



Women, Peace and Security: An Opportunity to Further the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance

Ms. Erin Cooper

Acting Director for International Humanitarian Policy, Department of Defense

This publication was part of Ms. Cooper'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

The Department of Defense (DoD) views Women, Peace and Security (WPS) as a national security tool to advance the U.S. National Defense Strategy objectives. This includes strengthening the DoD's collaboration and coordination with allies and partners, building resilience against competitors' coercive actions, and enhancing the design, development, readiness, and management of DoD personnel.

In July 2023, Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA sponsored a learning exchange on WPS as part of the Sasakawa Emerging Experts Delegation (SEED) program. The purpose of this program is to promote exchange between policy experts on a particular topic to improve understanding and

collaboration between the United States and Japan. WPS has had growing interest and policy demand in the Japanese foreign policy and national security space in the last year. This is evidenced by Sasakawa USA's decision to choose WPS as the topic for this summer's delegation. There are significant opportunities to further strengthen U.S.-Japan relations in foreign policy and national security through cooperation on WPS and other "human security" topics like disaster relief and response, prevention and response to gender-based violence, and trafficking in persons – all examples of a staunch commitment to upholding an international rules-based order.

In December 2022, Japan released three key strategic documents: the new National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defense Strategy (NDS), and the Defense Buildup Program (DBP). There is significant alignment between Japan's newly released NSS and NDS and the priorities outlined in the U.S. NSS and NDS. Both highlight the need for continuing bilateral efforts to modernize and address evolving regional and global security challenges through cooperation with like-minded allies and partners.

The United States is building momentum with Japan as a key WPS regional partner in the Indo-Pacific alongside Australia and New Zealand. Before the SEED trip, U.S. Army Japan (USARJ) hosted their inaugural WPS Symposium in March 2023 which brought together stakeholders from the United States and Japan to advance bilateral cooperation on WPS in the Indo-Pacific region.¹ Japan also participated in the Regional Gender Advisor Course that USINDOPACOM hosted in August. After the SEED program, in August 2023, the Japanese Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Japan Self Defense Forces (JSDF) held its first Headquarters meeting for WPS to strengthen the promotion of WPS activities both at home and abroad and to build awareness among employees.² U.S. Forces Japan will host the next U.S.-Japan WPS Symposium in spring 2024, and there are additional opportunities to continue strengthening the bilateral relationship and interoperability with partners in the region.

¹ "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/>

² "Activities Related to Women, Peace and Security (WPS)," Japan Ministry of Defense, August 8, 2023, <https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/wps/index.html>.

The United States and Japan can strengthen bilateral engagement and enhance security cooperation to achieve mutual security goals by working together on WPS implementation in the defense and security sector. The following paper outlines my observations and reflections from participating in the SEED program.

SEED Program Composition

In the U.S. delegation there were two representatives from the Department of Defense, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), as well as representatives from the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); Department of Homeland Security; Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace, and Security; and Our Secure Future, a program of One Earth Future Foundation. All representatives were subject matter experts within their various sectors and worked on WPS full time.

In the five days of the program, Sasakawa USA organized 25 meetings with over 50 people from MOD and JSDF, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA-Japan's USAID equivalent), and the Cabinet Office. We also met with 12 Japanese Diet members who are part of the Diet Members Network for WPS, the chair of the Evaluation Committee for their National Action Plan for WPS, and members from academia, nonprofits, and media organizations. The SEED delegation also met with U.S. Embassy Tokyo and U.S. Army Japan colleagues who hosted the WPS Symposium in March 2023.

