

# Gender Perspectives for Operational Effectiveness

## —An Opportunity for U.S. Forces Japan and the Japan Self Defense Forces

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### Introduction

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On April 10, 2024, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio of Japan met with President Joseph Biden of the United States. The two leaders issued a joint statement to announce new strategic initiatives for defense and security cooperation. Of note for U.S. Forces Japan and the Japan self Defense Forces, one of these new initiatives is an “intention to bilaterally upgrade our respective command and control frameworks to enable seamless integration of operations and capabilities and allow for greater interoperability and planning between U.S. and Japanese forces in peacetime and during contingencies.”<sup>1</sup> What may have gone unnoticed is a small paragraph near the end of the statement, in which both leaders reaffirm their commitment to empowering women and girls, achieving gender equality, emphasizing women in leadership, and cooperation on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda to promote equal and meaningful participation of women.

While some may see these issues as unrelated, the announcement of this restructuring of both nations’ command and control networks presents an ideal chance to commit to broadening their WPS initiatives by establishing Gender Advisor positions and incorporating gender mainstreaming mechanisms throughout these restructured commands. Other like-minded nations such as Australia and the members of NATO have recognized the imperative of incorporating the WPS Agenda to improve military capability and increase operational effectiveness. With the large changes that will accompany the establishment of the Joint Operation Command and restructuring of U.S. Forces Japan, Japan and the U.S. have the unique opportunity to make gender perspectives and WPS a critical pillar of their operations moving forward. This change is imperative not only to respond to the direction of the nations’ leaders, but to ensure the safety and efficacy of operations both now and in the future.

## Overview of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and Gender Perspectives

The origins of the WPS agenda can be traced back to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a revolutionary agenda that sought to restructure the international framework to achieve gender equality and secure human rights and empowerment for women and girls.<sup>2</sup> In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1325, which addressed for the first time the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and called on member states to enact what has become the four main pillars of WPS: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery (see Figure 1, below). In the following 19 years, the UNSC adopted an additional nine resolutions to augment UNSCR 1325, particularly with regards to eliminating sexual violence in conflict and implementing the principles of WPS. Together, these ten resolutions form what is commonly referred to as the WPS Agenda.<sup>3</sup> In response to the WPS Agenda, to date 108 UN Member States (or just over 50%) have adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) to implement UNSCR 1325, including Japan and the U.S., both on their third NAP.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 1 (Source: [UN Office to the African Union \[UNOAU\]](#))

The Nordic Center for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM) was established in 2012 to increase Nordic country implementation of the WPS agenda into military peace support operations.<sup>5</sup> According to the NCGM's A Military Guide to the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security, using a gender perspective means to "actively and systematically identify if, and when, women, men, girls, and boys are affected differently because of their gender."<sup>6</sup> By integrating a gender perspective into the organization and operations, defense actors can avoid blind spots in developing a common operating picture and help minimize risk to mission.

It is important to keep in mind what is **not** a gender perspective. There is a tendency to think that gender perspectives only deal with women's issues; however, this is overly simplistic. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and attributes assigned to women, men, girls, boys, and others in a given society at a given time.<sup>7</sup> There is also a tendency to assume that just adding more women to an organization will be sufficient. The *Handbook on Teaching Gender in the Military* emphasizes that "an equal number of men and women, or even the mere presence of women, does not automatically equate to a more gender-equal approach."<sup>8</sup> Increasing the number of women participating in security operations is an important step, but this must be accompanied by the ability to meaningfully participate and hold power at a high enough level to influence decision-making.

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## Why Use WPS and Gender Perspectives in Military Operations?

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To put it simply: decision makers cannot afford to continue ignoring nearly half the operational picture and expect continued successful outcomes. A study of WPS implementation within the U.S. Military by the RAND Corporation noted several key impacts of WPS and Gender Diversity on the success of military operations.<sup>9</sup> First, peace and security efforts have been shown to be more likely to succeed when women are involved in a meaningful way in the process. However, significant barriers exist that limit women's ability to engage in such efforts, which limits the effectiveness of operations and can have detrimental effects on mission success. Despite evidence showing that women participating in the negotiation process results in stronger and longer-lasting peace, they are still rarely seen working in these areas.

