

**Why Women, Peace, and Security is the Most Promising Solution Towards Combating
Violent Extremist Organizations in USAFRICOM**

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14. ABSTRACT Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO) continue to be a persistent and growing threat in Sub-Saharan Africa. In recent years terrorist-related incidents in the region have reached record heights. This problem poses a threat to U.S. interests in Africa and homeland security. United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) has made counterterrorism a key objective. To counter AFRICOM's VEO issue, the combatant commander should make Women, Peace, and Security a priority line of effort. Gender inequality correlates directly to both intra and inter-state violence. The inclusion of women at all levels of the decision-making process in peacekeeping has improved accord content, implementation rates, and peace durability. These linkages between gender and peace and security make WPS a highly viable solution. This paper recommends that AFRICOM restructure its WPS program into a unit-aligned mission to increase accountability of its application of the DoD Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (SFIP).					
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Abstract

Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO) continue to be a persistent and growing threat in Sub-Saharan Africa. In recent years terrorist-related incidents in the region have reached record heights. This problem poses a threat to U.S. interests in Africa and homeland security. United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) has made counter-terrorism a key objective. To counter AFRICOM's VEO issue, the combatant commander should make Women, Peace, and Security a priority line of effort. Gender inequality correlates directly to both intra and inter-state violence. The inclusion of women at all levels of the decision-making process in peacekeeping has improved accord content, implementation rates, and peace durability. These linkages between gender and peace and security make WPS a highly viable solution. This paper recommends that AFRICOM restructure its WPS program into a unit-aligned mission to increase accountability of its application of the DoD Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (SFIP).

Keywords: Women, Peace, and Security, AFRICOM, Gender Gap

Background

The persistent and growing threat of Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO) contests the United States Africa Command's efforts to preserve U.S. interest in Africa. The 2022 Global Terrorism Index illustrates the magnitude of this issue. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 48% of total global deaths from terrorism. The region had four countries out of the ten that experienced the largest increase in deaths from terrorism, specifically Niger, Mali, the DRC, and Burkina Faso¹. Extremist violence in Africa climbed to a new record in 2021, with a 70% annual increase in violence attributed to militant Islamist groups².

Based on the current state of the Africa theater, it is no surprise that the USAFRICOM posture statement places such a significant emphasis on the need to counter this growing VEO threat. The geographical combatant commander identified al-Qaida's al-Shabaab as the greatest threat to the U.S., both in the region and in the homeland. The posture statement provides solid objectives that support regional security and stability to combat terrorism, but noticeably missing was the mention of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)³.

The absence of WPS in the posture statement is by no means indicates that USAFRICOM has not incorporated the DoD Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (SFIP). The CCMD's implementation of a WPS program that has established a Gender Advisor (GENAD), hosted several women symposiums, partnered civil affairs units with women-based organizations, and executed all women military-to-military

¹"Global Terrorism Index 2022," *Institute for Economics & Peace*, March 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GTI-2022-web.pdf>.

² The Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Surge in Militant Islamist Violence in the Sahel Dominates Africa's Fight against Extremists," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, January 24, 2022, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mig2022-01-surge-militant-islamist-violence-sahel-dominates-africa-fight-extremists/>.

³ Gen. Stephen Townsend, Commander, U.S. Africa Command, to provide testimony to Senate Armed Forces Committee, 2022.

engagements, suggests the opposite⁴. However, it does indicate that while WPS is a consideration in combating VEOs, it is not the leading effort.

This paper will assert that WPS, an international initiative birthed from the U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 as a framework to integrate a gender perspective in international security and peace operations, is the best approach to combating VEOs. It will analyze the effectiveness of applying a gender equality approach to VEOs by examining 1) the correlation of gender inequality with inter and intra-state violence, 2) the durability of peacekeeping based on the involvement of women in the process, and 3) how the inclusion of women has linkage to improvements in human rights. It will also examine arguments against WPS that suggest cultural state identities are much too complicated of an obstacle in applying this initiative. Lastly, it will recommend how USAFRICOM can effectively apply WPS as a long-term approach toward enduring security and stability. The analysis of this paper will make it evident that WPS is the best approach to combating VEOs in Africa and, therefore, should be USAFRICOM's number one priority.

