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The WPS Agenda in the Asia-Pacific: an Emerging Field of Discourse and Practice

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ABSTRACT

The UN's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is now over 20 years old. Despite this benchmark, formalized approaches to WPS work have only recently gained traction in much of East and Southeast Asia. In this regional context, states are beginning to develop national action plans (NAPs), various regional institutions have recently issued joint WPS statements, and WPS conferences and dialogues are being organized by multi-track diplomacy networks seizing a new momentum. This paper explores and analyzes the emerging field of WPS discourse and practice in East and Southeast Asia. In doing so, it identifies the key themes discernable in the existing NAPs of several regional actors and situates them within the larger context of how regional institutions (at various "tracks") have begun to frame their visions on WPS and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead for regional security governance. Of particular interest is how the WPS agenda is appropriated differently by key actors (national, regional, and non-governmental), highlighting the existence of definitional and conceptual ambiguity within regional approaches to WPS. Ultimately, our findings suggest that the emerging field of WPS governance in East and Southeast Asia carries the potential for both convergence and contestation as actors work to assert and reconcile diverse –and sometimes contradictory– views on the WPS agenda. This has implications for regional security that warrant continued attention.

KEYWORDS:

WPS; UNSCR 1325; gender; security; multilateralism; East Asia; Southeast Asia; South Asia; diplomacy; regionalism; institutions; National Action Plans

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1. Introduction[1]

UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which formally launched the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2020. This benchmark year served as an opportunity to take stock. It also created new momentum for an increasingly global diffusion of the agenda, encouraging a variety of state and non-state actors to develop their own initiatives under the WPS umbrella. Despite its flaws, the UN's WPS framework continues to inform various undertakings of state, regional, and civil society actors on questions of gender and security.

This paper seeks to better understand the emergence of regional approaches to WPS, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific. Several regional states have developed national action plans (NAPs) and more are underway. Various regional institutions have issued joint WPS statements, and WPS workshops and dialogues are being organized by multi-track diplomacy networks that offer opportunities for a variety of stakeholders to gradually shape a WPS framework for the region.

This paper explores and analyzes the emerging field of discourse and practice that is shaping up around WPS governance in the Asia-Pacific (East, Southeast, and South Asia). In doing so, we identify the key themes discernable in existing NAPs and situate them within the larger context of how regional institutions (at various "tracks") are framing their visions for what WPS means and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead in this domain of regional security governance. Of particular interest is how the WPS agenda is interpreted and implemented differently by key actors (national, regional, and non-governmental), highlighting the existence of definitional and conceptual ambiguity within regional approaches to WPS.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides some background context on WPS work in the region. It takes stock of the current status of the global WPS agenda and discusses challenges and opportunities highlighted by WPS scholarship. In Section 3 we present our key findings on both the NAPs and regional WPS initiatives. First (3.1), we undertake a thematic analysis of the NAPs of six countries in the region, followed by (3.2) our analysis of emerging attempts to articulate a shared regional vision of the WPS agenda in various fora. Finally, in Section 4 we examine how our findings can inform foresight considerations for security governance in the Asia-Pacific. Ultimately, our analysis points to an emerging field of WPS discourse and practice in the region that carries the potential for both convergence and contestation as actors work to assert and reconcile diverse –and sometimes contradictory– views on WPS governance for the region.

2. The WPS Agenda at 20: Contextualizing Regional Responses

International Relations (IR) scholars –and feminist IR scholars in particular– have been building an extensive literature on the WPS agenda since the adoption of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 in 2000. This literature engages with the work done by state actors, regional organizations and transnational activists who have worked to "mainstream" gender

1 The authors would like to thank Laura J. Shepherd and one anonymous reviewer for the extensive feedback they provided on earlier drafts of this working paper, which contributed to its improvement. This paper was presented at the International Studies Association's 2021 Annual Convention and we are also thankful for the broader panel discussion that informed the subsequent development of this paper.

considerations in institutional agendas since the early 20th century (Kirby and Shepherd 2016; Shepherd and True 2014; Palmer and Williams 2017; Cook 2016). Several considerations highlighted by this literature helps to contextualize our analysis of the WPS agenda in the Asia-Pacific.

First, there is recognition of the role of many non-state advocacy actors that were instrumental in placing WPS on the UNSC agenda (Cohn et al. 2004). Experts have noted the difficulties inherent within the project of transforming radical emancipatory feminist ideals into mainstream international policy (Cook 2016; Basu 2016; Shepherd 2018), taking stock of the successes and failures of the WPS agenda (Shepherd 2018; Basu and Confortini 2017). Despite skepticism in both institutional and grassroots spaces around its implementation (Palmer and Williams 2017; Cook 2016), there is general agreement that gender itself is a legitimate matter of security, conflict, and peacebuilding at the UN (Tryggestad 2009). Further, siloed approaches to WPS that remain disconnected from humanitarian and development goals remain problematic (True and Hewitt 2018). These tensions, dynamics, and points of agreement are all observable within the WPS Agenda in the Asia-Pacific as well, as we outline in the following section.

Second, scholars have analyzed the intersections of networks and scales of engagement within the formation and implementation of WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) (Tiessen 2015; Shepherd and True 2014). These dynamics also bring up tensions that may exist along postcolonial lines of contention. For example, differences remain stark among NAPs across the so-called global North-South divide. Countries in the global North tend to present gendered inequality and violence as something that exists *outside* (Shepherd 2016). This easily results in interventions into conflict situations by the countries that are also the least likely to be self-reflexive about their *own* values and practices that contribute to gendered violence and global inequality (Tiessen 2015). On the other hand, many countries in the so-called global South tend to hold a lens up to gender dynamics *within* their borders through their NAP development and implementation (Lee-Koo and Trojanowska 2019). Again, this divide also manifests in the regional context we look into here.

Third, national-level WPS plans intersect further with two ongoing debates regarding the WPS agenda writ large: whether the promotion of gender equality and protection of women using a state-led military-based approach can ever be successful; and the degree to which the WPS agenda is complicit in ongoing structures of patriarchy and (Western) imperialism (Shepherd 2016; Pratt 2013; Peterson 2010; Willett 2010). Hence, there are concerns that the essentialized vision of gender that still permeates the WPS agenda reinscribes stereotypical tropes of women that lead to the dual assumption that women require protection and that their participation as agents in conflict resolution and other security-related processes will "naturally" garner more peaceful outcomes (Cohn et al 2004; Jansson and Eduards 2016). These persistent biases mean that when women and girls *fail* to meet these ideal-types, they are less protected, dismissed as exceptions, and/or cast as depraved or deviant (Côté and Huang 2018; Sjoberg and Gentry 2008). Such narratives also act as a convenient pretext to avoid addressing systemic barriers to gender equality, or the ways in which men must also take responsibility for change in organizational and institutional cultures (von Hlatky and Shoemaker 2021). Such tendencies, common across the WPS agenda, are visible in many of the NAPs analyzed in this paper.

