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ISF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

# Gender and Strategic Stability

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Direct Audience: Security Policy Department, Defence and International Security Directorate

Suggested Internal Distribution: ISF Strategic Stability Programme Team and stakeholders e.g. project leads, SSP Programme Board members, OGD partners, ISFU, ISF portfolio team and partners in MoD.

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# Task Overview

## Title of Task:

Gender and Strategic Stability

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## Terms of Reference:

To provide a comprehensive evidence base on the relationship between gender and strategic stability. It will draw together insights from existing literature, policy frameworks, and practice to:

- Establish why strategic stability work needs a gendered approach
- Review the conceptual and policy frameworks linking gender, WPS, security and SS.
- Map the existing evidence base (academic and grey literature)
- Explore intersections with thematic areas of nuclear deterrence, AI and Emerging and Disruptive Technology (EDT) and the geographical areas of Euro-Atlantic and Indo Pacific

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# Background and introduction

The United Kingdom's strategic environment is transforming due to rapid technological advancements, a more contested international landscape, and evolving threats, leading to a major overhaul of its defence and national security strategies. Intensifying great-power competition, most notably between China and the United States, is reshaping the global order, paralysing the United Nations Security Council, and eroding international norms.<sup>1</sup> The breakdown of traditional arms control agreements, combined with the rapid evolution of emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs), such as artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, and autonomous systems is generating unprecedented complexity and instability. These developments are accelerating decision-making cycles, increasing risk of miscalculation, and blurring the line between conventional and strategic deterrence.

For those engaged in strategic stability programming, these challenges are familiar, from maintaining credible nuclear deterrence, to managing risks of EDTs, to sustaining cooperation in the Euro-Atlantic and Asia Pacific Regions. What remains underexplored is how social and political dynamics, particularly gender, shape reality and perceptions of identity, power, risk, and credibility across each of these. These dynamics influence how deterrence postures are framed, how escalation risks are calculated in crises, and how new technologies are governed or constrained. As evidenced, a lack of diversity, and therefore diversity of thought, as well as lack of challenges to structural power inequality in national security making architecture, driven by male-dominated institutions and masculinised institutional structures, limits critical rigour and in turn results in less effective policy making.<sup>2</sup> Gender analysis offers a practical way to understand these human factors and to strengthen how stability programs anticipate, prevent and manage risk. It highlights how assumptions about leadership, authority and resolve can affect decision making, sometimes driving risk-taking or escalation that purely technical or capability models fail to predict.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, established through the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and grounded in Sustainability Development Goal 5, on Gender Equality, provides a globally recognised framework for understanding and managing security across both peace and conflict contexts.<sup>3</sup> It is not confined to post-conflict setting or crisis response, it applies equally to how states conceive, plan and implement national security in periods of stability and deterrence. WPS shows that gender norms shape how power, risk and the use of force are understood and exercised long before crises occur. Its four pillars; prevention, participation, protection and relief and recovery offer a whole-of-system approach to security, linking early warning and conflict prevention to resilience and

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS). (2024). Great Power Competition in the Multilateral System. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/great-power-competition-multilateral-system>

<sup>2</sup> Jenkins, B. (2019). Diversity makes better policy. *A New Vision: Gender. Justice. National Security*. San Francisco, CA: *Ploughshares Fund*, 35-39.; Wright, H. (2024). Diversity of thought as 'mission critical': Knowledge, politics and power in UK national security policymaking. *Security Dialogue*, 56(2), 97-115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106241262855>

<sup>3</sup> Resolution 1325 (2000). Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000. [https://www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/sites/www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/files/wps\\_sres1325.pdf](https://www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/sites/www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/files/wps_sres1325.pdf)

sustainable peace. The WPS agenda also provides the basis of applying a gender analysis within security and stability work. In this sense, WPS complements and strengthens the objective of strategic stability by embedding prevention, inclusion and accountability into the structures that manage deterrence, arms control and risk reduction.

Both the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) define how the UK understands and responds to security threats now and in the years ahead. They emphasize the need to address cross-border and transnational risks, strengthen resilience, and work through alliances and international systems.<sup>4</sup> The WPS agenda is not separate from these frameworks – it is one of the most effective means through which the UK can deliver on its objectives in practice. The UK National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS (2023-2027) translates this commitment into five strategic objectives, of which Strategic Objective 5 (SO5), addressing transnational threats, is the most relevant to strategic stability.<sup>5</sup> SO5 highlights state threats to UK security which extends to nuclear proliferation, emerging and disruptive technologies, and regional insecurity.