Gender Inequality and Violence

There is a direct correlation between gender inequality and a state's propensity for violence, both domestically and internationally. Research indicates that the larger the gender gap, the more likely a state is prone to conflict and to use violence as a first response to conflict⁵. The data aggregated on global terrorism impacts, analyzed against global gender gaps further supports this claim. Studies also show that women tend to choose diplomacy over violence as a

⁴ United States Government Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Congressional Report, June 2021.

⁵ Catalina Crespo-Sancho, "Can Gender Equality Prevent Violent Conflict?," World Bank Blogs, March 28, 2018, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/can-gender-equality-prevent-violent-conflict>.

first response to violence. Additionally, the familial violence associated with countries with gender gaps often manifests into a society that relies on violence to resolve inter and intra-state conflict. The credibility of gender inequality as an indicator of terrorism makes it only plausible to believe that a reduction in the gender gap will minimize terrorist impacts. Therefore, a WPS solution is a critical component that the CCMD must leverage to counter VEOs AFRICOM.

Analysis of Africa's gender gap index versus its terrorism index substantiates the claim that gender inequality is an indicator of violence. Sub-Saharan Africa ranked sixth out of eight in regional performance on closing the gender gap, with South Asia and the Middle East/North Africa taking seventh and eighth, respectively. Of the eight regions, it ranked last in educational attainment and second to last in political empowerment⁶. The terrorism index showed similar results, with ten countries attributing 85% of terrorism deaths. Sub-Saharan African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian countries made up the top ten⁷. Comparing Sub-Saharan African countries to one another also presented similar trends. Namibia and Rwanda were the top two performers in Africa in closing gender gaps⁸, they had none to very low impacts from terrorism⁹. Conversely, the Sub-Saharan African countries that ranked in the bottom five of the gender gap index all were very high or high on the terrorism impacts index¹⁰. The data analyzed presents a clear correlation between gender inequality and violence.

In addition to the gender parity and violence relationship, there is also a relationship between women's partiality toward diplomacy and violence. Women often prefer diplomacy

⁶“Global Gender Gap Report 2021,” *World Economic Forum*, March 2021, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf.

⁷“Global Terrorism Index 2022,” *Institute for Economics & Peace*, March 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GTI-2022-web.pdf>.

⁸ Julia Faria, “Gender Gap Index in Sub-Saharan Africa 2021,” Statista, September 9, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1220485/gender-gap-index-in-sub-saharan-africa-by-country/>.

⁹ “Global Terrorism Index 2022,” *Institute for Economics & Peace*, March 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GTI-2022-web.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ibid

over violence in comparison to men. When faced with conflict, women tend to resolve to diplomatic measures before resorting to the use of force. Theorists present opposing views as to what factors contribute to this claim, but regardless of cause, the impact of women's propensity towards diplomacy presents opportunities in countering terrorism. Studies done in the United States on the gender differences regarding support for military interventions demonstrated an 8% difference between women and men, with women less likely to support the use of force¹¹. Adding to this claim is a study on gender and the Gulf War. Results revealed a gap between genders in the support and opposition to attacking Iraq; 22% of women supported attacks on Iraq versus 48% of men. The results of those who opposed attacks on Iraq were 73% for women and 48% for men¹². Similarly, the incorporation of women into police forces shows a trend in the tendency of women to use means of de-escalation first. Police departments with higher levels of women on the force have fewer incidents of force in police-citizen encounters¹³. Global trends illustrate the benefits of incorporating more women in police forces and the security sector. The data from countries around the world signify that the inclusion of women in these areas improves accountability and decreases abuses against civilians¹⁴. Overall, the inclusion of women increases the likelihood of diplomacy over force.