Highlights from Meetings

In almost every meeting, Japanese entities cited the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami of 2011 as the primary catalyst for change to incorporate gender perspectives into their disaster response efforts. They highlighted two main reasons for this change: (1) a lack of women's participation in disaster relief and recovery (DRR) planning and policies, and (2) a lack of consideration in the supplies, information dissemination, and personnel requirements for DRR efforts and the differing needs of men, women, and children. Japan's WPS National Action Plan (NAP) identifies DRR as a key effort in both the 2015 and 2019 policy documents. DRR was also

highlighted in Japan's NSS and NDS as an area of responsibility for the JSDF domestically as well as for international security cooperation. Specifically, the NDS states "Japan must make proactive efforts towards resolving conflicts and confrontations around the world and responding to international issues such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the event of a large-scale international disaster caused by climate change and others."³

A pivotal meeting for me was the over two-hour block with representatives from Japan's MOD and JSDF. This was broken up into three different topics with 20 MOD and JSDF personnel participating across the different sessions. Japanese organizations included the Personnel & Education Planning Division, Maritime Staff Office, National Institute for Defense Studies, Joint Staff College, and the Bureau of Defense Policy. The three topics were: Internal Efforts (Personnel Affairs and Education), International Engagements, and U.S.-Japan Cooperation. I observed that Japanese counterparts, particularly those from the defense and security sector, were interested in DoD's structure for full and part time WPS personnel with dedicated funding and activities.

Internal Efforts (Personnel Affairs and Education)

During these sessions, discussions focused on a variety of gender-based indicators the MOD and JSDF are observing across their country and within their defense institution that have impacted recruitment and retention of women within the JSDF. This is underscored in Japan's NSS which includes a section titled "Strengthening Japan's Defense Architecture – Strengthening the Foundation for SDF Personnel to Fulfill Abilities as Core of Defense Capabilities," enabling the JSDF to focus on increasing the number of women personnel, reducing the barriers to their participation, and addressing harassment.

Given the overall population decline in Japan, the JSDF is prioritizing women's participation as a critical readiness issue for the future force. They hope to increase the number of women personnel to 12% or more by 2030, expand recruitment efforts so that 17% of total recruits are women, and promote women to make up 5% or more of field officer positions by FY2025.⁴ This was explained

³ "National Defense Strategy," Japan Ministry of Defense, December 16, 2022, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/strategy/pdf/strategy_en.pdf.

⁴ Emiko Jozuka et al., "She dreamed of defending Japan. Instead, her fellow soldiers sexually assaulted her," CNN, July 10, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/07/09/asia/japan-self-defense-force-sexual-harassment-hnk-intl-dst/index.html>.

further as a multifaceted approach to creating an environment that helps women be more comfortable staying in the military. Presentations outlined that this is being addressed through constructing women's quarters and bathrooms, building more nurseries at camps and bases, providing support for temporary childcare during disaster relief, and encouraging parental leave for all employees, especially those who are men.

What was not explicitly addressed during this session was how the JSDF will address what the Japanese NSS describes as the need to create an environment of zero tolerance for harassment and for women JSDF members to play "a more active role."⁵ Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada both have made statements committing to eradicating all forms of harassment and condemning the effects it has on members of the JSDF. The U.S. Armed Forces have similar experiences addressing women's recruitment and retention issues, including sexual harassment and assault. While the United States has not fully solved these issues, the experiences present opportunities for U.S.-Japan cooperation to exchange best practices and lessons learned. A recent example is the February 2022 Secretary of Defense initiative to reduce and eliminate sexual harassment and assault in the U.S. Armed Forces by implementing the findings from the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military.⁶

International Engagements

For international engagements, the MOD is targeting the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+) Expert Working Groups and other multilateral (e.g., Pacific Defence Gender network, Chief of Defense Conference, NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives) events to further WPS. Japan recently designated personnel to lead WPS in the Regional Policy Division to further WPS in international engagements. In the U.S. experience, we have seen a similar increase of dedicated personnel working on WPS. It also demonstrates to the international community the priority Japan is putting forth with partners to further WPS principles and universal values such as "freedom, democracy, respect for fundamental human rights, and the rule of law," as described in their NSS.

⁵ "National Security Strategy of Japan," Cabinet Secretariat, December 2022, <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryu/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>.

⁶ C. Todd Lopez, "DOD, Services Moving Ahead on Recommendations to Combat Sexual Assault," U.S. Department of Defense, September 22, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3167285/dod-services-moving-ahead-on-recommendations-to-combat-sexual-assault/>.