Next, the security environment is increasingly impacted by transnational threats such as climate change and global pandemics such as Covid 19. These kinds of threats usually have gendered components which impact women, men, girls, and boys in different ways.<sup>10</sup> For example, gender expectations of women's role as a primary caregiver to children saw more women quit their jobs during Covid-19 restrictions in order to care for their children or family members. These same expectations of women to care for children and the home limit their available hours for paid work, influencing them to choose part time or inconsistent work, such as the service sector, that was most heavily impacted by Covid restrictions.<sup>11</sup> Efforts to address these kinds of transnational threats both internally and externally to a defense organization must take into account these gendered impacts or risk exacerbating existing gender disparities and weakening response capabilities.<sup>12</sup>

Sahana Dharmapuri argues that increasing women's participation enhances operational effectiveness in three areas: information gathering, operational credibility, and enhanced force protection. First, gender perspectives create a more complete intelligence picture by including the entire population in intelligence gathering. Additionally, having a comprehensive understanding of the lives of women, men, girls, and boys can then act as leading indicators of instability. For example, a change in women's habits and public roles (women suddenly changing routine paths or avoiding going outside at all) can signal a change in the political or security situation that can precede more violent action. Secondly, a more gender diverse force

can increase the credibility of security forces. Women police officers tend to have lower rates of misconduct and are more likely to defuse potentially violent situations through de-escalation. Internal credibility is also increased, as an emphasis on gender equality and equitable actions can make an organization a more desirable place for women to work. Lastly, for force protection, particularly in operations within communities with strict gender roles, having women on security teams often grants access to areas and people who would be otherwise inaccessible to all-male teams.<sup>13</sup>

Gender perspectives are not necessarily relevant to every military operation. Jody Prescott, retired Army Judge Advocate and lecturer at the University of Vermont, notes that “equipment-heavy, force-on-force engagements conducted in areas where there are no civilians present, or in which the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of the civilians are not really relevant to whether either side prevails” may not benefit from a thorough gender analysis.<sup>14</sup> However, he notes immediately after that modern conflicts rarely look like what is described above in the age of smartphones and the Internet. For the same scenario above, a single civilian recording a force-on-force engagement with their cellphone coupled with a specific narrative could have dramatic implications for the public perception of events.

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## Gender Perspectives Reduce Risk to Mission

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The U.S. Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE) states that the Joint Force will have two significant challenges in the future: “The first is contested norms in which powerful actors, dissatisfied with the status quo, will capitalize on changes in communication and changes in socio-cultural contexts to contest norms governing international behavior. The second challenge is persistent disorder in which weak states are incapable of maintaining domestic order in the face of crisis.”<sup>15</sup> These challenges are readily apparent considering the state of conflicts today, particularly with regards to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The information environment is changing dramatically and will require a change in strategy as well.

For strategic competition (below the threshold of conflict) such as intelligence activities, cyberspace operations, and information operations, gender perspectives are a critical element to success. For example, during a social engineering competition at Def Con, a large hacker convention, women were significantly more successful in obtaining protected information from their targets, which a cybersecurity officer noted was likely due to female participants playing the role of “damsel in distress” and capitalizing on gender stereotypes in order to secure information.<sup>16</sup> By applying a gender perspective to cybersecurity, this potential vulnerability can be recognized and mitigated.

Gender blindness in operations can increase risk and even result in mission failure by failing to realize a complete operating picture. For example, not using a gender perspective in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) missions and demining missions can increase instability and risk for violence. While UNSCR 1325 emphasizes the outsized impact of conflict on women and girls, it is equally important to remember that women can also be active participants (willing or unwilling) in conflict situations. In addition

to active roles in frontline fighting, women also establish camps and maintain caches of weapons. If a DDR mission fails to complete a full gender analysis and use the results in the creation of the DDR program, the mission may fail to adequately disarm an entire group of combatants. "For example, in Sierra Leone, when women and young girls were excluded from the DDR process during the period from 1998 to 2003, they still chose to remain active supporters of a given side in the conflict... Other women reportedly fled the conflict areas to join armed groups across borders."<sup>17</sup>

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## Recommendations for Implementation