Inequality often results in violence against those who are marginalized. Women and girls who reside in countries with large gender gaps are at higher risk of being victims of familial

¹¹ Mary-Kate Lizotte, "Investigating the Origins of the Gender Gap in Support for War," *Political Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (July 2017): pp. 124-135, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929917699416>.

¹² Mary Caprioli. "Gendered Conflict." *Journal of Peace Research* 37, no. 1 (2000): 51-68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/425725>.

¹³ Amie M. Schuck; Cara Rabe-Hemp, "Women Police: The Use of Force by and against Female Officers," *Women & Criminal Justice* Volume: 16 Issue: 4 (2005) pp 91-117, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/women-police-use-force-and-against-female-officers>.

¹⁴ Rachel B. Vogelstein and Jamille Bigio. "Three Things to Know: The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017," Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations), October 13, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/three-things-know-women-peace-and-security-act-2017>.

violence. Familial violence is violence enacted amongst family members within the home. Ties exist between states with high familial violence and the likelihood of intra and inter-state violence. The application of violence in the home becomes a common practice and spills over into the handling of domestic conflicts. High rates of familial violence also correspond with the probability of a state not following international norms¹⁵. Research shows that the severity of violence used in international conflict decreases with higher gender equality¹⁶. This evidence further proves that addressing gender inequality positively affects state violence.

Given the preponderance of data linking gender gaps to state violence, the CCMD will benefit from aligning military support to partner nations to improve gender equity and equality in its forces. Emphasis on African partners' recruitment, retention, and gender inclusion training can generate a momentum of fostering equality within its forces. Additionally, strategic messaging can advance the military's agenda. Messaging that builds a tolerance for women in larger roles and offers security through improved women's rights, rivaling the perceived security offered by VEOs, should be considered. Ultimately, emphasis on WPS and the gender gap will lessen the threat of VEOs and provide greater access to a previously closed-off population.

Women in Peacekeeping

The main premise of WPS is to expand the role of women in preventing and resolving conflict. The violence imposed by terrorism often impacts women more, thus offering a valuable perspective in peace deals. This unique perspective makes it imperative women are included in all levels of the decision-making process of peacekeeping. Inclusion of women at all levels of the

¹⁵ Mary Caprioli. "Gendered Conflict." *Journal of Peace Research* 37, no. 1 (2000): 51–68.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/425725>.

¹⁶ Catalina Crespo-Sancho, "Can Gender Equality Prevent Violent Conflict?," World Bank Blogs, March 28, 2018, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/can-gender-equality-prevent-violent-conflict>.

process results in 1) higher rates of agreements reached and 2) durability of peace. WPS's emphasis on peacekeeping is critical as the involvement of women produces more stable and peaceful outcomes.

The relationship between the participation of women in peace deals and its results trend in a positive direction. The fewer women are involved, the less likely to reach an agreement, and this probability of reaching an agreement is even lower when women are not involved at all¹⁷. Research has shown an astounding correlation between women and implementation rates. Agreements with women signatories have a very high implementation rate. The average implementation rate of agreements with women signatories is 89.3%. This rate is significant compared to agreements without them which averaged 76.9%. In addition to the higher implementation rates, the accord content of the agreements is overall better¹⁸. To achieve these higher implementation rates, women must have a voice and influence over the process.

Implications of women in peace negotiations extend well beyond better accord content and higher implementation rates. Even more significant is the positive impact that the inclusion of women or women's groups has on the durability of peace. Including women at all levels as negotiators, mediators, signatories, and witnesses increase the lifespan of an agreement and decreases the probability of conflict reoccurring¹⁹. An agreement is 64% less likely to fail when

¹⁷ Catalina Crespo-Sancho, "Can Gender Equality Prevent Violent Conflict?," World Bank Blogs, March 28, 2018, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/can-gender-equality-prevent-violent-conflict>.

¹⁸ Jana Krause, Werner Krause, and Piia Bränfors, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace," *International Interactions* 44, no. 6 (October 2018): pp. 985-1016, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386>.