U.S.-Japan Cooperation

During this session, Japan indicated they would welcome U.S. advice, training materials, and assistance on institutionalizing the application of gender perspectives within military operations since this is not something they had previously developed or planned for their forces. The challenge of institutionalizing WPS is not unique to Japan – the United States and other countries are still developing policy and building this capacity with their defense and security sectors. For example, the Department of Defense is investing in not only training our own armed forces on WPS principles but working with partners to enhance their understanding of how gender roles, identities, and responsibilities among the local civilian population within crisis and conflict settings impact military operational effectiveness. This co-development alongside partners has been crucial for the Department to understand the cultural contexts that we are working in as to not impose U.S. values associated with gender, and instead apply universal standards of human rights frameworks.

Challenges

Most of the Departments and Agencies the delegation met with were focused on the “Participation” aspect of WPS. Participation is one of the key pillars of WPS and often one of the first steps countries will take towards WPS implementation. What can be improved is the building capacity for the application of an analytic framework like gender analysis that would increase the effectiveness of programs and planning. This kind of framework is applicable for WPS specific programs to increase women’s participation as well as broader peace and security decision-making.

A key challenge I noted during the trip is the assumption from many Japanese counterparts that gender equates to women. This notion is still prevalent in the broader national security community as well. To mitigate this within U.S. forces, the DoD has invested much of our WPS efforts in training, with over 1,000 participants completing our WPS 100 and 200 level courses. As part of that curriculum, we train personnel to understand the purpose of “gender mainstreaming” in DoD operations, activities, and investments. The goal is for military personnel to be able to reduce the negative impact on the conditions of civilians based on gender roles, identities, and responsibilities and build resilience and readiness in the management of DoD personnel.

I noted that the gender mainstreaming concept was well understood in our meetings with Japanese counterparts in academia, civil society, and development that had worked in international systems like the United Nations and NATO. But this is a specific area of opportunity for training and technical level exchanges in the defense sector as the United States and Japan continue to work together on WPS implementation.

Opportunities for the Future

I noted key opportunities for future defense cooperation between Japan and the United States. The opportunities described below align with both the U.S. and Japanese strategic security frameworks as well as stated WPS goals for each country.

1. Establish a U.S.-Japan WPS subcommittee to support annual bilateral engagement between the DoD and Japan's MOD.

In addition to the stated national security objectives in the Japanese and U.S. national defense strategies, Japan recently released their third WPS National Action Plan (NAP) and the United States recently released its U.S. Strategy and NAP on WPS. These high level WPS documents reinforce strategic level engagement for defense cooperation on WPS by providing guiding approaches, thematic focus areas, and lines of effort for each country's WPS implementation, which include the defense departments for each country. To formalize defense cooperation, the United States and Japan could establish a WPS sub-committee that meets on the side of our bilateral defense engagements each year to discuss WPS integration and topics like disaster relief and response, prevention and response to gender-based violence, and trafficking in persons. As an example, the DoD and Chile recently established a WPS subcommittee to the annual bilateral meeting between defense officials. This was initially proposed by Chilean Defense Minister Maya Alejandra Fernández Allende and accepted by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin during a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Conference of the Defense Ministers of the Americas. The United States and Chile will establish a work plan that will speak to bilateral actions for WPS, strengthen the relationship, and further the field in the region. It is the first WPS subcommittee established as part of an Office of the Secretary of Defense-led bilateral meeting and could serve

as a model for similar efforts with Japan. A near-term opportunity to initiate such discussions could be on the margins of the U.S. Forces Japan-led WPS Symposium that will happen in spring 2024.

2. Enabling WPS exchanges between U.S. and Japanese Congressmembers.

Another potential exchange is a Congressional Delegation. The SEED trip enabled us to meet with many members of the Japanese Diet WPS Caucus led by Honorable Yoko Kamikawa. She was recently named the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I am certain she will continue to champion WPS there. Fortuitously, several members of the SEED program had a direct hand in the creation of the U.S. WPS Caucus and the formation of a critical community that championed the creation of the WPS Act of 2017. In our discussion with the Japanese Diet Members Network on WPS, we highlighted the value of the WPS Act in establishing legislative requirements for implementing organizations which we shared had led to increased resources that enable implementation at the Departmental level in the United States. The next step would be a member-to-member Congressional exchange to discuss legislative options for the Congressional oversight of WPS efforts including best practices to ensure statutory compliance and implementation, such as the requirement to develop WPS implementation plans for each Department or Agency identified in the U.S. WPS Act.