Taking a gendered approach to stability and security enhances operational effectiveness by improving foresight, sharpening risk analysis and strengthening resilience. First, this broadens situational awareness by highlighting how perceptions of credibility, control and escalation are shaped by identity and power structures.<sup>6</sup> Second, it ensures that stability measures are people-centered and responsive to diverse experiences, which increase trust and legitimacy among partners.<sup>7</sup> Third, it improves decision-making under uncertainty by incorporating a wider range of perspectives and evidence-based insights, improving crisis management and risk reduction.<sup>8</sup> In short, gender-sensitive approaches make stability initiatives more adaptive, evidence-based and effective.

Despite these benefits, gender perspectives remain limited within strategic stability and deterrence debates, which have long been dominated by technical and state centric conceptions of power and implicitly masculine conceptions of power and rationality. Such assumptions shape how credibility, control and escalation are understood, yet they often go unexamined. While research on gender and deterrence has expanded in the past decade through the work of scholars such as Carol Cohn, Laura Sjobert, and Laura Rose Brown, policy has been slow to catch up.<sup>9</sup> Strategic stability frameworks often omit gender entirely, treating WPS as a peripheral concern rather than a strategic enabler. This carries

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<sup>4</sup> UK Government. (2025). National Security Strategy: Security for the British people in a dangerous world. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685ab0da72588f418862075c/E03360428\\_National\\_Security\\_Strategy\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/685ab0da72588f418862075c/E03360428_National_Security_Strategy_Accessible.pdf); UK Government. (2025). Strategic Defence Review: Making Britain Safer: secure at home, strong abroad. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683d89f181deb72cce2680a5/The\\_Strategic\\_Defence\\_Review\\_2025\\_-\\_Making\\_Britain\\_Safer\\_-\\_secure\\_at\\_home\\_strong\\_abroad.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683d89f181deb72cce2680a5/The_Strategic_Defence_Review_2025_-_Making_Britain_Safer_-_secure_at_home_strong_abroad.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> UK Government (2023). UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023–2027. London: FCDO

<sup>6</sup> De Jonge Oudraat & Brown. (2020). The Gender and Security Agenda, Strategies for the 21st Century, Routledge Series. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/oa-edit/10.4324/9781003030232/gender-security-agenda-chantal-de-jonge-oudraat-michael-brown> ; Futures without violence. (2017). Linking Security of Women, & Security of States. <https://futureswithoutviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Linking-Security-of-Women-Security-of-States.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> OECD (2024) Global Forum on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy. <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/programmes/reinforcing-democracy-initiative/2024-OECD-Global-Forum-Key-Issues-Paper.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Jenkins, B. (2019). Diversity makes better policy. *A New Vision: Gender. Justice. National Security*. San Francisco, CA: Ploughshares Fund, 35-39.

<sup>9</sup> Cohn, C. (1987). Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12 (4), 687–718; Brown, L. (2024). Gender, Power and Strategic Decision-Making: Reframing Deterrence through Feminist Analysis, *Security Challenges*, Vol. 20 (2).

consequences, as overlooking the human and societal aspects of risk can mean deterrence becomes weak, escalation risks increase and opportunities for cooperation narrow.

This report seeks to address that gap. It examines how gender perspectives strengthen the conceptual and operational foundations of strategic stability. Drawing on academic literature, policy analysis and practitioner insight, the report demonstrates how integrating gender enhances the effectiveness, resilience and sustainability of strategic stability programming. Its central argument is that gender must be considered as an integral part of programming to achieve effective, resilient and sustainable strategic stability in an era of rapid technological and geopolitical change.

