



The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda: Cross-Regional Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

This conference proceeding summarizes a virtual, on-the-record event organized by CNA's Strategy and Policy Analysis program on December 2, 2020. Exploring issues across Africa, Asia, and Europe, the event examined the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 that was passed 20 years ago. This document utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods to identify the key points of discussion presented by Major General Suzanne Vares-Lum of US Indo-Pacific Command; Admiral (Ret.) James G. Foggo III, previously Commander of US Naval Forces Europe-Africa and NATO Allied Joint Force Command Naples; CNA Principal Research Scientist Julia McQuaid, a counterterrorism and Africa expert; and CNA Research Program Director Nilanthi Samaranyake.

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Approved by:

March 2021

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Executive Summary

On December 2, 2020, CNA’s Strategy and Policy Analysis program hosted a virtual, on-the-record event¹ to discuss the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda 20 years after the United Nations (UN) Security Council passed Resolution 1325,² which placed WPS on the global agenda. The WPS agenda aims to enhance overall security by increasing the representation of women in militaries and peace processes, and by improving women’s access to protection, justice, and equal opportunities during and after conflicts. Examining developments across Africa, Asia, and Europe, CNA’s event surveyed progress and remaining work on the agenda, the US government’s contributions, and the agenda’s relevance to security challenges such as great power relations and terrorism.

The event featured Major General Suzanne Vares-Lum of the US Indo-Pacific Command; Admiral (Ret.) James G. Foggo III, previously Commander of US Naval Forces Europe-Africa and NATO Allied Joint Force Command Naples; CNA Principal Research Scientist Julia McQuaid, a counterterrorism and Africa expert; and CNA Research Program Director Nilanthi Samaranyake, who focuses on allies and partners.

Major conclusions included:

- **US security is served by advancing the WPS agenda.** The WPS agenda better equips the US to face two major security challenges: terrorism and great power relations.
- **The WPS agenda engages both personal experience and policy expertise.** Speakers drew on policy expertise, but several underscored the agenda’s importance by sharing anecdotes of their experiences witnessing shortcomings in women’s security—shortcomings the agenda is designed to address.
- **The US is a key actor in the WPS agenda—but should not work alone.** Panelists focused primarily on US policies and experiences with the WPS agenda. The UN played a relatively minor role in the discussion, despite its centrality in the WPS agenda’s origin. Instead, allies, partners, and civil society emerged as key partners in US WPS work abroad.

¹ Nilanthi Samaranyake, Julia McQuaid, Major General Suzanne Vares-Lum, and ADM James G. Foggo III (Ret.). “Women, Peace, and Security: Cross-regional challenges and opportunities,” CNA Virtual Event, Dec. 2, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/487385977>.

² UN Security Council, *Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) [on Women, Peace, and Security]*, Oct. 31, 2000, S/RES/1325.

- **The US contributes to both traditional and newer WPS agenda items.** Panelists concluded that the US has made some progress in improving the representation of women in militaries and governments, and that appreciation of US contributions to newer agenda items is growing.

During the discussion, speakers flagged the continued lack of awareness of the WPS framework and programs, both in communities and in command structures, and the continued underrepresentation of women in militaries as principal challenges for the years ahead. This conference proceeding utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods to highlight noteworthy themes throughout the discussion.

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Key Points of the Discussion

On December 2, 2020, CNA hosted an event to discuss the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda with a focus on cross-regional challenges and opportunities 20 years after the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the foundational WPS document.³ The four speakers were Major General Suzanne Vares-Lum, Admiral (Ret.) James G. Foggo III, Ms. Julia McQuaid, and Ms. Nilanthi Samaranayake.

The WPS agenda starts from the argument that durable societal security requires greater inclusion of women in militaries and peace processes as well as greater attention to women's specific needs during and after conflicts. Thus, it aims to increase the representation of women in militaries and peace processes and to improve access to protection, justice, and equal opportunities during and after conflicts. Panelists drew on their experiences and research across the globe to discuss the following points about the state and future of the WPS agenda for the US government.

