

House Oversight and Reform Committee- National Security Subcommittee Hearing on the U.S.
Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security

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Introduction

Chairman Lynch and Ranking Member Grothman, distinguished members of the House Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security, it is an honor to testify before you today on the Department of Defense implementation of the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security.

DoD fully supports the whole-of-government implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Act through the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security and the supporting implementation plans, and views this initiative as essential for U.S. national security.

Global conflict is evolving, and the need to identify sustainable security approaches that meet the needs of an entire population is greater than ever. As our adversaries and competitors continue to seek a strategic advantage, the United States and our partners must be better prepared to meet security challenges by recognizing the diverse roles women play in conflicts, and by incorporating their perspectives throughout our plans and operations.

The destabilizing effects of malign actors highlight the importance of the global Women, Peace, and Security principles in upholding international human rights and the rules-based international order the United States and U.S. allies and partners seek to maintain.

Advancing the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security provides a unique engagement opportunity to strengthen relationships with U.S. allies and partners through collective efforts to reinforce women's empowerment, meaningful participation in decision-making, protection from violence, and access to resources.

When we recognize and support the important roles women fulfill as agents of change, and when we incorporate their perspectives throughout our plans and operations, we are better equipped to promote our security, confront our near-peer competitors, and defeat our adversaries.

Overview of DoD's Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan

Last month, in accordance with the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 and the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security, the Department of Defense, along with our interagency partners, launched its Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan, or SFIP, signed by Secretary Esper.

This document is the first Department-wide implementation plan that outlines how the Department will support the intent of the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security through attention to the composition of our personnel and the development of our policies, plans, doctrine, training, education, operations, and exercises.

This approach will support the National Defense Strategy and increase our operational effectiveness by helping the Department to:

- Strengthen alliances and attract new partners by demonstrating U.S. commitment to human rights and women's empowerment, making the United States the partner of choice; and
- Reform the Department for greater performance and affordability by developing more effective strategies to mitigate risks and optimize mission success.

The SFIP details three overarching defense objectives to orient the Department's implementation of the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security, which are as follows:

- **Defense Objective 1:** The Department of Defense exemplifies a diverse organization that allows for women's meaningful participation across the development, management, and employment of the Joint Force.
- **Defense Objective 2:** Women in partner nations meaningfully participate and serve at all ranks and in all occupations in the defense and security sectors.
- **Defense Objective 3:** Partner nation defense and security sectors ensure women and girls are safe and secure and that their human rights are protected, especially during conflict and crisis.

Recognizing that such objectives cannot be achieved overnight, the SFIP lays out a series of intermediate defense objectives and actions the Department will take in support of those objectives to establish and improve policy frameworks and support achievements in women's empowerment.

Further Implementation of the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security

DoD's implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Strategy highlights and builds upon best practices that strengthen our armed forces and further our national security objectives. Since the enactment of the WPS Act of 2017 and the approval of the U.S. Strategy on WPS, the Department has significantly increased its WPS activities, with the support of WPS-specific funding from Congress, for which we are grateful.

The Department currently has an active network of WPS Advisors at the Combatant Commands, as well as in the Joint Staff and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. These personnel advise commanders and staffs on how to integrate gender perspectives into operations and organize engagements with partner nations on women, peace, and security.

We have engaged more than 50 partner nations to demonstrate the value of women's meaningful participation, empowerment, and safety to national security, and to share best practices on the recruitment, employment, development, retention, and promotion of women in military forces.

Among the particular engagements are conferences, training events, standard operating procedure development, and emphasis on WPS principles in military operations and multilateral exercises such as Flintlock, Khaan Quest, Gema Bhakti, and Pacific Sentry.

For example, in Niger, DoD's Office of Security Cooperation has developed a strategy to ensure our security cooperation efforts support the U.S. WPS Strategy. One of the objectives of this strategy is to help the Nigerien Armed Forces (FAN) adapt their recruitment methods to increase the number of women in their ranks and to promote women into leadership positions.

In the Indo-Pacific Command, our WPS Advisors have engaged with local organizations in countries such as Mongolia to work with women in rural areas in building their resilience capacity and leadership skills, such as in disaster response and relief efforts. They plan to expand this effort to other countries in the region this year.

Within the Department's own forces, formal training programs are being developed and piloted, beginning with senior leaders and WPS Advisors. We have also worked to integrate WPS into existing, related training modules such as training on Countering Trafficking in Persons.

Concluding Remarks

With the launch of the Department's Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan, the Department will further institutionalize and expand on the critical WPS work across components, and continue to coordinate closely with and support our interagency partners on this initiative to make the United States safer and more secure. This initiative is an important priority across the entire Department, and we are grateful for congressional interest and support in particular for the WPS funding DoD has received the past few years. We also welcome the new WPS Caucus, co-founded by Representatives Waltz and Frankel, and look forward to further engagement with the Caucus over the coming months. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.