

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Manuscript 3202

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ABSTRACT: Global powers, regional hegemonies, and non-state actors engaged in a perennial state of competition dominate today's security environment. In response, the Department of Defense has adopted the competition continuum model of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict. The military could significantly improve its efforts to compete along this continuum and achieve national security objectives by leveraging the Women, Peace, and Security global policy framework that supports gender equality and values women's diverse roles in global security.

Keywords: security, competition, gender, women, economy

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) is a global policy framework that supports gender equality and values women's diverse roles in conflict and security.

Women, Peace, and Security is a critical national security issue: more than 15 years of research shows countries with greater gender equality are less prone to violent conflict and are more secure and stable.¹ Based on United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) and nine follow-on resolutions, the WPS framework is implemented through country-level or regional national action plans.² The United States is an exception to this implementation, having passed the WPS Act in 2017, which codified this framework into law. The WPS Act requires the Department of Defense (DoD) to develop an implementation plan, which it did when it issued the

1. Valerie M. Hudson et al., *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 114.

2. United Nations Security Council (UNSC), S/RES/1325 – Security Council Resolution on Women and Peace and Security (2000); UNSC, S/RES/1820 – Security Council Resolution on Women and Peace and Security: Conflict-related Sexual Violence (2008); UNSC, S/RES/1888 – Security Council Resolution on Women and Peace and Security: Conflict-related Sexual Violence (2009); UNSC, S/RES/1889 – Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (2009); UNSC, S/RES/1960 – Security Council Resolution on Women and Peace and Security: Conflict-related Sexual Violence (2010); UNSC, S/RES/2106 – Security Council Resolution on Women and Peace and Security: Conflict-related Sexual Violence (2013); UNSC, S/RES/2122 (2013); UNSC, S/RES/2242 (2015); UNSC, S/RES/2467 (2019); and UNSC, S/RES/2493 (2019).

Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan in 2020.³

Department of Defense awareness continues to grow as its implementation plan efforts increase. In fiscal year 2021, the Department deployed its first gender advisory workforce to the eight US-based military installations hosting Afghan evacuees during Operation Allies Welcome. It also assessed the conduct of assorted security cooperation activities with partner nations, addressing barriers and opportunities to women's recruitment and retention in partner-nation armed forces. Finally, it trained approximately 400 DoD personnel to serve as gender focal points and qualified 30 personnel to serve as gender advisers.⁴

Most importantly, Women, Peace, and Security improves military operational effectiveness. By drawing attention to the range of women's security-related activities on the global stage—such as participating in combat and peace-building and providing early warning signs of conflict—Women, Peace, and Security helps reveal the often overlooked impact of women in conflict-affected areas. For example, the US Army's recognition of the role of Afghan women in supporting insurgents prompted a change in tactics, techniques, and procedures that reaped significant benefits.

Instead of sending only male soldiers on raids, the Army began to include female soldiers, since only women could approach Afghan women directly. When conducting a security search of Afghan women during a 2011 raid on a compound in Kandahar province, a female American soldier discovered a hollowed-out Quran containing cell phones with the names and numbers of insurgents, handwritten lists of names, and other incriminating documents tucked into swaddling clothes.⁵ This discovery improved counterinsurgency efforts directly. Acknowledging the active role of Afghan women in the insurgency also helped the US Army enhance its intelligence preparation of the battlefield, which prompted commanders to expand their understanding of the local context by overcoming a biased perception of violent conflict as a male domain.

3. Department of Defense (DoD), *DoD Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan* (Washington, DC: DoD, June 2020), https://media.defense.gov/2020/Jun/11/2002314428/-1/-1/1/WOMEN_PEACE_SECURITY_STRATEGIC_FRAMEWORK_IMPLEMENTATION_PLAN.PDF.

4. White House, *United States Government Women, Peace, and Security Congressional Report* (Washington, DC: White House, July 2022), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/US-Women-Peace-Security-Report-2022.pdf>, p. 44.

5. Brenda Oppermann, "Hawks, Doves and Canaries: Women and Conflict," *Small Wars Journal* (website), August 13, 2014, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/hawks-doves-and-canaries-women-and-conflict>.