## Policy Frameworks and Stakeholders

At the regional level, institutions such as NATO, OSCE, the European Union and ASEAN regional Forum have developed frameworks linking gender equality to deterrence, defence, and resilience. NATO's Policy on Women, Peace and Security strengthens the Alliance's institutional approach by embedding gender perspectives in capability development, operational planning, and crisis management.<sup>10</sup> The 2024 policy expands on earlier action plans, introducing stronger accountability measures and a clearer focus on how inclusive participation enhances deterrence credibility and strategic cohesion. In the Indo-Pacific, research shows that inclusive governance, transparency, and gender-responsive engagement reduce mistrust and strengthen regional stability.<sup>11</sup> The UK is also a participating member of the OSCE, whose Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality<sup>12</sup> builds on the WPS agenda and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to mainstream gender equality across all OSCE activities as it recognises gender equality as central to comprehensive security. It also highlights the benefits to security outcomes of gender sensitive institutional management.

At the national level, the UK's NAP translates global commitments into operational policy. SO5, addressing transnational threats directly aligns with strategic stability, calling for gender perspectives in nuclear policy, cyber governance, and emerging and disruptive technologies. The National Security Strategy (NSS) and Strategic Defence Review (SDR) provide the strategic context for these commitments, while the ISF operationalises them through funding and partnerships. Embedding WPS principles within the NSS and SDR would strengthen their delivery by ensuring that gender equality informs threat assessment, capability development and strategic foresight.

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<sup>10</sup> NATO. (2024). NATO Women, Peace and Security Policy and Action Plan 2021–2025.

<sup>11</sup> UN Women (2022). Advancing Inclusive governance in Asia and the Pacific Region (2022-2027). [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/ap-gps-Brief\\_Inclusive-Governance.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/ap-gps-Brief_Inclusive-Governance.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> OSCE (2004), OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/d/23295.pdf>

Key stakeholders include the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD), civil-society organisations, particularly women's rights organisations (WROs), as well as think tanks, academia on strategic stability and gender, are essential partners, providing grounded insight into how threats and risks are experienced across communities.



# Findings and analysis

## 1

### Priority thematic areas

#### Nuclear deterrence

##### **Nuclear deterrence as cornerstone of strategic stability**

- Nuclear deterrence, understood as the integration of credible capability, clear communication, and demonstrated resolve, has underpinned strategic stability since 1945. It seeks not only to prevent aggression through the threat of unacceptable costs, but also to manage escalation through signalling and controlled responses. Yet the broader environment in which deterrence operates is becoming increasingly complex. The erosion of arms control frameworks, the modernisation of nuclear arsenals, emerging proliferation risks, and the advent of disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons, and cyber capabilities all pose significant challenges to the practice of deterrence and the maintenance of strategic stability. Deterrence remains central, but it cannot be assumed to function as a self-sustaining framework. States must actively sustain and manage it, balancing credible deterrence with reassurance through dialogue, transparency, and arms control.

##### **Inclusive participation for stronger decision-making**

- Integrating gender perspectives and the WPS agenda into deterrence debates opens avenues for a more comprehensive understanding of strategic stability. WPS highlights participation as a core pillar, emphasising that diverse voices, including women, youth, and marginalised groups, strengthen policymaking. In deterrence contexts, inclusivity contributes to more robust strategic assessments by challenging cognitive and institutional biases that often shape security decision-making.<sup>13</sup> Evidence shows that gender-diverse leadership teams are better at anticipating a wider range of risks and interpreting complex information under uncertainty, ultimately strengthening deterrence and crisis management.<sup>14</sup>

##### **Prevention as complement to deterrence**

- The WPS pillar of prevention complements deterrence by addressing the deeper conditions that sustain stability and create resilience. As Míla O'Sullivan's analysis of NATO and the war in Ukraine shows, deterrence is not only about capability and resolve but also about legitimacy, coherence, and trust: all

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<sup>13</sup> Jana Wattenberg, More Women, Fewer Nukes? (2024). *International Studies Review*, Volume 26, Issue 4, viae020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viae020>

<sup>14</sup> Laura Rose Brown & Laura Considine. (2022). Examining 'gender-sensitive' approaches to nuclear weapons policy: a study of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, *International Affairs*, Volume 98, Issue 4, Pages 1249–1266, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia114>

factors that are shaped by inclusion, accountability, and justice.<sup>15</sup> When security institutions embed these values internally, their deterrent posture gains credibility externally. WPS strengthens deterrence by improving the quality of strategic judgment, by ensuring that restraint and resilience are institutionalised alongside resolve. It shifts deterrence from a purely reactive posture to one grounded in societal and institutional stability, making deterrence itself more sustainable.