Fourth, WPS perspectives tend to prioritize gender over and above other social categories that inform women's experiences (Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011; de Jonge Oudraat 2018), while colonial histories continue to reverberate into global WPS work. On these points, tensions arise out of structural inequalities between and within societies due to histories of Western imperialism (de Jonge Oudraat 2018). An important question, therefore, is whether the predominantly Western-centric WPS scholarship and work merely reinscribes the systems that perpetuate complex and intersectional inequalities along lines of gender, income, geography, race and sexuality (Martin de Almagro 2018; de Jonge Oudraat 2018; Hudson N. 2019). The extent to which these tendencies are reproduced in regional/national/local contexts, and in the particular frames and practices of local actors of security governance beyond the West, remains underexplored. This is especially important to consider when examining the localization of the WPS agenda in the Asia-Pacific region (George and Shepherd 2016, 299). A feminist postcolonial reading can thus offer perspectives that highlight how women's vulnerabilities do not arise solely from war. They are also rooted in the longstanding gendered relations of power that are reinscribed by conflict situations, reproduced in scholarship, and which lead to a lack of actionable "security" frameworks that actually improve the day-to-day situation of women in conflict zones and other insecure contexts (e.g. Wright 2016; Tanyag 2018).

This broader context informs how we discuss localized manifestations of the WPS agenda in the Asia-Pacific. Existing WPS research demonstrates complex networks and multi-scalar fields of practice that intersect in a number of ways. Yet despite the broad reach and size of the analytical literature, specific focus on the Asia-Pacific region is still nascent (Shepherd 2018). Additionally, examinations of the regional discourses and conceptual framing of the WPS agenda remain rare (Shepherd and True 2014). Addressing these gaps is an important part of what this paper seeks to do. This informs our methodological decision to thematically analyze specific NAPs as state-focused manifestations of the WPS agenda. This is because the formal WPS agenda itself –as opposed to feminist security practices more generally– is very much a top-down framework (Pratt and Devroe 2011; Lee-Koo and Trojanowska 2017), although it allows for opportunities of engagement and participation by non-state actors involved in bottom-up initiatives.

Encompassing all of the states who take part in "Asia-Pacific" regional governance would lead us to extend our focus to states in, or typically associated with, "the West" (e.g. the United States, Canada, Australia, among others), whose NAPs already form the bulk of case studies in WPS scholarship. Instead, the six countries we focus on (the Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, Timor Leste and Bangladesh) have not only articulated formalized WPS NAPs, but are firmly anchored in the main Asia-Pacific subregions of East, Southeast, and South Asia. These six countries are members of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the most inclusive security grouping in the Asia-Pacific, and therefore are part of regional discussions on the development of a regional framework on WPS. They are also classified as "Asia and Pacific" states with NAPs by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which is the main international monitoring body for the development of WPS NAPs.[2] After making our case selection, we looked at theofficial documents outlining the NAPs of each country and undertook a comparative discursive analysis of key themes that pertain significantly to the WPS agenda. Following that, and using similar methods, informed by criteria spelled out in discourse analysis scholarship in IR, we examined official regional initiatives, joint statements, and declarations

2 Other countries that could be considered as potential cases in an analysis of WPS in the "Asia-Pacific" are Nepal and the Solomon Islands, both of which have NAPs. Given their lack of representation in Asia-Pacific multilateral discussions on WPS or regional security more broadly, we do not include them among our cases. Further, while WILPF includes Tadjikistan and Kyrgyzstan as part their definition of "Asia-Pacific," they fall outside the scope of how this regional space is typically conceived by scholars and observers of Asia-Pacific affairs (along other members of the UN "Asia and the Pacific" Group with no NAPs in place).

made by key regional security forums and networks in order to contextualize the NAPs and vice versa.

3. Findings and Analysis: The WPS Agenda in the Asia-Pacific

Only a fraction of states in the sub-regions that make up the Asia-Pacific have adopted national action plans (NAPs) in accordance with the goals of the WPS resolutions, and there is general agreement that the region is lagging on their efforts to do so, including in comparison to other states and regions in the so-called "global South." Yet, signs of a new regional momentum on WPS are undeniable. As we explained in the previous section, this shift has not yet garnered much scholarly attention and there is a significant empirical gap in understanding the ways that WPS is being taken up in the region. Our analysis begins to address this gap by articulating different trains of thought that are emerging in the region about the WPS agenda. In doing so, we recognize that a readily available framework for making sense of a wider regional reception or reconfiguration of this agenda in the Asia-Pacific is still lacking. Furthermore, we find that examinations of contested meanings are still nascent in the WPS literature itself, and almost absent altogether in relation to the Asia-Pacific (Shepherd and True 2014). When we consider that the WPS agenda is mainly top-down and state-led, and that much of the pre-existing gender-based feminist work that occurs is often bottom-up and civil society-led, we get a sense of the complex terrain where the multi-scalar dynamics of the WPS realm are occurring.

3.1. WPS National Action Plans: Emerging Themes

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is the largest security dialogue grouping in the Asia-Pacific. Of the 27 members of ARF, only 10 have officially adopted national action plans: the Philippines (2010), Canada (2010), United States (2011), Australia (2012), Indonesia (2014), South Korea (2014), New Zealand (2015), Japan (2015), Timor Leste (2016), and Bangladesh (2019). For the reasons explained above, we focused our analysis on the NAPs of six states: **Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Timor Leste**.[3] Our analysis of these six countries' NAPs compares their approaches to WPS along a number of themes: 1) how the WPS agenda is defined in the national context, particularly in terms of the *gendered forms of insecurity* they address; 2) the *Self-Other dynamics* that are expressed in the varying ways that NAPs seek to assert and reproduce national identities; 3) the ways that *women's roles and agency* are defined in the context of WPS; and 4) which stakeholders are considered to be relevant to WPS, and the degree to which *consultations with regular stakeholders* (particularly with women's groups and other civil society actors) take place at various stages of the NAP process, from elaboration to implementation.

3 Full references to the NAPs quoted in this section are listed in the references list under: Coordinating Minister of People's Welfare of the Republic of Indonesia 2014; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh 2019; Government of Japan 2015; 2019; Government of the Philippines 2010; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Republic of Korea 2014; 2018; Ministry of Interior, Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste 2016.

Gendered Forms of Insecurity

NAPs typically presuppose that "gendered insecurity" refers to the insecurity of "women and girls," which is in line with the assumptions built into the phrasing of the UN's "*Women*, Peace and Security Agenda" (emphasis added). As such, mention of "gender" in this context tends to essentialize women as subjects of security, as opposed to referring to an expansive understanding of what it means to have a gendered analytical lens. Accordingly, the NAPs of all six countries foreground the impacts of conflict on women and girls. The specific forms of gendered violence emphasized vary, either in terms of issue-area or the extent to which the NAPs see insecurities manifesting in public or private spaces. Nevertheless, they tend to eschew the term "human security" and instead converge around connecting gender to more amorphous concepts like "non-traditional" or "inclusive" security, which already exist in the regional security lexicon. These discursive maneuvers create space for WPS work while catering to statist sensibilities around the perceived liberal/Western overtones of a "human security" agenda. As such, the NAPs show a cautious treatment of gendered insecurity but they do so in varying ways.