¹⁹ Catalina Crespo-Sancho, "Can Gender Equality Prevent Violent Conflict?," World Bank Blogs, March 28, 2018, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/can-gender-equality-prevent-violent-conflict>.

women and civil society groups participated²⁰. Also, the probability of an agreement lasting at least two years increases by 20%, and by 35%, the probability of it lasting at least 15 years²¹.

Given the overwhelmingly positive relation to women in peace negotiations, it should be an easy assessment that women need to be involved in shaping the process. However, this has not been the case. Although over 98 countries have adopted national action plans, women's participation remains low. Referencing significant peace negotiations from 1992 to 2018, women accounted for only 13% of negotiators, 4% of signatories, and 3% of mediators²². A 2021 study published by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security further substantiates that women are underrepresented. The institute reported that at the beginning of 2021, women accounted for less than 5% of military personnel, 11% in formed police units, and 28% of individual police officers tasked with peace missions²³. Peacekeeping in Africa has been no exception; in 2020, women accounted for only 20% of negotiators in political discussions in Libya, and none of the negotiators in Libya's military talks²⁴. In Sudan, women made up only 10% of the negotiators of the Juba Peace Agreement²⁵. This data illustrates a gap in policy development and the actual application of policy. The U.S. must partner with allies in the region to ensure that women are involved and have influence over every level of peacekeeping. In

²⁰ Rachel B. Vogelstein and Jamille Bigio. "Three Things to Know: The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017," Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations), October 13, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/three-things-know-women-peace-and-security-act-2017>.

²¹ Catalina Crespo-Sancho, "Can Gender Equality Prevent Violent Conflict?," World Bank Blogs, March 28, 2018, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/can-gender-equality-prevent-violent-conflict>.

²² Kyleigh Cullen, "The Women, Peace, and Security Act: Implementation Strategies for a Modern Department of Defense," National Defense University Press, December 29, 2021, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2884238/the-women-peace-and-security-act-implementation-strategies-for-a-modern-departm/#endnote-015>.

²³ Robert Nagel, Katie Fin, and Julia Maenza, "Peacekeeping Operations and Gender: Policies for Improvement," *Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security*, May 2021, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Peacekeeping-Operations-and-Gender-Policies-for-Improvement.pdf>.

²⁴ "Including Women at the Peace Table Produces Better Outcomes," Council on Foreign Relations n.d., <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>.

²⁵ United States Government Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Congressional Report, June 2021.

addition, the U.S. must ensure that it and its partners send higher percentages of women to International Military and Education Training geared towards security and peacekeeping. The data overwhelmingly supports this analysis as women's inclusion in shaping peace talks makes a state more resilient in disputing conflicts.

Implementation Challenges

Some may argue that WPS is a complex solution to an even more complicated problem. They assert that WPS is sound in theory but impractical in application. There is a clear indication that emphasis on gender equity and equality on every level of society decreases VEOs. However, the gender gap is deeply rooted in cultural and religious ties. So deeply rooted that many of the VEOs have organized to advance these rooted beliefs. The slow pace in which gender gaps close and past experience in the Middle East make WPS too difficult of a solution to apply as a military instrument.

The VEO problem in AFRICOM is pressing and needs immediate relief. The predicted rate at which gender gaps are to close appears to be too slow-paced to keep up with the problem. A 2021 Global Gender Gap report substantiates this claim. The report illustrated the protracted timeline to closing the gender gap. Based on the progress made over the last 15 years, it will take an estimated 135.6 years to fix the world's gender gap. Specifically relating to Sub-Saharan Africa, the current trajectory is on the path to close the gender gap in 121.7 years²⁶. The dire state of Sub-Saharan Africa's VEO problem only continues to grow and can not wait on the gender gap to close. Therefore, critics argue that AFRICOM should prioritize lines of efforts that achieve tangible, near-term results.

²⁶“ Global Gender Gap Report 2021,” *World Economic Forum*, March 2021, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf.