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**Start using tools that already exist.** Japan and the U.S. can easily leverage existing partnerships to rapidly implement gender perspectives and analysis. The Australian Defence Force, NATO, and the Nordic Center for Gender in Military Operations (NCGMO) have extensive libraries of supporting documents for integrating gender perspectives, from training, to planning, and reports evaluating the effectiveness of their use. The NATO Bi-Strategic Command Directive 040-001<sup>18</sup>, Australian Joint Doctrine Note 2-18 Gender in Military Operations<sup>19</sup>, and the NCGM Military Gender Analysis Tool (MGAT)<sup>20</sup> offer detailed explanations for mainstreaming gender across all aspects of operational planning, execution, and across staff functions. The MGAT tool in particular is ready for immediate implementation, as it uses the PMESII framework, which should already be a familiar structure to planners and policy makers, reducing barriers to adoption.

**Establish Gender Advisors across the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, and all staff functions (Prioritize J2, J3, and J5 first).** These positions should be full-time to the max extent possible, and should have direct access to the Commander, similar to a Legal Advisor. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command has made good progress in staffing Gender Advisors in recent years, but demand still outpaces training capacity. In the event that all staff functions are unable to be staffed by a trained Gender Advisor, priority should be given to those functions most heavily involved in operational planning, namely Intelligence (J2), Current Operations (J3), and Plans and Policy (J5).<sup>21</sup> It is imperative that intelligence collection ensure that sex-and-age-disaggregated data is part of all routine intelligence collection. This data collection is critical in order to enable comprehensive analysis and to inform operational planning.<sup>22</sup>

**Integrate gender into doctrine and compulsory training courses.** Begin by eliminating gender-biased language and apply a gender lens to existing doctrine and curriculum and add additional training as necessary.<sup>23</sup> NATO has an education and training package on gender perspectives that can be adapted to specific units.<sup>24</sup> The Australian Joint Doctrine Note 2-18 Gender in Military Operations and Air Force Doctrine Note 1-18 Gender in Air Operations are examples of currently implemented gender perspectives. It is important to incorporate this gender perspective within existing documentation rather than just adding gender as an annex that can be overlooked or ignored.<sup>25</sup> A review of NATO's implementation of gender by NCGM found that this was precisely the case, and that increased distribution and awareness of the NATO Bi-SCD 040-001 was needed to properly implement and enforce this guidance.<sup>26</sup>

**Incorporate gender as an aspect, not an afterthought, in exercise planning and execution.** Gender perspectives can and should be utilized at all levels: strategic, operational, and tactical. Gender Advisors and Gender Focal Points should be available to support leadership and exercise actors throughout the exercise process. Exercise planning teams should be as diverse as possible to maximize results.<sup>27</sup> A study on wargaming found that males tend to focus on offense, while females emphasize defense and reconnaissance, so having gender-balanced teams will enable more balanced approaches.<sup>28</sup> Rather than using a few specific gender injects, Gender Advisors and Focal Points can suggest small changes to planned injects to allow for a gender perspective and allow for better assessment of gender policy.

**Establish an accountability mechanism to monitor progress.** The United States already has this to an extent with the provisions of the 2017 Women Peace and Security Act.<sup>29</sup> A next step would be to incorporate more concrete, measurable goals of mainstreaming gender perspectives in doctrine into the DoD WPS Strategic Implementation Plan.<sup>30</sup> In lieu of a similar law being established in Japan, the Self Defense Forces can introduce accountability into the upcoming WPS implementation plan to establish a mechanism for progress assessment.

It must be emphasized that the responsibility to integrate gender into operations rests ultimately with commanders.<sup>31</sup> Gender Advisors and Focal Points are key enablers to this integration, but establishing gender perspectives as a truly cross-cutting and organization-wide effort will require participation from everyone. In order to meet the challenges of the future operational environment and fulfill the directives established by Prime Minister Kishida and President Biden, USFJ and the Japan Self Defense Forces should use the opportunity provided by the upcoming reshuffling of command to mainstream WPS and gender perspectives throughout their operations and organization.

<sup>1</sup> [Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting](#), April 10, 2024. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

<sup>2</sup> [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Beijing +5 Political Declaration and Outcome](#). 2015. UN Women.

<sup>3</sup> [UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace & Security](#). PeaceWomen.