Of the six countries we analyze, Indonesia's NAP is the one most focused on conflict situations. Yet, its conception of "conflict" is quite broad as it emphasizes "social conflict," defined as "enmity and physical violence between two or more community groups that [result] in insecurity and social disintegration [that] disrupt [s] national stability and [...] development." As such, their plan still relies on an expansive definition of violence. Relatedly, the NAPs from the Philippines, Bangladesh, and South Korea also foreground conflict but theirs show a more expansive understanding of gendered

insecurity. The Philippines' NAP, for example, discusses how gendered insecurities can arise from displacement, disruption of livelihoods, malnutrition, poverty, sexual violence, trafficking, prostitution, and gun culture. South Korea, through an emphasis on "comfort women" and North Korean refugees, also incorporates broader conceptions of the insecurities that arise from conflict situations, including trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of violence. Bangladesh's NAP, in turn, includes references to the gendered dimensions of climate change and disaster relief as well as violent extremism.

Timor Leste, on the other hand, is an interesting outlier in this regard. While the NAP also extends beyond a limited focus on armed conflict, it does so differently than its Philippine, Bangladeshi and South Korean counterparts. This is because Timor Leste's NAP does not present conflict solely as a *cause* of gendered violence, but instead frames it as a *symptom* arising from gendered insecurities that take place in many spaces, including the private sphere. For example, domestic violence is understood to be enabled by customary law and traditional representations of gender roles and behavior, informed by cultural conceptions of family honor. This reversal of the causal arrow echoes research findings that demonstrate how gender equality is a primary predictor of peace (Hudson V. et al. 2014), and show that misogynistic attitudes and gender-based violence are strongly correlated to violent extremism and inter-communal conflict (Johnston et al. 2020). Timor Leste's NAP is also more evidence-based than most, citing national data on domestic violence and women's representation in politics as informing WPS-related policies. This NAP is also unique because it explicitly outlines some of the challenges in the way of full and effective implementation of the WPS agenda.

Another interesting finding in the discourses of the six countries' NAPs is whether and howthey link the military to gendered insecurities in any way. In this respect, the NAPs of the Philippines, South Korea, Bangladesh, and Timor Leste specifically recognize the role of militaries in perpetuating gendered violence. South Korea's and Bangladesh's NAPs include strong language targeting sexual offenders in the military. In the case of Timor Leste, the military dimension of insecurity is acknowledged mostly in reference to the Indonesian military's role in the 1999 East Timor crisis. By contrast, Japan only obliquely acknowledges the possibility of its Self-Defence Forces perpetrating sexual violence, though limited references are made to peacekeepers requiring training around sexual violence.

Finally, the NAPs vary in their apparent recognition of intersectionality in experiences of gendered insecurity. For example, Indonesia and Japan's NAPs have a tendency to conflate women with girls in a problematic subject framing that feminist scholars refer to as "womenandchildren." In doing so, these NAPs also mostly treat women and girls as a homogenous group, with a tendency to emphasize victimhood and helplessness over agency. In Japan's case, we find brief recognitions that "women and girls are not all the same" and therefore, that some may experience discrimination based on their "various attributes" –such as them being LGBT women, (ethnic, religious, or linguistic) minority women, internally displaced women, women with disabilities, single mothers, elderly women, etc. Beyond this, however, there is no further reference to intersectional concerns, nor are they tied to any specific implementation objective. By contrast, the South Korean, Philippine, Bangladeshi and East Timorese NAPs are more intersectional. The Philippines' NAP makes multiple references to how marginalized women, especially Moro and Indigenous women, experience insecurity in particular ways, while Bangladesh devotes attention to migrant and refugee women and the particular forms of

gendered insecurity experienced by populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Timor Leste's NAP, in turn, distinguishes between the experiences of women depending on their agency (see below) and the roles they play in peace and security. Finally, South Korea's NAPs discuss in some detail how the situations of victims of sexual violence and refugees are unique.

Self-Other Dynamics

Another comparative dimension we explored is the extent to which, and how, NAPs (re) produce Self/Other dynamics in their approaches to the WPS agenda. As public-facing documents within the context of multilateral and regional relations, NAPs are highly performative artefacts that carry representations of the national Self as providers of security. In this vein, states draw from their own histories and experiences in order to position themselves. For instance, Timor Leste's NAP relies heavily on the country's position as a young post-conflict nation, making numerous references to their struggle for independence, gained in 2002. Similar references are present in Bangladesh's NAP. South Korea's NAPs center the country's unique position as the "only divided nation in the world under an armistice agreement." They draw from the inter-Korean experience as the main motivation for centering the protection of refugees and asylum seekers as a global contribution to peace and security.

The Philippines' NAP highlights the Bangsamoro armed struggle and Communist-lead insurgency as sources of gendered insecurity. Their NAP also makes a point of highlighting domestic initiatives that address gender-based violence and support the participation of women in peace and development. It also references women's contributions to national economic wellbeing, echoing national narratives that revere the "new heroism" of female Overseas Workers who provide remittancesto their families and communities while enduring personal hardship and sacrifice. These gendered narratives reproduce problematic assumptions about the resilience of Filipino women in ways that end up "eras[ing] all the gendered sacrifices, including physical and emotional stress, [associated with] intensified care obligations" (Su and Tanyag 2019), which ultimately shifts attention away from government failures.

Japan's framing of their WPS work, in turn, is a strong exercise in projecting aspirational "Middle Power" status. Japan positions itself as a major donor country and a global and regional force for peace, referencing national resilience in the face of large-scale disasters like the 2011 tsunami and their contributions to peacekeeping abroad. Japan also references its national constitution's upholding of gender equality and women's rights. Overall, Japan's NAPs seek distance from the country's imperialist history. Notably, they express a clear desire to be recognized as a significant contributor to international society and gender equality. Similarly, Bangladesh uses their 2019 NAP to convey a distinct national identity as an early leader in WPS issues,[4] despite being a relative late-comer to the NAP scene itself. Bangladesh has long contributed to UN peacekeeping efforts, and their particular history of promoting female troop participation undergirds its national-self projection as a WPS forerunner. Bangladesh's NAP also uses other national history narratives as a key context for their WPS work. In particular, the 1971 Liberation War is presented as an origin point for its domestically-focused WPS policies, with a focus on the rehabilitation of female victims of sexually violent war crimes.

4 Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of UN Women once observed that Bangladesh was in fact one of "the earliest champions of the women, peace and security agenda."