### Humanitarian consequences as a security concern

- A central contribution of WPS is its emphasis on human security, looking beyond state power balances to how conflict and weapons affect people differently. Nuclear testing and use have repeatedly shown that humanitarian consequences are profoundly gendered. For instance, women in the Marshall Islands, exposed during US nuclear tests,<sup>16</sup> [66] Recognising these differentiated impacts reframes nuclear risk as both a strategic and humanitarian issue, underscoring that stability cannot be separated from human security. Integrating humanitarian perspectives into deterrence policy strengthens its legitimacy and resilience, ensuring that strategic decisions reflect both security imperatives and their human consequences.

### AI and emerging disruptive technologies (EDTs)

#### EDTs and Strategic Stability

- EDTs are a force multiplier as their impacts are dependent on these systems being integrated into existing processes. As a result, the impact of AI technologies, for example, on strategic stability goes beyond its use in nuclear weapons or installations.<sup>17</sup> According to SIPRI, there are three areas of military AI integration that could exacerbate nuclear risk: (1) AI in nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3), i.e., early threat detection, targeting, and decision-making; (2) use of AI-enabled technology in nuclear-delivery platforms; and (3) the uses of military AI-enabled systems in non-nuclear applications.<sup>18</sup> This section will focus primarily on AI systems and decision-making, and subsequently on the importance of including women in these decision-making processes to limit the risk of conflict escalation.
- AI systems increase the pace of decisions making and may therefore increase the risk of states racing up the conflict escalation ladder.<sup>19</sup> The speed of AI processing could lead to overconfidence in the provided information, and subsequently in interpreting, for example, radar data as a real incoming attack rather than a false alarm. Compressing decision-making timelines can therefore increase the risk of miscalculation during a crisis. By suggesting outcomes to guide decisions, AI reasoning could propose new ways of thinking about warfare and military options. However, AI-powered decision-support

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<sup>15</sup> Mila O'Sullivan, Women, Peace and Security as deterrence? (2024). NATO and Russia's war against Ukraine, International Affairs, Volume 100, Issue 2, Pages 549–568, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae003>

<sup>16</sup> Anne Guro Dimmen. (2014). Gendered Impacts: The Humanitarian Impacts of Nuclear Weapons from a Gender Perspective, ILPI / UNIDIR, in the HINW Vienna Papers series, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/186101/gendered-impacts-en-620.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Unal and Richard (2024). Governance of Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain, UNODA Occasional Papers no. 42 (New York: UNODA, June 2024).

<sup>18</sup> Chernavskikh and Palayer. (2025). Impact of military artificial intelligence on nuclear escalation risk (Stockholm: SIPRI 2025).

<sup>19</sup> Nature. (2025). Misinformation and AI are supercharging the risk of nuclear war, Nature 643, 898-900. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-02271-w>

systems can also bias a decision-maker towards acting,<sup>20</sup> introduce confusion about an opponent's motives or capabilities, and undermine well-understood principles of nuclear deterrence.<sup>21</sup>

## Human Bias

- In training machine learning systems, human biases can be inadvertently and unintentionally taught to the AI programme. Even if a machine learning system can accurately read the data, any trained human biases within the machine can lead to an over- or undervaluing of any information assessed by the system. For example, AI systems trained for early warning systems can be affected by human biases, and extra weight could be placed on certain actors or variables that do not necessarily accurately reflect the reality. These biases by the machine could therefore lead to miscalculation and heighten the risk of responding to false positives.<sup>22</sup> More broadly, biases in the development and use of military AI can take three main forms: (1) historical inequalities, social institutions, practices and attitudes; (2) biases of individuals and groups when processing data and developing algorithms; and (3) biases when using AI systems that were not anticipated in the design stage.<sup>23</sup>
- Human biases in the use of AI-enabled programmes may not have immediate overt consequences on strategic stability, but the overarching challenge lies in the discriminatory or incomplete datasets on which decisions in this domain are made. Decision-makers may be increasingly fed information and recommendations using AI tools that are not reflective of the actual context. This could lead to errors in judging the threat context, and inadvertent risk escalation.
- While the negative impacts of bias in civilian uses of AI are widely discussed (e.g., disqualifying qualified female candidates in recruitment processes or higher rates of failure to recognise people with a darker skin tone), it has been noted that the humanitarian consequences of bias in AI in the military domain remain unclear. Nonetheless, some potential harmful outcomes could include: misidentification of targets due to AI systems inferring risks based on biased datasets; negative feedback loops by reinforcing and exacerbating stereotypes of certain groups based on AI-enabled surveillance and intelligence-gathering; greater risks to civilian populations as AI systems may be trained on recognizing the male body; among other concerns.
- It is generally known that there is limited diversity in nuclear weapons policymaking. This lack of diversity allows for greater risk of groupthink and thereby continues to facilitate the inability to develop innovative strategies to reduce nuclear risk. In other words, underrepresentation of women, people of colour, and other groups may contribute to greater nuclear risk. Research suggests that homogenous groups are more likely to assume existing shared knowledge, while diversity increases the exchange of unique information and new ideas.<sup>24</sup> Within the context of strategic stability and the potential impact of