<sup>4</sup> [National Action Plans at a Glance](#). PeaceWomen.

<sup>5</sup> [Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations](#) (NCGM)

<sup>6</sup> NCGM [A Military Guide to the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security](#). April 2020.

<sup>7</sup> UN Women. [Gender Mainstreaming Concepts and Definitions](#).

<sup>8</sup> PfPC SSRWG and EDWG, [Handbook on Teaching Gender in the Military](#). Geneva: DCAF and PfPC, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Fleming, J.; Garber, C.; Sudkamp, K.M.; Yoshiara, E.; Post, A.S.; Smith, V.M.; Howell, K. [Women, Peace, and Security in Action](#). Oct 18, 2023. RAND Corporation.

<sup>10</sup> Women, Peace, and Security in Action. Oct 18, 2023. RAND Corporation.

<sup>11</sup> Yavorsky, J.E.; Qian, Y.; Sargent, A.C. [The Gendered Pandemic: The Implications of COVID-19 for Work and Family](#). *Social Compass*. 2021 June 15(6).

<sup>12</sup> Women, Peace, and Security in Action. Oct 18, 2023. RAND Corporation.

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- <sup>13</sup> Dharmapuri, S. [Just Add Women and Stir? Parameters](#), Spring 2011.
- <sup>14</sup> Prescott, J.M. [Why militaries need a theory of gender's operational relevance](#). ICRC Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog. July 7, 2022.
- <sup>15</sup> United States Department of Defense. [Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment \(JCOIE\)](#). 25 July 2018, page 7.
- <sup>16</sup> Women, Peace, and Security in Action, Oct 18, 2023. RAND Corporation.
- <sup>17</sup> Dharmapuri, S. Just Add Women and Stir? Parameters, Spring 2011, pages 62-63.
- <sup>18</sup> Available at [https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Bi-SCD\\_040-001.pdf](https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Bi-SCD_040-001.pdf)
- <sup>19</sup> The current version does not appear to be available in the public domain but should be available through NATO official channels.
- <sup>20</sup> Available at [Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations](#)
- <sup>21</sup> PfPC SSRWG and EDWG, *Handbook on Teaching Gender in the Military*. 2016.
- <sup>22</sup> Women, Peace, and Security in Action. 18 Oct 2023. RAND Corporation.
- <sup>23</sup> PfPC SSRWG and EDWG, *Handbook on Teaching Gender in the Military*. 2016.
- <sup>24</sup> Available at <https://www.act.nato.int/about/gender-advisor/>
- <sup>25</sup> PfPC SSRWG and EDWG, *Handbook on Teaching Gender in the Military*. 2016.
- <sup>26</sup> Lackenbauer, H. and Langlais, R. [Review of the Practical Implications of UNSCR 1325 for the Conduct of NATO-led Operations and Missions](#). May 2013. Swedish Defense Research Agency.
- <sup>27</sup> Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations. [Integrating Gender Perspective in Military Exercises](#).
- <sup>28</sup> Obradovic, L. and Neathery-Castro, J. [Integrating Gender Perspective in Cognitive Warfare](#). OPEN Publications Vol 8(7), 2023.
- <sup>29</sup> Available at <http://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ68/PLAW-115publ68.pdf>
- <sup>30</sup> The 2020 version of the DOD Implementation plan can be accessed [here](#). With the release of the 2023 Women, Peace, and Security Strategy and National Action Plan, an updated implementation plan should be released in 2024.
- <sup>31</sup> Women, Peace, and Security in Action. 18 Oct 2023. RAND Corporation.

## PROFILE

### Jamie Leonheart

Major Jamie L. Leonheart is a Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation Fellow of the 27th class of the Mansfield fellowship program. During her fellowship year, she worked with various Government of Japan Agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense on issues related to Gender Equality; Women, Peace, and Security; and US-Japan relations, particularly in regard to U.S. Forces Japan.

Major Leonheart entered the United States Air Force in 2014 and since then has held a variety of positions as a pilot within two reconnaissance squadrons, ensuring persistent worldwide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), command and control (C2), and communications support to tactical forces and intelligence agencies through the RQ-4 Global Hawk Block 20, 30, and 40 aircraft.

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