Likewise, Women, Peace, and Security increases military operational effectiveness by highlighting another factor commonly unobserved in the global security equation: gender. This critically important concept of socially constructed roles, responsibilities, and behaviors associated with being a woman or a man helps deepen the understanding of the operating environment within the context of local protocols and traditions. Conducting an analysis of gender reveals the role it plays in global security, exposing a complex world of power dynamics and strategic, operational, and tactical decisions driven by gender norms.⁶

Although the Department of Defense recognizes the importance of Women, Peace, and Security to military operations, it would reap greater benefits by acknowledging Women, Peace, and Security as a tool that could enhance US competitiveness worldwide. This article demonstrates how Women, Peace, and Security can help operationalize the new concept of *global competition*, that is, the competition continuum as defined in the *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC)*.⁷ The *competition continuum* comprises cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict. This article also highlights the benefits of leveraging Women, Peace, and Security as a global network and a conceptual framework to enhance US competition through examples of strategically important US partners and adversaries, namely, Syria, North Korea, and China.

A Modern Three-part Continuum

The *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC)* serves as a North Star for the Department of Defense as it adapts to the changing security environment and provides the Joint Force an intellectual framework to conceptualize the evolving nature of global security. Its foundational idea “to enable an expanded view of the operating environment by proposing the notion of a competition continuum” offers an alternative to the obsolete peace-and-war binary with a new, three-part model of cooperation, competition below armed conflict, and armed conflict.⁸

In practice, the competition continuum is not new; the Ottomans used it to expand their empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the United States engaged in all elements of the continuum

6. Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, *The First Political Order: How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

7. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC)* (Washington, DC: JCS, 2018), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concept_integrated_campaign.pdf?ver=2018-03-28-102833-257, 1.

8. JCS, *JCIC*, vi, 1.

during World War II. Now, the activities comprising the continuum occur more rapidly and in more varied ways due to evolving technologies and new alliances and partnerships.⁹



Figure 1. The competition continuum
(Source: 2018 *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, 8.)

When it comes to conceptualizing this continuum, the Department of Defense should leverage Women, Peace, and Security. Its principles affect each element of the continuum and compel DoD personnel to think more deeply, to analyze each element through a gender lens, and to identify new opportunities for competition.

Tapping into the WPS Global Network

The Department of Defense could improve its engagement in armed conflict, competition below armed conflict, or cooperation by becoming more involved with the WPS global network. This relationship-rich asset and worldwide alliance includes international, regional, national, and local entities (including many current US partners and allies) that officially subscribe to WPS principles through national action plans and other policies and mechanisms. Tapping into this network of 100 nations, 11 regional organizations (including the European Union, Economic Community of West African States, League of Arab States, and NATO), and more than 100 municipalities, cities, and towns would enable the Department

9. Alan Mikhail, *God's Shadow: Sultan Selim, His Ottoman Empire, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Liveright, 2020); and JCS, *JCIC*, 10.

of Defense to advance US global influence and hone its competitive edge through bilateral partnerships and network-affiliated activities.¹⁰

Competing through Armed Conflict by Leveraging Gender Equality in Syria

Armed conflict is one dimension of the competition continuum where Women, Peace, and Security can be readily observed. The implementation of Women, Peace, and Security in counterinsurgency initiatives in Afghanistan provides one such example, and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) provides another key illustration in which the application of a WPS framework improves combat effectiveness and, moreover, ensures “the maintenance of hard-won gains.”¹¹

According to the *JCIC*, “translating military success into the aims of policy is the ultimate purpose of armed conflict.”¹² Since there is no guarantee that military victories will translate into achieving strategic objectives, ensuring that policy goals are met and maintained calls for ongoing coordination of all elements of the competition continuum. The *JCIC* stresses the importance of “‘follow through’ to ensure the maintenance of desired policy aims” as a common imperative linking these elements.¹³ When it comes to armed conflict, follow-through is especially salient, as evidenced by US combat experiences over the past 20 years that demonstrate unequivocally that winning a battle does not equate to winning the war. Acknowledging the essential role of follow-through in the context of armed conflict is also important because it obliges us to think about what comes next and particularly about what needs to happen to secure the national security policy objectives temporarily achieved through combat success.