Finally, Indonesia's 2014 NAP is the least detailed when it comes to projecting national leadership in WPS issues. Unlike the other NAPs we examined, it does not present any particular narrative of national self-conception in terms of gender equality. However, there are strong indications that this will soon change with a second-generation NAP. Indeed, in practical terms, Indonesia appears to have seized the role of regional and global champion of WPS. Accordingly, Jakarta has been fairly consistently spearheading the WPS agenda in various ASEAN settings. Indonesia also played a key role as UNSC President in supporting a unanimous August 2020 endorsement of Resolution 2538, which promotes the role of women in peacekeeping. It will be interesting to see whether and how this WPS leadership is more clearly reflected in their updated NAP, and how influential Indonesia will be in shaping regional visions of WPS.

Some of the NAPs also position particular Others as sources or causes of insecurity, which could exacerbate existing bilateral tensions in the region. This is especially so for issues where reconciliation remains limited or has been absent altogether, and will depend on the particular ways in which the Othering occurs. For example, Bangladesh only makes veiled references to Myanmar in relation to the Rohingya refugee crisis and Pakistan in relation to the liberation struggle, and is careful not to name them explicitly. By contrast, Timor Leste's NAP specifically calls for reparations from the Indonesian armed forces, whose actions after the 1999 referendum led to large-scale violence and the UN peacekeeping intervention that followed. As already mentioned, this armed conflict continues to serve as the primary context for Timor Leste's NAP, which continually emphasizes how Timoresewomen – as victims, peace-workers, and liberation fighters– were made insecure by the Indonesian military's actions during the crisis. The prominence of Othering maneuvers that appear in Timor Leste's NAP are noteworthy, distinguishing their rationale for embracing WPS from the more inward-looking rationales provided by Japan and the Philippines.

Perhaps not surprisingly, South Korea is the most direct of all six countries when it comes to Othering practices in their NAPs. Seoul's unresolved conflict with DPRK features prominently in positioning the contributions of South Korean women to peace and security, which are said to be rooted in Inter-Korean dialogues and activities. Then, when it comes to insecurities experienced by South Korean women, it is Japan's historical violence with "comfort women" that is invoked repeatedly throughout the document. This source of ongoing tension between the two countries likely informs the South Korean emphasis on trafficking, sexual exploitation and violence, and the strong endorsement of punishing sex offenders –all of which feature less prominently in the other NAPs.

Finally, some of the NAPs –Japan's and Indonesia's in particular– are also interesting for what they *omit* in terms of Self/Other framing. For example, the Indonesian NAP makes no mention of ongoing gendered insecurity in West Papua; nor does it allude to Indonesia's role in the Timor Leste conflict (Lee Koo and Trojanowska 2017). Perhaps most surprising is the lack of acknowledgement of the many contributions of women in the Aceh peace process, considering that this "success story" is commonly raised by Indonesian representatives in multilateral WPS settings. And of course, the topic of "comfort women" is predictably absent in Japan's NAP though one might argue that its omission is preferable to the kinds of revisionist arguments often promoted both domestically and abroad. This issue is central to Japan-South Korea relations and a key point of contention that could possibly

reverberate into regional discussions on WPS.

Women's Roles and Agency

WPS NAPs are obviously concerned with gendered insecurities and violence faced by women and girls. But questions around women as victims of violence are distinct from expectations around their agency and participation. Hence, another interesting theme to look at in the NAPs is if –and how– women's agency is acknowledged or discussed, and the extent to which they are thought to have a role in peace and security.

In this regard, Timor Leste's and Bangladesh's NAPs are the ones that most recognize women's agency. The background context for these NAPs feature extensive discussions on the various situations of Timorese and Bangladeshi women. A key aspect of these NAPs is an emphasis on women's active participation in independence liberation movements. This includes acknowledging women as combatants, their contributions during both war and peacebuilding, and their status as veterans who should receive compensation and support. Further, the NAP of Bangladesh formally defines victims of wartime rape as "freedom fighters" eligible for compensation benefits as redress and reparations. Bangladesh also acknowledges that women sometimes exercise their agency as perpetrators of insecurity, such as in the context of violent extremism.

The Philippines' NAP also discusses the various ways that women exercise agency in peace and security. Like Timor Leste's and Bangladesh's, the Philippines' NAP expands its definition of "women's empowerment" beyond the more typical neoliberal preoccupation with economic participation. Instead, it incorporates questions of women's agency throughout discussions on peacebuilding, peacekeeping, conflict, and post-conflict reconstruction. The Philippines also recognizes the expertise of women with lived experience of insecurity and includes them at the literal WPS table to discuss mediation and negotiation in security policy and peace processes. Along with Timor Leste and Bangladesh, the Philippines' NAP conceives of women's participation qualitatively, beyond simply counting the women present.

By contrast, Japan acknowledges women's agency and participation in peace and security only in broad terms rather than with specific WPS objectives and indicators. Women's agency in conflict mediation, negotiation and resolution evince essentializing assumptions around gender-specific attributes, with a lack of recognition of already existing women's contributions. In general, Japan's approach to women's participation in peace and security is limited to an "add women and stir" approach, without consideration for the need to reform institutional cultures of prevailing societal expectations of gender. Here again, women and girls are often conflated in discussions of victimhood and any agency ascribed to them is generally passive or afforded through the state's benevolence. While Japan's second-generation NAP does make some space for the participation of women in peacekeeping, their initial NAP foreclosed the potential contributions of women by relegating their participation mainly as delegates at conferences, and mostly for representation purposes.

Indonesia's NAP in turn, also depicts women mostly as victims, with a tendency to portray their agency in ways that reflect patriarchal assumptions around gender (see also: Veronika, Gayatri and True 2020). The latter occurs through an emphasis on supporting women in their "natural functions"

and reproductive roles, and encouraging their participation in gendered economic activities such as hair dressing, bridal make-up, sewing, and the production of handicrafts and ornaments. This is an example of the neoliberal disposition to "empower" women mainly in gender-specific economic positions with the view that this is the primary way to facilitate their transformation from victims into agents of peace. The "womenandchildren" conflation is broadly deployed, with references to women's agency that is undifferentiated from that of children –whose "agency" is developed through education. References to the rights of "unborn" girl children also potentially create tension with WPS objectives of advancing the reproductive autonomy of women.

Similar to Japan's approach, Indonesia's NAP has a paternalistic tendency to focus on training in ways that position women as needing state-guidance in order to realize their agency, neglecting extensive contributions made by an already well-established community of peacebuilders. Admittedly however, Indonesia's NAP does recognize that women's agency can be enhanced through capacity-building efforts that support their participation as mediators and negotiators in peace processes. As mentioned, there is evidence of a possible change of approach in the second-generation NAP that might better recognize the contribution of women peacekeepers. Further, the Surabaya attacks of 2018 served as a reminder that women's agency can also be implicated in violence. Such considerations specifically informed the country's gender-sensitive approach to their development of a national strategy on Countering Violent Extremism that Leads to Terrorism, adopted in 2021 (Gayatri 2021).

