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Women, Peace, and Security: Global Context and U.S. Policy

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. The resolution calls on U.N. member states to, among other things, take steps to increase women's participation in peace processes and to protect women from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Resolution 1325 and nine follow-up resolutions adopted in subsequent years collectively provide a global foundation for what is generally referred to as "Women, Peace, and Security" (WPS), a broad policy framework that supports the participation and full involvement of women in all efforts to achieve peace and security. The United States played a lead role in the adoption of Resolution 1325, and there has generally been broad support in Congress for WPS. The 115th Congress enacted the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017 (WPS Act; P.L. 115-68), which aims to integrate WPS objectives into U.S. foreign policy. Members of the 118th Congress may continue to conduct oversight of WPS Act implementation, monitor U.S. funding for WPS activities, and assess global efforts to implement Resolution 1325.

Background and Context

Role of Gender Inequality. Historically, women have been generally viewed as victims or passive observers in security situations rather than as active participants or leaders. This reflects the broader exclusion of many women from full participation in their families, communities, and governments. In some societies, long-standing power imbalances between men and women have led to pervasive gender stereotypes and behaviors that contribute to discrimination. Gender imbalance is especially prevalent in peace talks and post-conflict resolution processes, where men are disproportionately represented at all levels. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, from 1992 to 2019 women represented 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in peace processes.

Links Between Women's Well-Being and Security.

Many experts and policymakers have increasingly recognized a growing body of research which finds that women can play an important role in creating and sustaining peace and security. Studies have found that when women participate in peace processes, they are more likely than men to build coalitions, speak up for marginalized groups, and promote human rights and national reconciliation. Women's involvement can also lead to more sustained and peaceful outcomes; for instance, the United Nations reports that peace agreements are 20% more likely to last at least two years, and 35% more likely to last for more than 15 years, when women are involved.

Some experts have also recognized the importance of protecting women from SGBV in conflict and post-conflict

settings. Such violence negatively and disproportionately affects women's health, safety, and community participation. In 2021, the United Nations identified nearly 3,300 cases of conflict-related sexual violence (800 more than in 2020). For every documented case, experts estimate 10-20 are unreported.

The U.N. Security Council and WPS

Adoption of UNSC Resolutions. Resolution 1325 calls on governments and organizations to take measures to address several issues, including (1) improving women's participation in all institutions and in conflict and post-conflict mechanisms; (2) protecting women and girls from SGBV, particularly in conflict and humanitarian situations; (3) preventing SGBV, including by strengthening women's rights under international law and supporting local women's peace initiatives; and (4) advancing relief and recovery efforts to include a gender perspective. In 2004, the UNSC issued a Presidential Statement encouraging member states to develop national action plans (NAPs) to implement Resolution 1325. (Over 100 countries created NAPs, including the United States. The scope and contents of NAPs vary depending on the country.) Between 2008 and 2021, the UNSC adopted nine additional resolutions that affirmed and expanded on Resolution 1325. Of these, Resolution 1820, adopted in 2008, was the first UNSC resolution to recognize sexual violence as a weapon and tactic of war and to note that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime.

UNSC Debates. Most UNSC resolutions addressing WPS have been adopted by consensus; however, negotiations have become increasingly contentious, leading some observers to question the future of WPS in the Council. For example, despite agreeing to previous resolutions on WPS, Russia and China (two of the five permanent members of the UNSC, or "P-5") continue to question whether the Council is the appropriate forum for addressing gender issues in the U.N. system. Other countries, including the United States (also a P-5 member), have at times objected to certain issues. Resolution 2467 (2019) on sexual violence in conflict became the first WPS resolution to be adopted without consensus. China and Russia abstained due to concerns about the resolution potentially expanding the Council's WPS activities through a new working group. In addition, the United States threatened to veto the resolution because initial drafts included text on sexual and reproductive health that U.S. officials believed could imply access to abortion. (The language was removed and the United States voted for the resolution.)

Global Implementation and Challenges

Implementation. Experts largely agree that while there have been some successes, implementation of Resolution

1325 by U.N. member states has been inconsistent and at times has stalled or backtracked. Overall, despite the breadth and scope of global WPS commitments, there is a large gap between WPS rhetoric and action. For example, the United Nations reports that despite global support for including women in peace negotiations, 7 in 10 peace processes in 2021 did not include women as mediators or signatories. In 2021, women participated as negotiators or delegates in all 18 U.N.-led peace processes; yet women's representation was just 19% (compared with 23% in 2020). In 2021, 32% of peace agreements included provisions taking into account the needs of women and girls, which represents an increase from 26% in 2020 but is barely above the 20-year average.