- **US security is served by advancing the WPS agenda.** The WPS agenda intersects clearly with two major US security challenges: terrorism and great power relations. On terrorism, MG Vares-Lum, ADM Foggo, and Ms. McQuaid all discussed how the WPS agenda can inform better counterterrorism policy and address root causes of violent extremism. MG Vares-Lum, ADM Foggo, and Ms. Samaranayake each highlighted the role WPS plays in US great power competition, particularly as a showcase for US values and as an enhancer of US military effectiveness.
- **The WPS agenda draws power from both personal experience and policy expertise.** Every speaker drew on their respective policy expertise to highlight the agenda's importance, progress in implementing the agenda, and ways for improving execution in the coming years. MG Vares-Lum and ADM Foggo also drew heavily on personal experience to add color and emotional force to their arguments about the WPS agenda's critical importance.
- **The US is a key actor in the WPS agenda—but should not work alone.** Each panelist shared some tangible examples and anecdotes regarding how important US collaboration with allies is on this agenda. For the US to press its moral advantage, US

³ Nilanthi Samaranayake, Julia McQuaid, Major General Suzanne Vares-Lum, and ADM James G. Foggo III (Ret.), "Women, Peace, and Security: Cross-regional challenges and opportunities," CNA Virtual Event, Dec. 2, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/487385977>.

military commands must lead by example, communicate effectively, and dedicate substantial financial resources to implement WPS training programs and goals. Speakers also addressed the continued need to improve awareness of key WPS principles both in the US military and abroad. Recent legislation and DOD policy both form foundations for continued improvement.⁴

- **The US contributes to both traditional and newer WPS agenda items.** The original WPS agenda emphasized improved representation in militaries and governments, as well as enhanced protections and justice for women during and after conflicts. Recently, the agenda has broadened to incorporate more dimensions of human security. Discussants focused primarily on increasing military representation, as well as revising cultural and patriarchal norms.

In addition to summarizing the speakers' major conclusions, we supplement this conference proceeding below with insights and visualizations derived from processing the event transcript in NVivo, a text analysis software. Drawing on CNA's past work on WPS, this analysis allowed us to identify exactly what share of the event's conversation was dedicated to a given topic, region, or theme, providing added context on how the WPS agenda is framed.

WPS and US security

Both terrorism and great power competition, two major US security challenges, were common points of discussion. ADM Foggo and Ms. McQuaid drew on their respective expertise and experiences to highlight the changing ways WPS has been applied to counterterrorism studies and policies. Ms. McQuaid helpfully laid out the shift in the treatment of women in terrorism studies and counterterrorism studies as evolving from seeing women as merely victims or peacemakers to recognizing their possible roles as enablers, auxiliaries, or combatants. This progressive development has led to improved and more effective policies and should, in the panelists' view, continue,

Speakers were somewhat less explicit about the WPS agenda's relevance for great power competition. Instead, MG Vares-Lum, ADM Foggo, and Ms. Samaranayake all spoke generally about how embracing and actualizing the WPS agenda, particularly through better gender representation, feeds into the US' moral advantages. ADM Foggo made this connection with great power competition most directly when he contrasted the opportunities available to women in the US Navy with the ceiling on advancement that women in the Chinese military face. Still, the role of WPS in great power dynamics seems apt for further exploration.

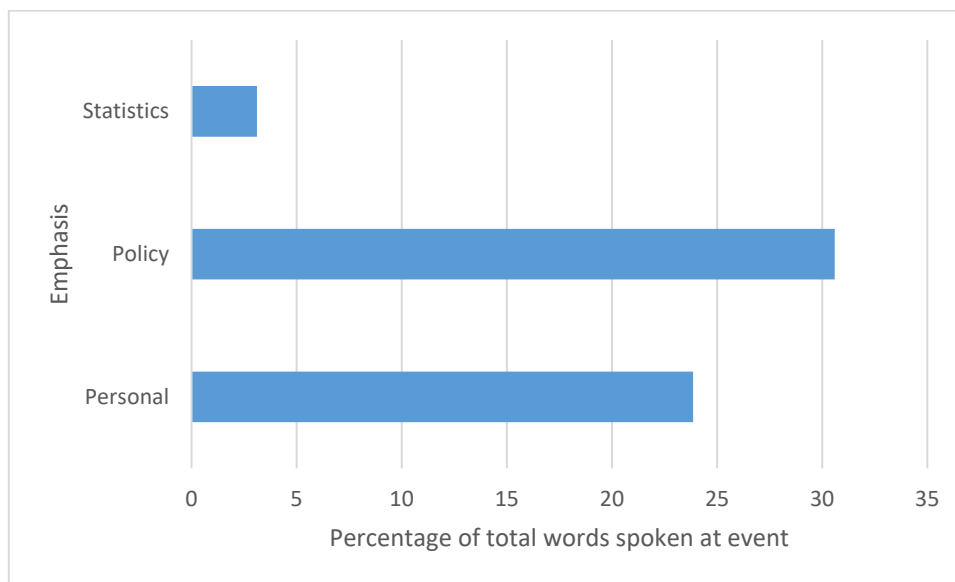
⁴ DOD News, "DOD Unveils Women, Peace, Security Strategy," June 11, 2020, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2217438/dod-unveils-women-peace-security-strategy/>.