Implementing Women, Peace, and Security enhances combat operations by leveraging the talent, knowledge, and abilities of women and men in security forces and facilitating the design of appropriate and effective follow-through. A first-rate example of follow-through is the US military support of the People’s Protection Units (YPG), the homegrown defense forces of the Kurdish area of Syria that formed the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces. Working together, the United States, the Syrian

10. Women, Peace and Security Programme, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, “1325 National Action Plans (NAPS): WILPF Monitoring and Analysis of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security,” 1325 NAPS PeaceWomen (website), n.d., accessed December 30, 2021, <https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/>.

11. JCS, *JCIC*, 2.

12. JCS, *JCIC*, 2.

13. JCS, *JCIC*, vi.

Democratic Forces, and the counter-ISIS coalition conducted combat operations against ISIS, eventually defeating the group's attempt to control the area. This victory was due to the efforts of the People's Protection Units, especially its all-female People's Protection Force (YPJ).¹⁴

The Kurds in Syria have a unique approach to gender equality; the women's fighting force is separate from the men's, though the two comprise a coherent whole. Female soldiers are responsible for their decisions and defense. They decided—and the men of the People's Protection Units agreed—that women could and would lead men in battle but that women would be led exclusively by an all-female command structure.¹⁵ Effectively partnering with the People's Protection Units and People's Protection Force required American military advisers to accept this situation, since having women and men on equal footing was integral to the YPG command structure. When discussing what Special Forces should expect when operating in northern Syria, Jack Murphy, a former senior weapons sergeant with the 5th Special Forces Group, stressed this point, stating, "American Special Forces advisors should be prepared to accept the Kurdish notion of gender equality, which differs substantially from what currently exists in the US military."¹⁶

Experienced female Syrian Kurdish fighters proved a key asset to the United States and Syrian Democratic Forces. They participated in many battles before the People's Protection Force was officially established in 2013, including fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other Islamist groups, like Nusra in northeastern Syria, and retaking the border town of Yaroubiya near Iraq in 2013, which gave the People's Protection Units control of the Syria-Iraq crossing.¹⁷ The People's Protection Force also fought in the Battle of Kobani in 2015, playing a fundamental role in liberating the city and heralding the Islamic State's territorial end. Despite media coverage concerning the People's Protection Force's combat experience, American Special Forces advisers were not convinced of the women's combat ability. They did not know if the Syrian-Kurdish women's

14. US Department of State, "Members – The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS," US Department of State (website), n.d., accessed August 18 2022, <https://www.state.gov/the-global-coalition-to-defeat-isis-partners/>; Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, *The Daughters of Kobani: A Story of Rebellion, Courage, and Justice* (New York: Penguin Press, 2021); and Bethanne McKernan, "The Kurdish Woman Building a Feminist Democracy and Fighting ISIS at the Same Time," *Independent* (website), January 5, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/kurdish-woman-building-feminist-democrac-fighting-isis-at-the-same-time-syria-kurdistan-rojava-new-world-embassy-oslo-a-7487151.html>.

15. Lemmon, *Daughters of Kobani*, 25.

16. Jack Murphy, "Expert Analysis: What U.S. Special Forces Advisors Can Expect When Deployed to Northern Syria," SOFREP (website), November 24, 2015, <https://sofrep.com/news/what-us-special-forces-can-expect-when-deployed-to-northern-syria/>.

17. Lemmon, *Daughters of Kobani*, 27.

role in the fight constituted window dressing for naive foreigners or a truly significant part of the Syrian Kurdish force. Their Kurdish hosts in Kobani, however, made it clear to the advisers that the People's Protection Force played a vital role in winning the fight.¹⁸

In fact, the combat effectiveness, discipline, and exceptional leadership displayed by female Kurdish soldiers were the reasons the People's Protection Force led the critical attack on Manbij in 2016. Located on the border with Türkiye, Manbij was the locus of the Islamic State's foreign-fighter and external-plotting network. It was the crossroads through which internationals joining ISIS passed to drop off their families and passports before heading to the front.¹⁹ As a vital hub and territorial connection to the outside world, Manbij was strategically significant to ISIS, making it a crucial target of the Syrian Democratic Forces.²⁰ The Manbij offensive, an already complicated operation involving US Special Forces advisers, the Syrian Democratic Forces, and the newly established Manbij Military Council, was further complicated by a substantial tactical challenge the People's Protection Units had never conducted: a water crossing. The demanding and risky night crossing of the Euphrates River was executed first by the female Kurdish fighters, followed by their fellow SDF forces, including Arab and other non-Kurdish fighters. The Syrian Democratic Forces captured Manbij from ISIS in August 2016. The People's Protection Forces went on to play a decisive role in the battle to defeat the Islamic State at their capital, Raqqa.