The military's experience in the Middle East, specifically Afghanistan, further supports this claim. CENTCOM spent over 20 years on counterinsurgency in the region. A larger portion of its efforts was on governance and human rights efforts that facilitate improvement in the treatment of women and girls. After the fall of the Taliban, the U.S. established policies that facilitated human rights within institutions in Afghanistan and that encouraged adherence to international human rights standards. Women's groups grew to be a large component of Afghan civil society. The freedoms of Afghani women greatly expanded and even extended to their service at many levels of government²⁷. This change did not create the shift in cultural beliefs as it appeared. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan left women and girls in similar conditions pre-911. The reinstatement of the Taliban also came with the reinstatement of policies that violate women's rights, and Afghanistan remains number one in the world in impacts of terrorism attacks²⁸.

The slow pace of change in gender gaps and the U.S.'s recent history in the Middle East has left many critics jaded on the military's ability to impact cultural change. The gender gap in Sub-Saharan Africa will not close until over a century. Afghanistan's withdrawal has provided a newly gained perspective that is less than optimistic. This lack of confidence makes WPS appear as an inadvisable candidate for AFRICOM's leading priority.

²⁷ Katzman, Kenneth and Layton Thomas. "AFGHANISTAN: POST-TALIBAN GOVERNANCE, SECURITY, AND U.S. POLICY (UPDATED)." *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East* 8, no. 4 (2017): 531-643. <https://login.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fafghanistan-post-taliban-governance-security-us%2Fdocview%2F2273146378%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D322>.

²⁸ "Global Terrorism Index 2022," *Institute for Economics & Peace*, March 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GTI-2022-web.pdf>.

Conclusion

Despite what critics may say, the recent lessons learned in the Middle East can also argue in support of WPS as a leading solution in countering terrorism. The U.S.'s over 20 years of history in that region has taught us that you can not fight VEOs with brute force. VEOs are a socio-cultural problem that requires a socio-cultural solution. Although the gender gap in the Sub-Saharan region is over a century away from being closed, there is still significant progress that can be made in the near future. The gender gap does not have to be entirely closed to impact state violence positively. Putting it into a clearer perspective, North America ranks second globally on gender parity, and it still has another 61.5 years to close its gap²⁹. Ultimately, a state can reach a state of gender parity that empowers peace and security well before the gender gap closes.

WPS addresses critical areas associated with Sub-Saharan Africa's VEO dilemma. Gender inequality has proven to be a credible indicator of a state's propensity for violence. Women incorporated in the peacekeeping process prevent and resolve conflicts by establishing agreements that are more likely to be implemented and far more durable. WPS's emphasis on the inclusion of women at the domestic and international levels will show positive trends in decreasing intra and inter-state violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, WPS must be AFRICOM's priority initiative.

Recommendations

To effectively implement Women, Peace, and Security on a scale that will provide an enduring solution to the VEOs in Sub-Saharan Africa, AFRICOM will have to change its current

²⁹“ Global Gender Gap Report 2021,” *World Economic Forum*, March 2021, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf.

framework of WPS. Instead of structuring WPS as a program, it will need to reorganize it as a mission and align it to a unit or follow a similar model to a Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB). This unit's sole mission will be to execute efforts aligned with WPS. The CCMD's gender advisor's role will be an extension of the unit assigned to WPS, working directly with the unit's commander to advise the CCMD on all things relating to gender considerations in peacekeeping. The gender advisor will also ensure synchronization of all of the WPS unit's efforts with the efforts of other units aligned under CJTF- Horn of Africa. The organization's implementation plan will need to establish clearly defined goals that are obtainable and measurable. Also, there should be specified projected timelines and benchmarks for reaching these goals. Lastly, mechanisms and incentives that hold partnering African countries accountable for putting their WPS policies into practice need enforcement—possibly aligning compliance with the amount of assistance rendered. These steps will likely increase accountability in applying WPS principles, the reporting process, and funding allocation. The outlined recommendations apply a socio-cultural approach to a socio-cultural problem.

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