



CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

Women and Armed Conflict

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The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** marks one of the most important documents in the recognition of women's rights as human rights. A product of the engagement of the international women's movement with the United Nations at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the Platform recognizes that women are impacted disproportionately by the world's biggest challenges, and that women's equal representation in decision-making at all levels is key to addressing these challenges.

The Beijing Platform highlights twelve Areas of Concern, from poverty to armed conflict, that continue to be pressing problems 30 years after the Beijing Conference. Recognizing that “grave violations of the human rights of women occur, particularly in times of armed conflict, and include murder, torture, systematic rape, forced pregnancy and forced abortion, in particular under policies of ethnic cleansing” (paragraph 11), *as well as* the contributions women have made to peace movements, the Beijing Platform puts forth **six strategic objectives with respect to women and armed conflict**:

- 1) Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation (para 142)
- 2) Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments (para 143)
- 3) Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations (para 144)
- 4) Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace (para 146)
- 5) Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women (para 147)
- 6) Provide assistance to the women of the colonies and non-self-governing territories (para 149).¹

Linking the political economy of war to the political need to achieve gender equality, and paying particular attention to displaced women and refugees, the Beijing Platform calls for specific actions to be taken by governments and the international community to reach these six objectives. **Thirty years later, these objectives have not been reached.** Women, and society at large, continue to suffer from patriarchy and militarism, and we are far from creating a gender-just and sustainable peace based on the realization of social and economic rights.²

Military expenditures

The Beijing Platform's **second** strategic objective to “reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments” has not been met. Military spending globally has grown steadily, reaching \$2.44 trillion in 2023.³ The outbreak of war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022, the Israel-Gaza war, and tensions in the South China Sea only add to an increase in global military spending.

The United States leads with the highest military spending in the world: \$916 billion or 3.5% of GDP, corresponding to over 40% of the total military spending *worldwide* in 2023.⁴ Moreover, the US Congressional Budget Office projects that outlays for defense will rise to \$1.1 trillion by 2033. As the leading exporter of arms, the United States profits from war around the world. The US has long provided financial and military support to Israel and continues to support it even during its brutal military campaign against Palestinians since October 7, 2023 that the International Court of Justice has found is plausibly genocidal.⁵ In view of the egregious violations of human rights in the Gaza war documented by the UN Human Rights Council,⁶ the United States has not succeeded in achieving the Beijing Platform's **third** strategic objective to “promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.” The US government cut funding to UNRWA, the UN agency tasked with assisting Palestinian refugees and the main provider of international aid in Gaza, and has not resumed the aid despite the desperate needs of the Gaza population, including over 1 million women and girls.⁷ While the US has provided Gaza aid through other channels,⁸ US foreign policy remains far from meeting the Beijing Platform's **fifth** strategic objective, to “provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women.”

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Participation of women in conflict resolution and decision making

Between 1992 and 2019, women averaged only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in major peace processes, and the global trend on regression on gender equality does not bode well for the future.⁹ According to the UN Secretary-General's 2023 report, the number of women and girls living in conflict-affected countries increased by 50% since 2017, reaching 614 million in 2022, while their participation in decision-making and formal peace processes is still very limited.¹⁰ **Negotiating parties continue to exclude women from peace processes** in violation of the Beijing Platform's **first** strategic objective, and impunity for atrocities against women and girls is still prevalent. In 2022, of 18 peace agreements reached, only one was signed or witnessed by a representative of a women's group or organization.¹¹ That the Doha meeting of the Special Envoys on Afghanistan, held on July 1, 2024 with the Taliban, did not include Afghan women is a case in point.¹²

Nevertheless, since the Beijing Conference, there has been some progress, namely the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 which established the **Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda**. Per UNSCR 1325's encouragement that countries implement National Action Plans (NAPs) to fulfill tenets of the WPS agenda, the US passed a domestic law on Women, Peace, and Security in 2017. By 2019, the US government had adopted a WPS Strategy based on the law and updated it in 2023 "to advance women's meaningful participation in preventing and resolving conflict, countering violent extremism (CVE), and building post-conflict peace and security."¹³ The US Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, and USAID have all produced implementation plans.

The existence of a US law that specifically aims to incorporate the WPS agenda at the national level is commendable. However, as the country with the highest military expenditures and the highest number of military bases in the world, the US is far from meeting the six strategic goals of the Beijing Platform.

There is a paucity of data on American women's participation in foreign policy-making. The 2019 and 2023 WPS Strategy plans focus on increasing women's participation in decision-making *in other countries*, but neither document provides any data on the inclusion of American women in US or international operations, including peace negotiations. We do not know the percentage of US women involved in peace negotiations and foreign-policy decision making at different levels.¹⁴ This lack of data on the participation of US women in foreign-policy decision making is not explicitly acknowledged in the 2023 WPS Strategy. Another challenge, which *is* acknowledged in the 2023 WPS Strategy, is the lack of expert staff to implement and coordinate the WPS agenda across the four departments.

The US has had **three women as Secretaries of State** since 1995: Madeleine Albright (1997-2001), Condoleezza Rice (2005-2009), and Hillary Clinton (2009-2013). This may be seen as an improvement for the implementation of the WPS agenda. On the other hand, some of the costliest foreign policy decisions, including the first Bush Administration's decision to impose sanctions on Iraq, which contributed to more than doubling child mortality in Iraq, and the second Bush Administration's 2003 deadly war on Iraq, were voted for and defended by these women. There is little progress towards the Beijing Platform's **fourth** strategic objective, promoting women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.¹⁵

Recommendation for better gender data

Female policymakers as a group do not share the same views any more than male policymakers do, nor is there a foreign policy agenda (feminist or not) on which they would all agree. To assess women's participation in, and its impact on, foreign policy and peacebuilding processes, both the sex of decision-makers and the gendered nature of decision-making processes must be analyzed together. For this, there should be **gender-disaggregated data** on the participation of women in different offices at different levels of foreign-policy decision-making within each of the four departments tasked with the implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. In addition, qualitative studies of the gendered process of decision-making itself are needed.

¹ United Nations 1995. *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.

² Yakın Ertürk 2020. The political economy of peace processes and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. *Conflict, Security & Development* 20(4), 419-439.

³ Einar H. Dyvik 2024. *Countries with the Highest Military Spending 2023*.

⁴ Dyvik 2024.

⁵ Fatima Al-Kassab 2024. *A Top UN Court Says Gaza Genocide is "Plausible"*.

⁶ US Human Rights Council 2024. *Israeli Authorities, Palestinian Armed Groups are Responsible for War Crimes*.

⁷ UN Women 2024. *Scarcity and Fear: A Gender Analysis*.

⁸ US State Department 2024. *United States Announces Additional Humanitarian Assistance*.

⁹ The White House 2023. *US Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security*. Pg. 8.

¹⁰ UN Security Council 2023. *Women, Peace, and Security: Report of the Secretary-General*. Para. 2.

¹¹ UN Security Council 2023, para 8.

¹² Rosemary DiCarlo 2024. *USG DiCarlo Highlights Afghan Women's Concerns*.

¹³ The White House 2023, pg. 41.

¹⁴ Valerie Hudson et al. 2023. *Shadow CEDAW Report for the United States*. Texas A&M University Bush School of Government and Public Service. Pp. 312-314.

¹⁵ Mohamed M. Ali and Iqbal H. Shah 2000. Sanctions and childhood mortality in Iraq. *The Lancet* 355.9218 (2000): 1851-1857.