Consultations with Relevant Stakeholders

Finally, we compared the six countries' NAPs in terms of whether they involved non-governmental stakeholders in their development; which stakeholders were deemed to be relevant; and in which phase of NAP development these stakeholders were consulted. As a clear exemplar in many respects, Timor Leste's NAP actually reported their stakeholder consultations in detail, including specific mention of which inputs were made by whom, and how they were incorporated. Their NAP chronicles how key civil society agents[5] were directly involved at every step and were actively considered as agents of collaboration and implementation. Timor Leste's NAP is also the most detailed when it comes to explaining their methodology, providing accounts of various stages and instances of stakeholder consultation. In addition, their NAP explicitly mentions that civil society organizations (CSOs) will be expected to continuously play an active role in advocacy work and WPS monitoring.

Stakeholder consultation processes in the Philippines and Bangladesh are among the most extensive. In both cases, CSOs actually played a leading consultative role since the beginning of NAP development processes. According to Lee-Koo and Trojanowska (2019, 295), CSOs drove "six regional cluster consultations [...] across the Philippines (three in Luzon, two in Mindanao and one in [the] Visayas in 2008 and 2009. Two national validation workshops (inclusive of women's groups) followed and led to the NAP launch in 2010." The Philippines' first NAP highlights how CSOs' contributions are "integral" to gender mainstreaming in peace and security. It lists the various CSOs consulted, which includes a mix of peace-oriented institutions and organizations and women's rights organizations. It also references specific processes of consultation designed to ensure representative CSO input, occurring at different stages of the plan's development. Interestingly, despite NAPs being a mostly

5 The NAP lists the following not-for-profit and/or non-governmental organizations advocating for gender equality and/or engaged in post-conflict reconstruction work: ACBIT (Associacaon Chega Ba Ita), APSC-TL, Rede Feto, Ba Futuru, Belun, CEPAD (Centre of Studies for Peace and Development), Fokupers, and JCMP (Judicial System Monitoring Program).

top-down endeavour, both the Philippines and Bangladesh relied on grass-roots and civil society stakeholders' to identify root causes of gender-based insecurity and develop strategies for WPS implementation. In the case of Bangladesh, emphasis is placed on the CSO contributions of religious leaders and women's groups in conflict prevention. Consultations with civil society stakeholders are also institutionalized via the creation of a Consultative Platform of CSOs, which is also meant to support monitoring and review.

Japan's NAP, on the other hand, is an example of a heavily top-down approach that makes only some room for CSO stakeholder consultation. The Japanese government formulated a draft NAP *before* soliciting input from civil society organizations[6] in a number of consultation rounds that took place between 2013 and 2015 (Prescott, Iwata and Pincus 2016). As such, the 2015 NAP makes a few broad references to civil society consultations and the role of NGOs as "indispensable partners" in the protection and respect of women's rights, but no detail is provided on the practical aspects of the consultations; what the stakeholder inputs were; or which inputs –if any– were incorporated. Indeed, beyond an acknowledgement that civil society recommendations were "adopted [...] as much as possible" in the revised version of the plan (Government of Japan 2015), this NAP does not go much further on the role of non-state stakeholders. Instead, the "main agents" of implementation identified in the plan are exclusively government actors[7] while civil society's[8] inputs are circumscribed to an evaluating committee in charge of producing a report, the conclusions of which are meant to be incorporated into the NAP as part of a periodic revision process.

Turning to South Korea, the CSO stakeholder consultations undertaken by the government were even more limited (Lee-Koo and Trojanowska 2019, 296). The consultations that did occur took the unusual form of a public-private consultative body that consisted of government officials and area experts. The resulting framework is bereft of concrete action on specific issues that CSOs would have flagged, but instead advances a "whole of government" and "whole of society" transformation that calls for reforms to school curriculums and mobilization of mass media in order to alter societal perspectives on issues of gender equality. In a sense then, the South Korean approach takes such an expansive view of how to incorporate stakeholder consultations to the point of subsuming and diluting CSO contributions into generic gestures of "raising awareness." This overly broad approach to WPS has been subsequently criticized by South Korean women's organizations for only adopting "a small part of the various recommendations submitted" during the NAP development stage (Lee-Koo and Trojanowska 2019, 296).

Indonesia's NAP is also characterized by a top-down and government-centric approach to WPS but the situation of stakeholders in their plan is less straightforward in its apparent absence. For one thing, despite its top-down and government-centric nature, Indonesia's NAP is nevertheless heavily decentralized in its approach to implementation. Further, while the participation of civil society in the drafting process is not explicitly mentioned in the NAP itself, extensive consultations did in fact occur between the government and CSOs (Lee-Koo and Trojanowska 2019). While recognizing the existence of consultative gaps, Indonesian WPS expert Irine Gayatri nevertheless describes Indonesia's NAP as ultimately a "by-product of collective efforts" of a broad variety of stakeholders, and an attempt to

6 For example, some Tokyo-based NGOs, and women's organizations in Okinawa.

7 MOFA, DND, and Japan's international development agency hold predominant roles.

8 Japan's NAP conflates issue area experts and NGOs together under the category of "civil society."

reconcile diverse perspectives in a way that reflects an "inclusive approach". As such, Indonesia's NAP is a clear example of why WPS analyses should not be restricted to formal policy documents, which can both belie the active participation of various stakeholders and downplay the existence of "differing interpretations, resistances and subversions" that often remain unresolved (Basu 2016, 363).

Overall, a central and key point that emerges from our comparative analysis of these six countries' NAPs is *the existence of both convergences in thinking and multiple interpretations of conceptual themes that reflect a diversity of approaches to WPS in the Asia-Pacific.* This brings us to the complicated question of what is happening at the regional scale of WPS governance. In what follows, we offer some observations on attempts to articulate shared visions of the WPS agenda in various regional forums and "tracks". It is useful to consider how regional WPS work connects to NAPs (or does not); how this is an emerging field where meanings are still in the process of being articulated; and how difference is being navigated in these circumstances.