3. Support the development of an ADMM+ Gender Advisor.

Japan and the United States have both affirmed the central role ASEAN should play in promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific. Japan and the United States have worked together previously in the ADMM+ Experts Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations. The Peacekeeping Operations model could be replicated for developing WPS knowledge within ASEAN member national security forces. Notably, this would align with ASEAN's Women, Peace and Security Regional Plan of Action (WPS RPA). Released in November 2022, the WPS RPA highlights two areas of action for the security sector that the United States and Japan can support.⁷

⁷ "ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security," Association of Southeast Asian Nations, November 16, 2022, <https://asean.org/asean-regional-plan-of-action-on-women-peace-and-security/>.

- Priority Action 1.1.2 Building the capacity of frontline responders (e.g., military and peacekeepers) to prevent and respond to gender-based violence through training.
- Output 1.3 Security sector forces identify ways to improve gender mainstreaming in its responses to traditional and non-traditional security challenges.

Organized through the bilateral activities mentioned above, an ADMM+ Gender Advisor program could build expertise in uniformed military and civilian defense officials from ASEAN member states to apply WPS principles and employ gender perspectives in defense planning and operations. These workshops would build off best practices from programs established by other multilateral organizations and ministries of defense globally, including NATO, Australia, and Canada.

Conclusion

In both strategic security documents, the United States and Japan mutually reinforce the need to work together for a free and open Indo-Pacific and for the realization of peace and stability in the international community. The U.S. NDS prioritizes “modernizing” our Alliance with Japan and the Japanese NSS highlights that the deepened cooperation between Japan and the United States in the Indo-Pacific region is of “vital importance.”

To complement “traditional” national security efforts, it is mutually beneficial for the two countries to work together on global “human security” issues that (1) contribute to a free and open Indo-Pacific and (2) contribute to peace and stability in the international community. WPS presents a framework for defense cooperation. This could specifically include disaster relief and response, prevention and response to gender-based violence, trafficking in persons, and a staunch commitment to upholding an international rules-based order. Most recently, the “Camp David Principles” released by the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea included “promoting the full and meaningful participation of women in our societies and to human rights and dignity for all.”⁸ These principles enhance the ways we can work together in the defense and security sector to provide a range of options towards international cooperation based on our shared values and protect our national security interests.

⁸ “Camp David Principles,” The White House, August 18, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/08/18/camp-david-principles/>.

The strategic security documents outline a need for continued coordination and collaboration between the United States and Japan. The SEED WPS program helped to identify a few key areas of opportunities to further the Alliance through WPS. The next step is to put these principles and relationships into action and expand the community of countries that will improve international security through advancing the tenets of WPS.

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



Erin Cooper is a Women, Peace and Security Project Specialist with Our Secure Future who concurrently serves as a Women, Peace and Security Policy Analyst for the U.S. Department of Defense within the Office in the International Humanitarian Policy (IHP) Directorate in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability and Humanitarian Affairs (SHA).

She graduated from the University of Denver with a Master's in International Studies with specializations in Security and Human Rights focusing on human trafficking, human security and the relationship between security policy and international development. At the University of Denver, she served as the Deputy Director for the 2019-2020 academic year for the Human Trafficking Center. She graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of Pittsburgh with her Bachelor's degree where she double majored in History and Political Science with a concentration in American Legal History. She has previously interned for the U.S. Mission to Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) with the Department of State, One Earth Future with Our Secure Future, and the International Rescue Committee. Prior to the University of Denver, she served as an Education Volunteer with the Peace Corps in rural Thailand, worked as an operations manager in a retail store, and is a certified yoga instructor.
