



CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE
INSTITUT CANADIEN DES AFFAIRES MONDIALES

Implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Act

by Travis Liu
July 2021

CONFERENCE REPORT

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Prepared for the Canadian Global Affairs Institute
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QUESTION: *Can you give us some background on what led to the passing of the WPS Act? What led to the passing of the bill? Was it a bipartisan effort?*

Susan Markham

- The United States government's efforts in implementing the WPS agenda originally started during the Obama-Biden Administration in 2011, when the first United States National Action Plan (USNAP) was issued.
- The *WPS Act* passed during the Trump Administration has been a bipartisan effort and is providing a viable starting point for future implementations.
- The *WPS Act* provides the initiatives top-down approach framework, which agencies across the United States government shall take various actions to implement the strategies laid out by the White House.

QUESTION: *The U.S. approach to WPS describes itself as a “Whole-of-Government” (WoG) approach to WPS. What makes it WoG? How do the different agencies involved in the implementation of the WPS Act/WPS agenda interact? How aligned are their line of efforts? What role does the Ambassador at-large play?*

Stephenie Foster

- There are currently four primary actors within the United States government responsible for implementing the WPS agenda, the State Department, USAID, DHS, and DOD. While the four departments operate independently, their initiatives and actions on implementing the WPS agenda are interconnected and are stronger, more efficient when collaboratively working together.
- Primary responsibilities of DOS: advocacy for stronger women participation during peace processes, outreaching efforts to NATO, G7, and other international coalition efforts.
- The role and responsibilities of the Ambassador-at-large on WPS are reflective of the bodies and departments within the United States that create and implement WPS policies. They are the primary advocate for WPS policies on behalf of the United States around the world.
- The Trump Administration's strategy on WPS has primarily focused on economic empowerment of local women, thus for example, leads the USAID's policies to be



predominantly focused on improving local women's self-reliance. While the strategy was present, it was not doing enough to fully realize the integrated implementation of the 4P principles of the WPS agenda.

- Primary responsibilities of USAID: provides local women with aids in forms of financial funding and training, ensuring that women are equipped and prepared during engagements with other agencies and actors.

Carolyn Washington

- Beyond government departments, the civil society organization working group (CSOGs) play a vital role in outreaching and connecting between state actors, governmental agencies, civilians, and people working on the ground.
- Primary responsibilities of DOD: outreaching efforts to the less usual actors, to examine and implement women's perspective and gender perspective in defining security and peace keeping processes.
- Primary responsibilities of DHS: examine and implement women perspective and gender perspective during unusual events including natural disasters and on issues such as immigration and migration.

QUESTION: *Although the United States' approach to WPS is internationally oriented, it seems to be essentially bilateral in nature. What does the pursuit of the WPS Act signal about the U.S.'s outlook on its position on the global stage?*

Susan Markham

- The United States does possess the abilities as a global player to bring together the efforts, tools and resources to the issues outlined by the WPS agenda on various spheres, whether it may be bilateral, multilateral, or regional, etc.
- While the U.S. is shifting into the Biden Administration, U.S. diplomacy is also shifting back towards the multilateral approach.
- As we can see from the reports that has been put out by the four key actors, it is correct to say that the United States have been primarily focusing on bilateral approaches. (e.g., between USAID and local ambassadorships)
- CSOG and people on the field remain vital to every line of effort. One of the current focuses is on pushing for the embassy-level workers to actively engage with people on the ground, including both civilians and local civil society organizations.



QUESTION: *Are there any domestic aspects to the implementation of the WPS Act? In the sense of improving the meaningful participation of women in security matters within the United States. Or is that line of effort considered something different and outside of the WPS realm?*

Carolyn Washington

- While increasing women's participation is important, it is also important to integrate gender perspectives. Security needs based on norms and roles of society, access to resources and power imbalances and other issues can be more accurately when examined through the lens of gender perspective, not only through women's perspective.
- The U.S. currently has the Combat Integration Initiative (CII) as part of its domestic lines of efforts, which focuses on working towards the full integration of women in the military. This initiative has also been introduced to regional combat commands.

QUESTION: *DOD seems to have a very international-focused implementation plan under the WPS Act, what does it entail for defense practices in the United States? Is it only DOD that has such a focus?*

Carolyn Washington

- New lines of efforts focusing on preventing sexual misconducts still need to be established. 1) Accountability: reflected through actions such as establishing an independent special prosecutor within the Office of the Secretary of Defense; 2) Prevention: leaderships need to be equipped with capabilities in preventing sexual misconducts; 3) Creating a safe environment for personnel; 4) Recognize that the U.S. has its own WPS problems within its own organization, the U.S. needs to apply the WPS principles to demonstratively protect its own personnel.