All speakers agreed that the US government, and the military in particular, need to reinforce commitment to the WPS agenda—whether to enhance US counterterrorism programs or to better prepare the US for meeting the challenge of a rising China. To date, both funding and engagement have largely been haphazard and dependent on individual leaders. MG Vares-Lum and ADM Foggo both noted that sustained funding and wider engagement by leaders at all levels in the US military would go a long way towards making WPS issues a core consideration of US military programs.

Personal experience and policy implications

Through their contributions, speakers underscored that the WPS agenda sits at the intersection of personal experience and policy innovation. Figure 1 illustrates how much each speaker invoked policy, statistics, or personal anecdotes. ADM Foggo presented some statistics on the WPS agenda but used personal anecdotes with powerful descriptions of the violence suffered by women and the effects of US humanitarian policy. To some extent, MG Vares-Lum shared ADM Foggo’s split emphasis on personal stories and policy discussions. By contrast, Ms. McQuaid and Ms. Samaranayake, the two analysts on the panel, focused on policy.

Figure 1. Speaker emphases across event



Source: CNA.

Note that shares may sum to more or less than 100, since some transcript passages may match multiple codes while others may match no codes.

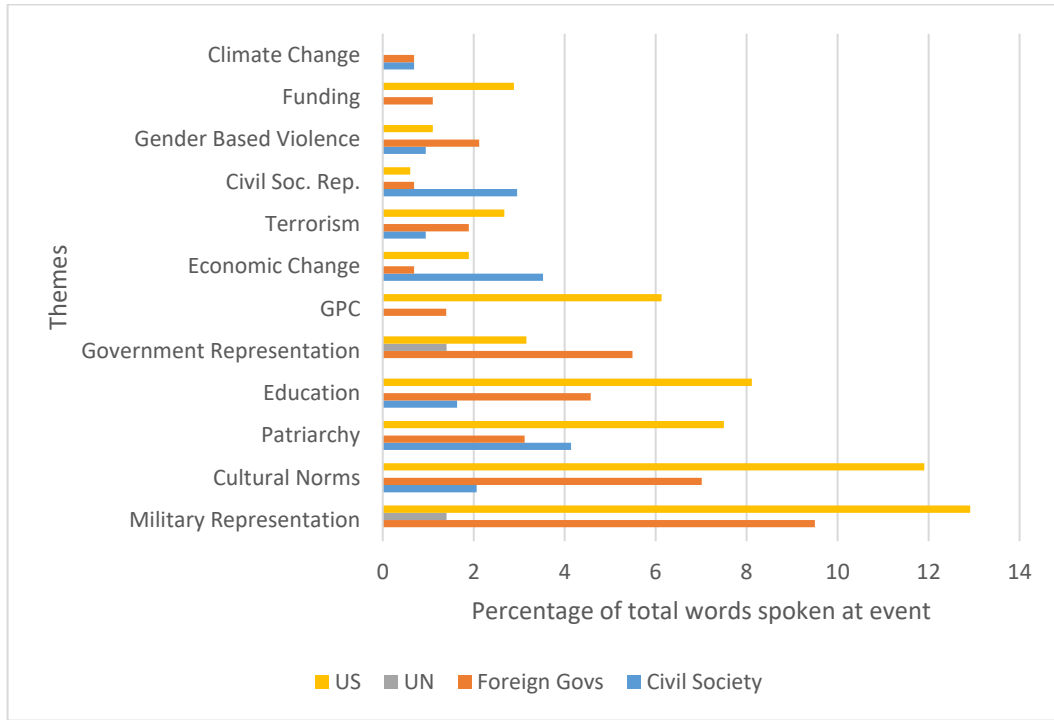
Speakers also discussed policy in notably different ways. In MG Vares-Lum’s case, policy primarily included initiatives at Indo-Pacific Command designed to increase awareness of and engagement with gender perspectives, particularly via gender advisor courses. Likewise, ADM Foggo’s mentions of policy centered on new initiatives with non-governmental and international organizations. In contrast, Ms. McQuaid’s policy comments focused on how an evolving understanding of women’s roles in terrorism has enabled more effective US counterterrorism policies. In every case, however, speakers emphasized incorporating the WPS agenda into US policy and plans to multiply US soft power and enhance US foreign policy.