While partnering with the Syrian Democratic Forces helped the United States succeed in "competing through armed conflict" by defeating the Islamic State militarily and disrupting the spread of global terrorism, this partnership also enabled crucially important follow-through that would help translate combat success into longer-term policy goals, a key feature of the competition continuum. In the context of Syria, US objectives included promoting stability and realizing the Syrian people's "call for freedom and a representative government."²¹ The People's Protection Units and People's Protection Forces were crucial partners in combat and were thus promising partners in governance and a primary

18. Lemmon, *Daughters of Kobani*, 124.

19. *Global Efforts to Defeat ISIS: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 114th Cong. (2016), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-114shrg28676/html/CHRG-114shrg28676.htm>; and Lemmon, *Daughters of Kobani*, 47.

20. Lemmon, *Daughters of Kobani*, 132–38.

21. Joseph R. Biden Jr., "Briefing Room – Presidential Actions: Notice on the Continuation of the National Emergency with Respect to the Actions of the Government of Syria," White House (website), May 6, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/05/06/notice-on-the-continuation-of-the-national-emergency-with-respect-to-the-actions-of-the-government-of-syria/>.

means to advance stability and democratic values and secure US policy objectives over time.

The People’s Protection Units and People’s Protection Forces revealed themselves to be secular and democratic, following a political philosophy called *democratic confederalism*, which emphasizes gender equality and grassroots democracy.²² Consequently, their officers are elected by troops, and equality—regardless of gender, religion, and ethnicity—is guaranteed.²³ Likewise, the Syrian Democratic Council, their political arm, ensures the fulfillment of democratic rights for all Syrians. It bases its governance model on a wide range of democratic principles that acknowledge Syria’s communal diversity, including embracing a multilingual, multiethnic, and interfaith homeland with a national spirit based on attachment to land, ecology, and progress, without sexism and racism.²⁴

Viewed through the lens of Women, Peace, and Security, the connection between the YPG and YPJ mission at the level of armed conflict and the realization of their broader policy goals through democratic governance is a clear example of follow-through in the competition continuum. Indeed, the importance of governance as one way to consolidate gains achieved through armed conflict and to facilitate the transition to long-term stability cannot be overstated. Senator Robert P. “Bob” Corker made this importance clear during a Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing on “Global Efforts to Defeat ISIS” when he asked, “And even if we continue to take back territory from ISIS, are those gains backed by political progress necessary to sustain them?”²⁵ In the case of the People’s Protection Units and People’s Protection Forces, the answer is yes. The Syrian Democratic Council had a political plan that leveraged the YPG and YPJ armed combat success to attain its policy aim of establishing

22. Abdullah Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, trans. International Initiative (Cologne, DE: International Initiative Edition in Cooperation with Mesopotamian Publishers, 2017), https://ocalanbooks.com/downloads/EN-brochure_democratic-confederalism_2017.pdf; Murphy, “When Deployed to Northern Syria.”

23. “YPG: People’s Protection Units,” Kurdish Project (website), n.d., accessed January 19, 2022, <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-nationalism/peoples-protection-units-ypg/>.

24. “Principles of the Syrian Democratic Council,” Syrian Democratic Council U.S. Mission (website), n.d., accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.syriandemocraticcouncil.us/about/principles-of-the-syrian-democratic-council/>.

25. *Global Efforts to Defeat ISIS*.

a democratic government, constituting the sort of follow-through necessary to compete effectively in armed conflict.²⁶

North Korea: Women, Peace, and Security and Competition below Armed Conflict

Competing below the threshold of armed conflict presents a complex landscape where a multitude of challenges “might be addressed through a mixture of diplomatic, informational, military and economic activities.”²⁷ Because this type of competition is complex and enduring, relevant literature will help establish a solid understanding of what *competition below armed conflict* means and how the United States might best engage in it. Applying the WPS framework to North Korea can help the Department of Defense gain a comprehensive understanding of the operational environment in North Korea and, in turn, identify relevant opportunities to compete below armed conflict.