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<sup>20</sup> Chernavskikh and Palayer. (2025). Impact of military artificial intelligence on nuclear escalation risk (Stockholm: SIPRI 2025), [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/2025\\_6\\_ai\\_and\\_nuclear\\_risk.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/2025_6_ai_and_nuclear_risk.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Witze. (2025). How to avoid nuclear war in an era of AI and misinformation, *Nature* 643, 879. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-02260-z>

<sup>22</sup> Rautenback. (2022). On integrating artificial intelligence with nuclear control, Arms Control Association. <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2022-09/features/integrating-artificial-intelligence-nuclear-control>

<sup>23</sup> Blanchard and Laura Bruun (2024). Bias in military artificial intelligence (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2024), [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/background\\_paper\\_bias\\_in\\_military\\_ai\\_0.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/background_paper_bias_in_military_ai_0.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Reitmann (2024). The scientific case for diversity in nuclear weapons policymaking, *From the Margins to the Mainstream: Advancing Intersectional Gender Analysis in Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2024), [https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/UNIDIR\\_From\\_the\\_Margins\\_to\\_the\\_Mainstream\\_Advancing\\_Intersectional\\_Gender\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Nuclear\\_Non\\_Proliferation\\_and\\_Disarmament.pdf](https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/UNIDIR_From_the_Margins_to_the_Mainstream_Advancing_Intersectional_Gender_Analysis_of_Nuclear_Non_Proliferation_and_Disarmament.pdf)

EDTs and AI systems, diversity and inclusion are therefore essential – as is well evidenced, instantaneous decision-making, by a homogeneous group, can heighten the risk of escalation.<sup>25</sup>

## 2

### Priority Geographic Areas: Euro-Atlantic and Indo Pacific Contexts

#### Euro-Atlantic Context

- Due to its role as the geographic and political interface between major powers, notably NATO member states and the Russian Federation, the Euro-Atlantic space remains a cornerstone of contemporary strategic stability. Euro-Atlantic encompasses key institutions, such as NATO, the European Union and the Organisation for Co-operation and Security in Europe, which contribute to collective defence, arms control, and crisis management. With the ongoing war in Ukraine and tensions rising over military build-ups and EDT threats, the region is both a flashpoint as well as a potential platform for dialogue and de-escalation. The region is experiencing democratic backsliding and hybrid threats,<sup>26</sup> so that ensuring stability is critical not only to reducing risk, preventing escalation and maintaining global strategic balance, but also to upholding international norms and values on security.

#### Indo Pacific Context

- The Indo-Pacific has become one of the primary arenas shaping global strategic stability. The region's security landscape is defined by intensifying US-China competition, the erosion of India-Pakistan deterrence stability, unresolved territorial disputes, and contested maritime domains. These dynamics heighten the risks of escalation and misunderstanding, whilst the rapid modernisation of regional capabilities adds new layers of uncertainty. Risks of proliferation further complicate this landscape. North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile programmes, China's arsenal expansion, and the absence of regional arms control mechanisms all increase the potential for an arms race and undermine crisis predictability.
- Unlike the Euro-Atlantic context, where strategic stability has traditionally relied on arms control and formal dialogues, in the Indo-Pacific it depends on the active management of security competition through transparency, communication, and confidence-building among regional actors. Middle-ground partners such as South Korea, Australia, Singapore, the Philippines, and New Zealand play a critical role in this process. Their participation in regional dialogues helps to mitigate mistrust, encourage transparency, and reinforce shared norms of restraint, particularly in the absence of formalised security architectures.