The US as a key actor

With all four speakers from the US, conversation focused on US government initiatives across the globe. The US featured heavily according to our analysis, consistently emerging as the most common actor associated with the most themes, as evident in Figure 2. The cases in which the US did not lead included economic change, the representation of women in civil society, and climate change, which may point towards areas for further US programs to address.

More surprising is the limited emphasis on the UN—speakers mentioned it only in association with military and government representation. The UN inaugurated the global engagement on the WPS agenda, and its organs remain important actors in promoting women’s rights in and after conflict. Nevertheless, this omission could be interpreted as a success, indicating that the WPS agenda has spread widely enough that it need not advance solely through the UN and its agencies. It may also suggest that there is room for growth in how the US engages with, supports, and benefits from the UN’s work on the WPS agenda.

Figure 2. Thematic emphases and the United States



Source: CNA.

Note that shares may sum to more or less than 100, since some passages may match multiple codes while others match no codes.

Military representation and newer dimensions of the WPS agenda

UN Security Council Resolution 1325,⁵ the seminal WPS agenda-setting document, identifies increasing representation of women in the armed forces and governments and reducing gender-based violence as primary objectives. It also envisions roles for government, international organizations (particularly the UN), and civil society. In recent years, the agenda has broadened to encompass non-traditional security, such as economic rights and climate change. CNA’s discussion centered largely on US contributions to the WPS agenda, as well as the representation dimension of the original agenda.

⁵ UN Security Council, *Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) [on Women, Peace, and Security]*, Oct. 31, 2000, S/RES/1325.

The discussion notably focused on the need to increase the participation of women, particularly in US military and peacekeeping operations, but the speakers also spent significant time discussing issues such as patriarchy and cultural norms, as displayed in Figure 2. Military representation was the most commonly discussed theme in conjunction with specific actors, while the next three most mentioned topics—cultural norms, patriarchy, and education—are noteworthy as newer themes in the WPS agenda. Cultural attitude shifts in gender norms are related to education and intersect with the policy and program implementations that will be necessary to achieve more equal gender representation. The focus on these three topics suggests that the speakers have incorporated more recent innovations and advances in the WPS debate and, furthermore, have identified ways that the US can innovate in these areas.

Nevertheless, speakers rarely discussed certain elements of the WPS agenda. Gender-based violence and economic change—two core tenets of the program—were relatively minor points in the conversation. Likewise, speakers spent little time on climate change. The growing appreciation that climate security has a close bond with societal and gender security issues underscores yet another area ripe for expanded US programming.

Conclusion

This event offered thought-provoking discussion among experts who have been engaged on issues surrounding WPS during their careers. The speakers acknowledged the progress that the US government and its partners have made on the WPS agenda and its positive effect on US security, ranging from counterterrorism to great power relations. However, they also called for policy innovations, highlighted areas in which work remains to be done, and emphasized that further enhancing our understanding of the intersection between security and gender remains vital for national security.

For more information on this event or the Strategy and Policy Analysis program (www.cna.org/strategy), please contact Ms. Nilanthi Samaranayake (nilanthi@cna.org).

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This report was written by CNA's Strategy, Policy, Plans, and Programs Division (SP3).

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