According to Joint Doctrine Note 1-19, *Competition Continuum*:

... [C]ompetition below armed conflict involves operating below a threshold that invokes a direct military response from an adversary while retaining the capability to escalate to more conventional armed conflict. . . . An inherently constrained and measured approach, competition below armed conflict tends to occur over extended periods of time, frequently consisting of indirect actions.²⁸

Effectively competing below armed conflict requires situational awareness of the human dimension. In their article concerning great-power competition, Kevin Bilms and Christopher Costa underscore this point, noting it is essential to “emphasize the human element before hostilities occur.”²⁹ Likewise, the publication *Special Operations Forces within the Competition Continuum* stresses the importance of the human aspects of competing below armed conflict, highlighting that successful action in this context

26. Burcu Özçelik, “Explaining the Kurdish Democratic Union Party’s Self-governance Practices in Northern Syria, 2012–18,” *Government & Opposition* 55, no. 4 (2019): 690–710.

27. JCS, *Competition Continuum*, Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-19, 3, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_19.pdf.

28. JCS, JDN 1-19, v–vi.

29. Kevin Bilms and Christopher P. Costa, “Ideas: Look at Great Power Competition through a Special Operations Lens,” *Defense One* (website), June 18, 2020, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/06/putting-special-operations-lens-great-power-competition/166241/>.

provides an “understanding of how relevant actors will perceive action or situations.”³⁰

Given that “gains in competition below armed conflict typically take the form of modifications in people’s behavior rather than control of territory,” it is critically important to develop a mindset attuned to behavior and actions that influence behavior.³¹ US Air Force General Paul Selva highlights this when discussing the importance of the information environment. He observes that “achiev[ing] the desired influence [calls for] . . . a mindset based on a greater understanding of the environment, relevant actors, and how . . . to apply the information.”³²

Since behavior can change quickly, competition below armed conflict also requires different ways of thinking about escalation and deterrence. The *JCIC* reinforces this idea by pointing out that “early recognition of an impending change in an adversary’s behavior provides the best opportunity for deterrence.”³³ Gender analysis is a key tool in the WPS arsenal, capable of heightening situational awareness and paving the way for improved deterrence. Gender analysis involves assessing the different implications of any action for men and women based on the distinctive roles, responsibilities, and opportunities ascribed to each group through social constructs.

Examining the socioeconomic changes in North Korea over the past 30 years demonstrates the value of analyzing a situation through the lens of gender. When the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc collapsed in the late twentieth century, North Korea’s “industrial economy began to implode due to the withdrawal of subsidies from the Soviet Union, Russia and then China” and the country’s “misguided pursuit of a strategy of self-sufficiency.”³⁴ A devastating famine also occurred during this period. These events wreaked havoc on the country’s economy and impacted men and women very differently. One result of the crumbling economy was a proliferation of unofficial markets known as the *jangmadang*. These informal markets, combined with the influence of gender norms, created significant, lasting changes in behavior. For example, many North

30. US Air Force, *Special Operations*, Air Force Doctrine Publication (AFDP) 3-05 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Lemay Center, 2020), 9–10, https://www.doctrine.af.mil/Portals/61/documents/AFDP_3-05/3-05-D03-SOF-Competition-Continuum.pdf.

31. JCS, *JCIC*, 21.

32. JCS, *Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE)* (Washington, DC: JCS, 2018), iii, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concepts_jcoie.pdf.

33. JCS, *JCIC*, 21.

34. Stephen Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Hunger and Human Rights: The Politics of Famine in North Korea* (Washington, DC: US Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, 2005), 14–15.

Korean women left their official jobs to engage in peddling and trade to buy food for their families while men shied away from these activities, which were often looked down upon. Further, housing and other necessities were tied to men's state jobs, so men were unable to leave their jobs despite receiving insufficient pay to maintain a family.³⁵

While North Korean women became more active in the *jangmadang*, the government loosened its control on freedom of movement, which increased the procurement of supplies from China to trade in North Korean informal markets. Thousands of North Korean women developed black-market businesses, filling the void left by the bankrupt and incapacitated state, emerging as a new entrepreneurial class, driving the spread of markets, feeding the country, and dominating an informal market estimated to contribute more than 70 percent of the country's household income.³⁶