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

EMERGING THEMES IN NATIONAL ACTION PLANS	BANGLADESH	INDONESIA	JAPAN	PHILIPPINES	SOUTH KOREA	TIMOR LESTE
DEFINING GENDERED INSECURITY	Looks beyond traditional forms of conflict. Inward facing.	Conflict-focused definition of gendered insecurity. Inward facing.	Focuses on women and children as victims. Outward facing.	Looks beyond traditional forms of conflict. Inward facing.	Looks beyond traditional forms of conflict. Inward and outward facing.	Sees conflict as both cause and symptom of gendered insecurity. Inward facing.
SELF-OTHER DYNAMICS	Post-liberation National Self as provider of security and fore-runner of WPS work.	National Self as global and regional champion of WPS work.	National Self as multilateral actor for peace. Projection of Aspirational "Middle Power" status.	National Self emphasizes domestic progress and "new heroism" of female Overseas Workers.	National Self as good global actor in contrast to DPRK. Japanese military as cause of insecurity.	Post-liberation National Self as provider of security. Indonesian military as cause of insecurity.
WOMEN'S ROLES AND AGENCY	Emphasizes women's agency and as active combatants with veteran's rights.	Positions women as victims and needing help to realize their agency.	Positions women as needing help to realize their agency. Limited "add women and stir" approach with no structural reforms.	Emphasizes women's agency, participation in WPS and sees empowerment beyond economic participation.	No clear expression of women's roles and agency in WPS work.	Emphasizes women's agency and as active combatants with veteran's rights.
CONSULTATIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS	Extensive involvement. Grassroots CSOs played leading consultative role in development.	Officially very top-down. Unofficially, high participation of CSOs in development and implementation.	Very top-down. CSO's consulted only after NAP was drafted.	Extensive involvement. Grassroots CSOs played leading consultative role in development.	Very limited via government run public-private consultative body rather than CSOs themselves.	Exemplary. Transparent reporting of CSO consultations throughout development and implementation.

3.2. The WPS Agenda on a Regional Scale: Multiple Meanings

As we have explained, WPS issues are a relatively recent addition to the security agendas of states and multilateral institutions in the Asia-Pacific. There is general agreement that the sub-regions of East, Southeast, and South Asia are lagging in this regard, including in comparison to other states and regions in the so-called global South. Yet, signs of a nascent regional momentum on WPS issues are there. This section reviews recent regional-scale and multilateral WPS developments that have taken place in the Asia-Pacific, particularly in the context of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as the hub of Asia-Pacific regional governance, and its related forums. More attention needs to be afforded to how –or whether or not– regional organizations and groupings are managing to reconcile varying and sometimes conflicting national-level approaches to WPS, and ASEAN governance offers a prime terrain to unpack such dynamics. Further, while significant limitations persist in the ways that WPS work is undertaken, the agency of state and non-state actors in taking ownership of various components of the WPS agenda is also an interesting focus of inquiry.

The Regionalization of WPS: A Survey of ASEAN's Contributions

Prior to 2015, WPS issues were effectively absent from ASEAN's official security agenda. There were a number of existing mechanisms to promote women's rights and declarations on gendered issues like sexual violence and human trafficking, but they were always clearly positioned outside the scope of *security* cooperation. ASEAN's attentions to WPS along with the deliberate linking of gender to security began taking shape in the activities of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR), established in 2012. In March 2015, AIPR convened a multilateral workshop on *Strengthening Women's Participation in Peace Processes and Conflict Resolution*, sponsored by the Philippines and with support from Norway and Japan. The workshop resulted in a number of recommendations that would later be picked up by ASEAN and serve as the basis for its first concrete contributions to the regional promotion of WPS.

Like many other regional organizations, ASEAN[9] saw the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 as an opportunity to officially integrate WPS into its activities. This move mirrored parallel developments happening at the national level, which included the development of NAPs as outlined in the previous section. Within this broader context, we can surmise that national representatives and other relevant stakeholders were coming to the regional table to discuss WPS within the context of developing (or not developing) NAPs of their own and vice versa. Understanding that there are several areas of both convergence and discord between the various national-level perspectives sheds light onto the multi-scalar complexities that emerge in efforts to develop regional-scale WPS-related statements and initiatives.

In 2017, ASEAN issued an official joint statement on Women, Peace and Security as its first step in initiating a formal regionalization of the WPS agenda (ASEAN 2017). The statement is a short, 2-page document delineating a broad understanding of how the WPS agenda fits in with existing initiatives of ASEAN. It also mentions the relevant international agreements pertaining to gender

9 Along with its related bodies like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). The EAS consists of

equality, women's rights, protection against sexual violence, and peacebuilding that ASEAN supports. The document further spells out a number of general principles meant to guide the implementation of a regional WPS agenda.[10] That being said, it contains no specific action items beyond a vague commitment to "task relevant ASEAN bodies" with the promotion of WPS (ASEAN 2017). Taken within the context of the few equally broad and general NAPs being formulated in the region, one could be forgiven for reading the statement as largely symbolic. A more generous reading might see it as paving the way for a succession of more robust regional efforts.

Accordingly, the 2017 ASEAN WPS statement was soon followed by the adoption of a joint statement by the ARF Foreign Ministers in 2019. The 2019 ARF statement further contributed to a gradual positioning of WPS as an emerging security priority for regional actors. It adds more specific considerations with clear security overtones, and puts a stronger emphasis on attending to gendered insecurity and violence in situations of armed conflict. The statement also includes clear goals towards developing a regional framework, such as calling for data-driven gender-based research, and the regional sharing of best practices on WPS issues. It commits to meeting the needs of women and girls in "humanitarian settings" and to supporting "meaningful participation" of women as mediators and negotiators in armed conflict and in peacekeeping operations. The statement further declares support for the infusion of a gender perspective in all international security efforts pertaining to armed conflict, and the work of women in peace processes and peacebuilding (ARF 2019). Interestingly, this statement is also the first regional effort to specifically encourage member states to develop WPS NAPs, further highlighting the emergence of a complex landscape of multi-scalar governance of the WPS agenda in the Asia-Pacific.

Following the ARF's statement, the EAS –widely considered to be the primary leaders' meeting on key strategic issues in the region– also adopted its own WPS statement in 2020. This statement was similar in scope and format to the ARF one but is not focused as exclusively on armed conflict. Instead, it also addresses broader societal forms of gendered violence, and further commits to the promotion of women's full potential in a variety of peace-supporting roles. It refers to specific ASEAN mechanisms that contribute directly to the promotion of the WPS agenda, including the AIPR and the newly-launched ASEAN Women for Peace Registry. The 2020 EAS statement also encourages consultations with a variety of stakeholders to promote implementation of the agenda's goals in ways that highlight women's perspectives and experiences. However, unlike the ARF statement, the EAS statement makes clear that any national-level implementation of the WPS agenda ought to happen on a voluntary basis and be flexible to the needs of member states. This language can be read as caution against any expectations that NAPs are obligatory, but it can also be read as stage-setting for the development of a regional framework, if not action plan (EAS 2020).

ASEAN and related forums continue to develop increasingly concrete initiatives to support the further promotion of the WPS agenda beyond ministerial declarations and joint statements. For example, the ASEAN Women Peace Registry –mentioned above– is a collection of women experts on issues pertaining specifically to WPS that was established under the AIPR in 2018. Then, at the initiative of Indonesia,

10 These include the promotion of a culture of peace and gender equality; a commitment to address the root causes of conflict; the integration of a "gender perspective" and support for women's participation in conflict prevention activities; the mainstreaming of WPS into relevant existing regional policies; the capacity-building of women as agents of peace; and the engagement of men and boys in the WPS agenda.