Selected Challenges. One of the foremost challenges to WPS implementation is pervasive gender discrimination and inequality. Some experts argue that substantive progress on WPS cannot be achieved or sustained unless the root causes of gender imbalance are addressed, with many observers noting the importance of further involving men in WPS efforts. Some also note that implementation of WPS is dependent on progress on cross-cutting issues such as women's equal access to health care, education, and economic opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many of these issues, reversing global progress on gender equality, including WPS.

Some experts have also found that insufficient WPS funding and resources remain a persistent challenge. A 2020 U.N. report found that while funding for programs that support WPS has increased globally since 2000, "inadequate and unpredictable financing remains a major roadblock." In addition, many government WPS commitments are often not sufficiently linked to budgets or accountability mechanisms (including verifiable indicators of progress), and WPS recommendations by women-led organizations are often "left unheeded or deprioritized."

U.S. Policy

U.S. Agencies and Programs. The key U.S. agencies responsible for global WPS activities are the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and Department of Defense (DOD). U.S. WPS programs vary by agency but generally focus on training, engaging civil society, and promoting WPS with foreign partners. For example, in FY2021 USAID supported the participation of over 77,000 women in leadership, conflict mediation, and other processes. The State Department addresses women's leadership and SGBV responses through humanitarian assistance, public diplomacy, engaging civil society, and promoting WPS bilaterally and multilaterally. DOD's international security cooperation programs support women's participation in partner government defense institutions and security forces.

U.S. Action Plans and Strategies. In 2011, the Obama Administration released (and in 2016 updated) the first U.S. NAP on WPS, which aimed to integrate WPS into U.S. foreign policy. In 2020, the Trump Administration published a new U.S. WPS Strategy as required by the WPS Act (see "Legislation" paragraph). The strategy, which supersedes the NAP, outlines four U.S. foreign policy

priorities: (1) supporting women's meaningful participation in decisionmaking processes; (2) protecting women from human rights abuses, including SGBV; (3) adjusting internal capabilities and programs to improve women's equality; and (4) supporting partnerships to improve women's participation. In a 2022 report to Congress on the strategy, President Biden called WPS "a cornerstone of U.S. ... efforts geared to averting and preventing conflict."

Legislation. In 2017, Congress enacted the WPS Act (P.L. 115-68), which aims to promote the meaningful participation of women in overseas conflict prevention, management, and resolution. The act, among other things, calls for a new U.S. WPS strategy; incorporates WPS into certain U.S. government employee training; establishes guidelines on collaboration and consultation with global, regional, and local organizations in conflict prevention and mitigation; and requires annual reporting to Congress.

Since FY2021, Congress appropriated between \$130-\$150 million annually to WPS in Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) Appropriations Acts (**Table 1**). Some National Defense Authorization Acts also provide guidance to DOD on WPS Act implementation (e.g., §1334 of P.L. 117-81). In FY2021, DOD spent \$5.5 million to implement the act, hire and train personnel, and integrate WPS into training and education.

Table 1. SFOPS WPS Appropriations (\$ millions)

FY13	FY14-FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23
50	Not specified	130	135	150

Source: SFOPS Acts and committee reports.

Notes: From FY14-FY20, Congress directed that funds be used for WPS but did not specify a dollar amount.

Congressional Considerations

WPS Act Implementation. Members of Congress oversee U.S. implementation of the WPS Act, including progress on agency implementation plans. Members may also consider how, if at all, U.S. WPS programs complement or relate to U.S. efforts to address other global women's issues, national security priorities, or country-specific situations (such as the status of women in Afghanistan).

WPS Funding. Members may consider the level and status of WPS funding, including whether, if at all, to condition assistance to governments based on WPS progress. Members may also track how funds are allocated across agencies. For example, a 2022 USAID report to Congress on WPS identified "lack of flexible and core funding" as a key challenge, stating that it is difficult to provide "rapid dedicated WPS monies" for programming and staffing to implement the WPS Act and Strategy in real time.

WPS in the UNSC. As a permanent member of the UNSC, the United States can play a key role in shaping Council actions on WPS. Congress may monitor executive branch priorities and activities in the Council, including the implementation of WPS resolutions by U.N. entities and the status of WPS negotiations or discussions.

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