Significant changes in North Korean society flowed from the combined effects of increased cross-border movement and the improved economic status of women. As North Korean traders traveled to China, they saw their neighbors' relative prosperity. They also received information about the Republic of Korea that was vastly different from the official propaganda.³⁷ The increasing economic influence of female business owners—some of whom became *donju*, “masters of money”—also improved the overall status of women in society.³⁸ At the same time, however, women remained subject to intense societal and familial pressure to get married early. Once married, strict gender norms dictated how women behaved and obligated them to “fulfill three roles—caretaker, housekeeper and, increasingly, breadwinner.”³⁹ North Korean women's growing economic power, increased awareness about life outside of North Korea, and desire to escape burdensome gender norms have resulted in high numbers

35. Amanda Kelly Anderson, “Gendered Rhetoric in North Korea's International Relations (1946–2011),” PhD diss. (University of Wollongong, 2015), 83, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/4581>; and Cheon Soram and Noh Jung-min, “Women Who Flee North Korea Also Escape a Harsh Patriarchy,” *Radio Free Asia* (website), December 23, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/women-patriarchy-12232021154512.html>.

36. Christian Davies, “North Korean Women Pay a Heavy Price as Kim Turns Back on ‘Black Market Breadwinners,’” *Financial Times* (website), January 12, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/154f7fe6-e9b9-4a4f-b590-f08afa5ca326>.

37. Anderson, “Gendered Rhetoric,” 174.

38. Sung Kyung Kim, “Issue Brief – North Korean Women as New Economic Agents: Drivers and Consequences” (Stockholm: Institute for Security & Development Policy, 2020), 3, <https://isdpu.eu/content/uploads/2020/10/North-Korean-Women-as-New-Economic-Agents-IB-21.10.20-1.pdf>; and Jonathan Corrado, “Kim Jong Un's Risky Economic Gambit,” 38 North (website), April 2, 2021, <https://www.38north.org/2021/04/kim-jong-uns-risky-economic-gambit/>.

39. Cheon and Noh, “Women Who Flee North Korea.”

of female refugees. Over 70 percent of approximately 33,000 North Koreans who escaped to South Korea in the past several decades have been female.⁴⁰

When competing below the threshold of armed conflict, it helps to remember how past conflicts with formidable adversaries have played out. During the Cold War, the United States spent significant time, effort, and resources preparing for armed conflict with the Soviet Union, however, the deepest causes of Soviet collapse were the decline of communist ideology and the failure of the Soviet economy.⁴¹ Indeed, changing gender norms are driving significant economic and ideological changes in North Korea, revealing strategic vulnerabilities that could foreshadow political transformation. By analyzing North Korea's conduct through the lens of gender, we can understand its response to the drastic changes brought on by the end of the Cold War and the catastrophic famine of the 1990s. A gender analysis of this era could reveal opportunities to influence North Korea's increasingly powerful private sector and, in doing so, mitigate the country's adversarial behavior.⁴²

North Korean women might represent the prospects of their society. Their emerging high level of agency, power, and influence could enable the United States to assist with economic development and social transformation should the North Korean regime open up its market and society through the process of denuclearization.⁴³ This idea aligns with Joint Doctrine Note 1-19's emphasis on applying all national instruments of power to achieve national security objectives, noting that competition below armed conflict might be "addressed [effectively] through a mixture of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic activities."⁴⁴

The Department of Defense is well-positioned to support this approach, given civil affairs forces' responsibility for collecting civil-military information as part of civil reconnaissance operations. Discussing the role of civil affairs forces when competing below the level of armed conflict, Emily Mushen highlights the importance of reconnaissance operations. She observes that insights gained from mapping civil institutions, gathering and tracking information on key players, and monitoring for changes over time help

40. Cheon and Noh, "Women Who Flee North Korea."

41. Joseph S. Nye, "Who Caused the End of the Cold War?," *HuffPost* (website), March 18, 2010, last updated May 25, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/who-caused-the-end-of-the_b_350595.

42. Vincent Koen and Jinwoan Beom, *North Korea: The Last Transition Economy?*, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Economics Department Working Papers no. 1607 (Paris: OECD, November 25, 2020), <https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=ECO/WKP%282020%2915&docLanguage=En>.

43. Sung, "North Korean Women," 6.

44. JSC, JDN 1-19, 3.

US forces achieve their objectives.⁴⁵ Ensuring that this type of information includes a gender perspective would improve the DoD's understanding of the operational environment and present additional opportunities to influence it.