ASEAN launched a network of Southeast Asia Women Peace Negotiators and Mediators in 2020. Under the chairmanship of Vietnam, ASEAN has also convened a number of important dialogues on WPS.[11]

In March of 2021, ASEAN published the report of an extensive, expert-driven study on WPS conducted with support from US-AID and the UN. The study adopts an extensive definition of gendered insecurity that goes beyond armed conflict, and encompasses "peace and electoral processes, violent extremism, transnational crime, communal conflicts, climate-change, natural disasters, migration and displacement, as well as [...] pandemics." It highlights four major findings. First, that there are signs of localization of the WPS agenda in ASEAN member states, but a need for those to be "scaled up" via a regional action plan. Second, while the emergence of regional networks of women peacemakers, peacekeepers, and peacebuilders is promising, there remain significant gaps in the promotion of gender equality in the security sector across member states. Third, despite the repeated nod towards "non-traditional security" concerns, many forms of gender-based violence remain outside the scope of current efforts. Fourth, WPS is increasingly recognized as a cross-sectoral issue in ASEAN, taken up in all three pillars of the ASEAN Community. These findings serve as a strong foundation for further institutionalized regionalization of the agenda (ASEAN 2021).

Also in March of 2021, the first ARF Workshop on WPS –co-chaired by Indonesia, Thailand and Canada– brought together experts, CSOs, and officials to discuss the agenda as it relates to the region and provide recommendations to the ARF on next steps. Among the many themes discussed were the practical issues of funding and monitoring; ongoing limitations to the recognition of women's contributions and participation; and the need to improve consultation mechanisms with CSOs. An emerging key issue of concern is the divergent perspectives on WPS across member states and other stakeholders, since it is widely acknowledged by high-ranking ASEAN officials that the next step is the development of a *regional* WPS framework, if not an action plan. Identifying common goals in the different NAPs and various regional instruments, and then converting them into actionable items, will inevitably depend on the extent to which ASEAN institutions can mediate these various perspectives in productive ways,[12] which is a question we turn to in the final section.

As a Track 1-sponsored initiative, the ARF workshop still offered opportunities for exchanges among officials, experts, and civil society representatives. But it is also noteworthy that the current regional momentum around WPS extends beyond official initiatives. Expert diplomacy in the region has also taken an interest, as exemplified by novel initiatives like the Study Group on WPS within the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.[13] WPS issues were also raised by several delegates at the 14th ARF's Expert and Eminent Persons Group meeting in July 2021, marking a significant departure from previous meetings where WPS issues were largely ignored.[14] In addition, despite not being framed as "WPS" per se, issues pertaining to gender-based violence and gendered insecurity have long been part and parcel of discussions occurring among civil society organizations

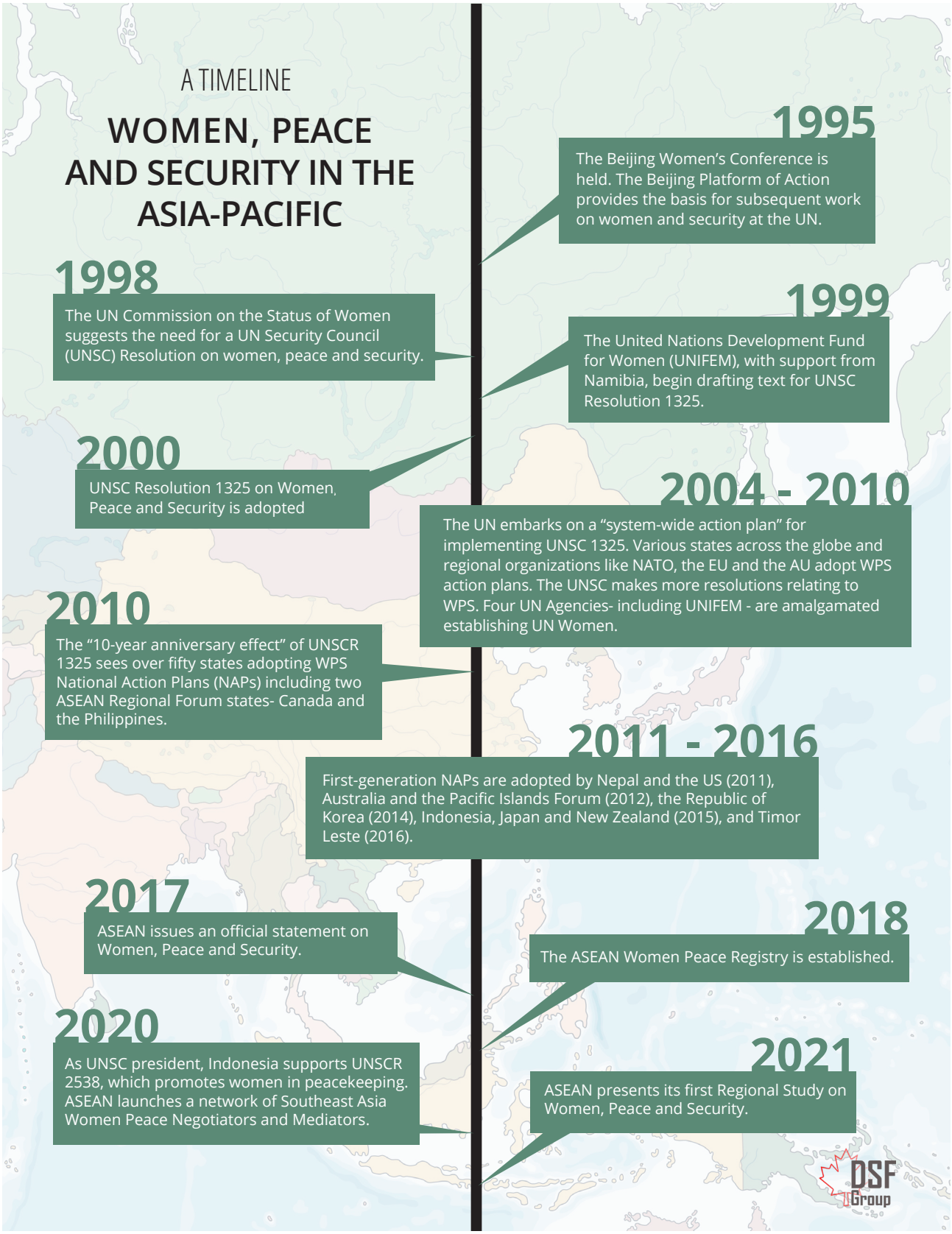
11 This included the first Regional Symposium on Implementation of the WPS agenda under the ASEAN-USAID Partnership for Regional Optimization (U. S. Mission to ASEAN 2019); a Ministerial Dialogue on Strengthening Women's Role in Sustainable Peace and Security (ASEAN 2020a); and an ASEAN Workshop on Enhancing the Roles of ASEAN Women in Sustainable Peace and Security (Royal Norwegian Embassy in Hanoi 2020).