QUESTION: *How has implementation looked like? Are there some lessons learned that have already been development?*

Stephanie Foster

- Since the establishment of the first USNAP, the four key actors within the United States government and the National Security Council have come up with plans to address the impacts of the WPS Agenda.
- The WPS Agenda and the lines of efforts within the U.S. is not entirely new, however there remains a need to establish frameworks for policy evaluation for the work across departments under the WoG approach.
- As the WPS Act and the WPS Agenda are becoming more broadly implemented within the United States, more funding and resources continue to be needed.
- Although it is not namely "WPS," plenty of diversity and inclusion work done by the DOS can be considered as the United States own domestic implementation lines of efforts of



the WPS agenda. Considering that one of the primary goals of the WPS agenda is to broaden women's participation, the U.S. has been ensuring the presence of women participants in all aspects of decision making.

Susan Markham

- Regardless of what has been taking place politically, the implementation of the WPS agenda by the United States government has not stopped.
- The U.S. has taken broadened approaches in examining security needs, which has now expanded to include topics such as gender issues and conflicts driven by climate change and displacement.
- Gender-based violence (GBV) has recently adopted a more broadened lens during COVID-19. The U.S. recognizes that GBV and sexual violence can and are taking place in various kinds of conflict settings. While GBV cannot be separated from war and peace, the issues need to be addressed from a less binary, prevention-oriented, and more systematic perspective.

Carolyn Washington

- The DOD has done plenty of work for the implementation of the WPS agenda. Examining from the recent reports submitted to the White House, the DOD has listed numerous accomplishments on the matter since 2010.
- GENADs, Gender Focal Points and the establishments of other gender-advising roles across the chain of command are among some of the key accomplishments by the DOD since the establishment of the USNAP.
- Funding has been and should continue to be provided for the DOD in order to increase and improve the training of GENADs on the implementation of the WPS agenda.
- While there has been clear progress on the existing lines of efforts, there remain works to be done on the leadership-level. Beyond relying on roles such as GENADs, future leaderships should become more supportive and gender inclusive. Plenty of efforts have been bottom-driven by dedicated individuals working on the ground, when very often senior leaderships are not aware of these efforts as much as they should.
- In terms of institutionalization of the WPS agenda, the WPS needs to become more integrated into policies in order to create long-lasting changes that can remain in situations of personnel changes.
- Training should be available for not only leadership, but also for all personnel within the institution.
- Monitoring and evaluation frameworks also need to be established.
- One of the key existing challenges is the implementation being “feminized”. When “women” are commonly referred to on the lines of efforts of the WPS agenda, gender perspective must not be omitted. WPS is not solely “women’s issues”, they are issues concerning all genders.



QUESTION: *Do you see plans to fully integrate the WPS plan within the U.S. bureaucracy? Is there a move towards gender mainstreaming in the State Department? If yes, what does it look like; if not, why? Are we seeing a shift between implementation of the WPS Act under the Trump presidency vs the Biden presidency?*

Carolyn Washington

- There has been inconsistency on how things have been done. There is a better way to formalize our operations, in terms of when individuals are placed, how they are operating and where they are operating.

Susan Markham

- The inconsistency remains a big issue and is coming from the top to the bottom. Even though there is a clear strategy to be followed from the top-down, people on the ground who are living the issues are communicating with departments such as the USAID. The key challenge is, therefore, to seek a middle point for the people on the ground to be better heard.
- With a more commonly shared understanding of the WPS agenda, the progress is difficult to be undone. While there has been consistent messaging, there remains the need to build on the skills to provide basic knowledge on WPS to people of all levels. Building the consensus and knowledge across the staff that respond to both leadership and people on the ground is important in seeking an increasingly thorough implementation of the WPS.

Stephanie Foster

- It is important to examine ways to move forward on WPS issues in real time means that withstand leadership and political changes.
- Bring in intersectionality of women and gender perspectives on all WPS issues. The analysis of policy impacts should incorporate gender perspective to reflect the needs of the people on the ground for top-level leadership.

► About the Author

Travis Liu holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree from Queen's University and has recently graduated from the Master of Public Policy and Global Affairs (MPPGA) program at the University of British Columbia in 2021. Travis's academic and professional background have focused primarily on the intersectional function between public policy, international relations and strategic business practices. During his time at the MPPGA program, Travis worked with a team of three students and the Dallaire Centre of Excellence for Peace and Security to produce a report that advised the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) on strengthening their relations with civil society organizations in Iraq, as part of CAF's commitment and implementation of the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Prior to joining the MPPGA program, Travis spent a year working with Accenture Strategy in Shanghai, China, serving several Fortune 500 and 100 clients on strategic brand management, practice optimization and digital transformation.

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