China: Cooperation with Adversarial Partners

One of the chief aims of the Department of Defense vis-à-vis the competition continuum is to avoid armed conflict. By decreasing tensions or deterring an adversary's calculated escalation of oppositional tactics, cooperation can mitigate adversarial tendencies. The Department's WPS goal of advancing women by increasing their meaningful participation in security institutions and processes could enhance cooperation efforts with allies and partners whose "overall relationship with the US is . . . adversarial."⁴⁶

China is considered a major competitor and adversarial partner, and its stance on women in defense represents a constructive point for cooperation between the Department of Defense and China's armed forces. China began deploying UN peacekeepers more than 30 years ago but sent its first female peacekeepers to South Sudan in April 2015, where they served as the first female infantry squad.⁴⁷ Since then, more than 1,000 female peacekeepers serving in mixed-sex battalions have deployed to Lebanon, Liberia, Mali, South Sudan, and other countries. They have worked as medical support, liaison officers, and military observers and have conducted demining, explosive ordnance disposal, protection of civilians, and gender-equality activities.⁴⁸

Although China has conducted extensive training through its specialized peacekeeping institution and engaged in numerous peacekeeping activities with countries and regional organizations, it has not targeted female peacekeepers as a specific subgroup in these efforts.⁴⁹ The Department of Defense could take advantage of the situation by developing a female peacekeepers security cooperation initiative in partnership with China as a form of military diplomacy. Just as current US-Chinese military

45. Emily Mushen, "New Roles for Civil Affairs Forces in a New World," *in depth* (blog), October 1, 2021, <https://www.cna.org/news/InDepth/2021/10/new-roles-for-civil-affairs-forces>.

46. JCS, JDN 1-19, vi.

47. Olivia Gippner and Garima Mohan, "Women in United Nations Peacekeeping: Holding Up Half the Sky?," *South Asia @ LSE* (blog), May 27, 2015, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2015/05/27/women-in-united-nations-peacekeeping-holding-up-half-the-sky/>.

48. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, "China's Armed Forces: 30 Years of UN Peacekeeping Operations" (white paper), September 18, 2020, *China Daily* (website), <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202009/18/WS5f641de9a31024ad0ba7a5de.html>.

49. State Council Information Office, "China's Armed Forces."

diplomacy activities like counterpiracy patrols and bilateral exercises focusing on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief strengthen cooperation, a WPS-focused security cooperation initiative could achieve the same goal.⁵⁰ To entice China, the Department of Defense could include partner nations China currently influences and seeks to influence, creating a WPS security cooperation alliance.

For example, the Department of Defense should invite Ghana to join this alliance, given that Ghana's long-standing, almost 60-year relationship with China has grown more important over the past 15 years, establishing Ghana as a key country in China's expanding sphere of influence in Africa. As a significant provider of development aid, China supported Ghana in the form of grants, interest-free loans, and concessional loans used in a variety of sectors, including infrastructure, economic development, and health. The discovery of oil in the Gulf of Guinea in 2007 made Ghana an oil-rich nation, and, thus, the nature of China's relationship with Ghana has shifted from that of an aid donor to that of an investor.⁵¹ While China provides technical expertise and funding for the development of energy infrastructure within Ghana, it is also an international competitor for Ghana's oil resources.⁵² Ghana's Ministry of Environment and Science highlighted the importance of the latter, noting that "China needs a lot of oil for its massive population. . . . China needs Ghana's oil."⁵³

While China's vested interest in Ghana as an oil supplier underscores Ghana's suitability as a partner in a WPS security cooperation initiative, so does Ghana's robust efforts to enhance the role of women peacekeepers. Men and women serving in the Ghana Armed Forces have participated in more than a dozen UN peacekeeping operations and missions since the early 1970s.⁵⁴ Ghana is the third-largest troop- and police-contributing country in Africa. Of the top 10 troop- and police-contributing countries, it deploys the highest proportion of women (averaging 15 percent) and continues to increase and improve women servicemembers' participation

50. Caitlin Campbell, *In Focus – China Primer: U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report IF11712 (Washington, DC: CRS, January 4, 2021), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11712/3, 2>.