#### WPS as a Framework for Redefining Strategic Stability

- Across both theatres, the Women, Peace and Security agenda offers a unifying framework to re-think what strategic stability means in practice. WPS challenges the assumption that stability is only achieved through deterrence and capability. It introduces a broader, more sustainable vision of security, one grounded in inclusion, legitimacy, and accountability.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Wallender, Celeste. (2022). "An Inconvenient Truth: Addressing Democratic Backsliding Within NATO." Brookings Institution.

- In the Euro-Atlantic, WPS can help modernise deterrence thinking by embedding resilience, societal cohesion, and civilian protection into strategic planning. Integrating gender perspectives into arms control, early warning, and hybrid-threat response strengthens deterrence credibility by showing that institutions protect not only territory but people. In the Indo-Pacific, WPS offers a way to connect strategic and human security. Applying WPS principles through regional and multilateral forums links crisis prevention and deterrence discussions to priorities that resonate locally, climate resilience, maritime security, and economic stability. Integrating the WPS agenda into Indo-Pacific security frameworks offers a practical means of strengthening regional stability through more inclusive approaches to risk management. The region faces both traditional security threats, great-power competition, militarisation, and nuclear proliferation, and non-traditional challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, and transnational crime.<sup>27</sup>
- In both contexts, WPS promotes bottom-up legitimacy: decisions informed by a wider range of experiences, including women's participation and civil-society engagement, produce policies that are more adaptive, trusted, and sustainable.

## ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security

Gender issues in security are often advanced through WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) developed by individual countries. ASEAN has extended this practice via the development of a regional plan. The plan does not specifically refer to strategic stability but commits to bringing gender equality considerations into “all security concerns in the region” and to increasing women's participation in all security forums. As intensified geopolitical competition increasingly characterises parts of the region, this plan offers a model for how both gender equality and strategic stability concerns relevant to the region can be approached cohesively.

### Role of Civil Society and Community Engagement

- Despite its championing of a comprehensive approach to security, experts note that the OSCE needs to do more to link WPS with arms control and strategic dialogue, a point that is clear in the organisation's Action Plan for the *Promotion of Gender Equality*.<sup>28</sup> Civil society engagement and localised implementation are key to overcoming these gaps. By contextualising WPS within strategic dialogue and arms control, civil society organisations play a vital role in bridging the gap between high-level security policy and the lived experiences of affected communities.<sup>29</sup> Engaging them in a sustained manner ensures not only the integration of gender perspectives into policy frameworks but also their implementation on the ground, significantly contributing to enhancing accountability and the legitimacy of institutions like the OSCE.

<sup>27</sup> Veronika Nuri, and Dina Afrianty. (2025). “Special Issue Editorial: Gender and Security in the Indo-Pacific.” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, September, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2025.2563210>

<sup>28</sup> OSCE. (2004). *Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality*

<sup>29</sup> Turner, S. (2023). *Forward Together: Women, Peace, & Security and Human Security at NATO*. Stimson Center; Wright, K. A. M. (2022). *Challenging Civil Society Perceptions of NATO: Engaging the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*. Cooperation and Conflict

- The WPS agenda provides a useful framework for rethinking strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific, where the traditional, deterrence-centric approaches developed in Euro-Atlantic contexts often resonate less with regional priorities. Applying a WPS lens encourages a more bottom-up understanding of stability, one that reflects how local actors, communities, and civil society experience insecurity and resilience. This perspective expands strategic analysis beyond military balances to include the political, social, and environmental conditions that sustain peace. In practice, WPS tools can help link the strategic to the human. Many Indo-Pacific states view stability through immediate challenges such as climate change, maritime security, and economic disruption rather than nuclear risk alone. Integrating WPS principles such as participation, prevention, and protection into regional mechanisms like the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit, and the Pacific Islands Forum can connect these human security concerns with broader risk-reduction and crisis-management processes. For example, ASEAN's Regional Plan of Action on WPS<sup>30</sup> aligns gender and inclusion with existing conflict-prevention and counter-terrorism frameworks, showing how local priorities can inform confidence-building at the strategic level.

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<sup>30</sup> ASEAN (2022), ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security <https://asean.org/asean-regional-plan-of-action-on-women-peace-and-security/>