12 Participant observation at the 2021 ASEAN Regional Forum Workshop on Women, Peace and Security.

13 The first meeting was held in June 2021 and was characterized by substantial discussions and candid sharing of experiences focused on the development and implementation of NAPs.

14 Participant observation in the CSCAP Study Group and in the ARF EEP.

and networks (see WEAVE 2021 for a recent example). There are also signs of civil society actors seizing the momentum, exemplified by references to a need for regional states and organizations to pick up the pace on WPS in the recommendations made by Solidarity for Asian Peoples Advocacies on the ASEAN Vision 2025 (SAPA 2015). These non-governmental regional initiatives are also important and deserve more attention in future research.



4. Foresight Considerations, Implications for Future Research and Conclusions.

A perusal of the status of the WPS agenda at the regional organizational level makes several things apparent. First, **it is clear that Asia-Pacific actors and institutions are catching up with the global trend of regionalizing the WPS agenda**. This is occurring in conjunction with national and localized expressions of the agenda, which we examined in our analysis of the six countries' NAPs discussed in Section 3. Hence, at different scales– across stakeholders and organizations– there is increasing momentum around WPS in the region. **We also see evidence of an emerging and increasingly diverse community of practice coalescing around the WPS agenda at various "tracks" of regional diplomacy: governmental, expert/informal, and non-governmental.** The recent ARF Workshop, the CSCAP study group, and the ongoing discussions happening in regional civil society networks mentioned above are all good indications of this trend.[15] Despite being mostly elite-driven and dominated, these initiatives nevertheless offer a variety of ways for women, including those with lived experience of gendered insecurity, to exercise agency in the regionalization of the agenda (Lee-Koo and Trojanowska 2019), and having their voices incorporated at all stages, from decision-making to implementation to monitoring.

On the other hand, **important limitations will continue to hamper the promise of the WPS agenda in the Asia-Pacific.** Many of these limitations are not specific to this region. Rather, they are pervasive aspects of the agenda that have been well-documented in scholarly work and policy analyses. These include a lack of consideration for intersectionality; an unproblematic reliance on neoliberal practices that do not account for the role of capitalist modes of production as a direct source of gendered insecurity; a failure to recognize statist and militarized forms of security as a root cause of gendered insecurity; a tendency to assume that presumed agents of "civil society" are necessarily reliable translators of women's lived experiences; and the reproduction of gendered assumptions that women are inherently better placed than men to contribute to peace given certain attributes and via certain roles and not others. This last limitation additionally places the burden of WPS onto the shoulders of women while simultaneously ignoring the role of women in the perpetuation of gendered violence. **An obvious consideration and concern here is that despite its emancipatory goals, the WPS agenda itself may simply be ill-suited to effectively mitigate certain aspects of gendered violence in the region.**

Further, there are clear areas of ambiguity and tension that emerge from diverging and competing understandings of what the WPS agenda means for the Asia-Pacific and its various states, let alone how it ought to be implemented. There are signs at the regional level that states disagree on fundamental elements of the agenda, such as the need for a regional action plan. At both national and regional levels, governmental and non-governmental actors also have different and sometimes incompatible views on WPS issues. Some of these tension points might become apparent if regional actors cannot reconcile their competing understandings of WPS into a coherent regional framework that can translate into meaningful forms of implementation. As we have shown, the WPS agenda is interpreted differently by different actors, highlighting the existence of both definitional and conceptual ambiguity. Ultimately, our findings suggest that the emerging field of WPS discourse and practice in the Asia-Pacific carries the potential for both convergence and contestation. This

15 Participant observation at the 2021 ASEAN Regional Forum Workshop on Women, Peace and Security.

has implications for regional security that warrant continued attention. **In a more dire scenario, cleavages that exist across the NAPs or are beginning to appear in regional dialogues highlight possible areas of tension or even open contestation that connect to regional relations more generally.** One of the specific areas of concern is the possibility for already sensitive areas of strained relations to become exacerbated by the Self/Other messaging we can observe in the discourses of several regional NAPs.

Another factor that is always at play in the region is the continued reverberation of anti-colonial sentiment and "a deeply held suspicion of global or perceived Western agendas" (Lee-Koo and Trojanowska 2019) on the part of many regional states that will continue to shape what these institutions can effectively contribute to the realization of regional WPS ambitions.[16] While regional institutions have spelled out broad principles, continued differences in approaches at various scales are likely to become more apparent as additional NAPs are developed, or as other states continue to reject global and regional calls to elaborate their own plan, potentially leading to further and more open forms of contestation over WPS. T**he presence of Western/liberal states who have branded themselves as champions of WPS in regional institutions is another space where contestation is likely, and where the perceived Western origins of the agenda might complicate further regionalization.** As such, more attention needs to be paid to the dynamics of diffusion and localization that shape the encounters between the broader Western-led WPS agenda and region-specific understandings and practices of gender and security.

Overall, there is cause for both cautious optimism and concern. There remain important divergences in how states in the region make sense of the WPS agenda and how the agenda is being implemented, if at all. There is still a long way to go before the broad principles that animate the WPS agenda in the region are translated into actionable (let alone budgeted) items with clear indicators of progress. **Our analysis points to the emergence of a multi-scalar space of WPS governance in the Asia-Pacific, which is ongoing and still very much in its early stages. Yet our analysis also finds that this space is characterized by significant challenges that could easily hamper the development of effective regional initiatives towards WPS goals.** ASEAN and its bodies typically operate in a highly aspirational fashion, through statements that are meant to set member states on long-term paths, and are useful for photo-ops and short-term diplomacy but offer no guarantees of practical outcomes, especially not in the short term. Finally, this study also brings forth obvious questions for future research about how WPS is discussed and/or implemented outside of spaces dominated by state actors, including informal diplomacy spaces and expert communities, as well as civil society initiatives at the regional, national, and community-level. This reminds us that this region is home to already established communities of practice comprised of women activists, community leaders and organizers, peacemakers and negotiators that have long played a crucial role in fostering amity in and across the locales in which they live and work. These communities of practice remain important sites of activism, advocacy and service work that exist whether or not they are presently contributing actively to the development of national and regional framings of WPS (or even using this language). Limiting our attention to formal and procedural WPS-based activity means that we also limit opportunities for understanding the full array of gendered insecurities experienced in the region and of efforts towards governance in these areas. The formal United Nations WPS agenda does

16 Fortunately, active participants in the emerging WPS community of practice are not waiting for governments and multilateral institutions to get their act together to make progress.

not have a monopoly on these issues or efforts to ameliorate them. All of these factors combined open up interesting avenues for research with the potential to generate important insights that point specifically to prospects for WPS agenda implementation in the Asia-Pacific, and more broadly towards the significance of discursive contestation in world politics.

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