51. Giles Mohan, "China in Ghana: Easing the Shift from Aid Dependency to Oil Economy? (ARI)," Real Instituto Elcano (website), October 15, 2010, <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/china-in-ghana-easing-the-shift-from-aid-dependency-to-oil-economy-ari/>.

52. Stephanie Rupp, "Ghana, China, and the Politics of Energy," *African Studies Review* 56, no. 1 (April 2013): 103–30, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/african-studies-review/article/ghana-china-and-the-politics-of-energy/C2E08C4F907DDEE36520A7E4EE0B9141>.

53. Richard Aidoo et al., "Footprints of the Dragon: China's Oil Diplomacy and Its Impacts on Sustainable Development Policy in Ecuador and Ghana," *International Development Policy*, 8, no. 1 (2017), <https://journals.openedition.org/poldev/2408#tocto1n8>.

54. "United Nations Peacekeeping," United Nations (website), n.d., accessed July 14, 2022, <https://peacekeeping.un.org>.

in peacekeeping operations, as evidenced by a Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations Assessment conducted in 2020.⁵⁵

China's extensive involvement in peacekeeping operations and its robust relationship with Ghana illustrate the intersection of security and economic interests in the context of the competition continuum. Certainly, a WPS security cooperation initiative represents a strategically informed effort to cooperate effectively with China and other important US partners and promote national security over the long term. The Department of Defense can realize this concept by leveraging the WPS global network and the WPS know-how of the US Army War College's Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute.⁵⁶ An ideal partner to liaise, train, and cooperate with China—and US partner nations targeted by China—this institute can bring to bear its peacekeeping and WPS experience along with the growing body of WPS expertise within the Department of Defense.

Tailoring the peacekeeping institute's efforts to enhance the capabilities of women peacekeepers and increase their numbers through a WPS security cooperation initiative would provide many benefits. In addition to improving peacekeeping operations and thereby promoting peace and stability over the long term, this alliance would facilitate the creation of new relationships among China's military members, their US counterparts, and DoD partners and allies. The alliance would enable more channels to engage in military diplomacy, precluding potential conflicts through discussion. This initiative would also strengthen US ties with China and provide a concrete, nontraditional security activity designed primarily to address issues of mutual interest. Finally, cooperating with China in this manner might encourage Beijing to develop a WPS national action plan, further strengthening investment in the multilateral system and promoting global stability by improving the status of women in China.⁵⁷

55. For additional information on Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations, see Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance et al., *Ghana Armed Forces: MOWIP Report 2020* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance [DCAF], 2020), https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Ghana_Armed_Forces_2020_MOWIP_Report.pdf.

56. "Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI)," Army War College Foundation, Inc. (website), <https://usawc.org/peacekeeping-stability-operations-institute-pksoi-2/>.

57. Richard Gowan, "China's Pragmatic Approach to UN Peacekeeping," Brookings (website), September 24, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-pragmatic-approach-to-un-peacekeeping/>.

Conclusion

As a practical and conceptual framework, Women, Peace, and Security is a value proposition that will enhance the Department of Defense's ability to envision the competition continuum and operationalize it effectively. Drawing attention to women's active involvement in all elements of the continuum—armed conflict, competing below the threshold of armed conflict, and cooperation—Women, Peace, and Security, like the notion of the competition continuum, expands one's view of the operational environment. Concretely, leveraging the WPS global network allows the Department of Defense to strengthen existing partnerships, expand its network of potential allies, and create more opportunities to compete through cooperation. Likewise, it also provides opportunities to expand the US sphere of influence through cooperation with adversarial partners. By highlighting women's roles in armed combat, Women, Peace, and Security assists in ascertaining and overcoming gender biases and capitalizing fully on the skills and abilities of all military members regardless of sex, begetting efficiencies that translate into effectiveness.

Finally, Women, Peace, and Security reveals how gender norms can impede or enable efforts to compete along the competition continuum. Appreciating the impact of societal gender norms encourages inquiry beyond superficial impressions—for example, that men hold all the power in North Korea or that Middle Eastern women have little agency or influence—enabling the Department of Defense to discover a more comprehensive and nuanced operational environment. In sum, as a conceptual and practical framework, Women, Peace, and Security helps shape the Department of Defense's collective mindset, preparing it to operate more effectively in the exceedingly complex and contested space of the competition continuum and to achieve national security objectives along the way.

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