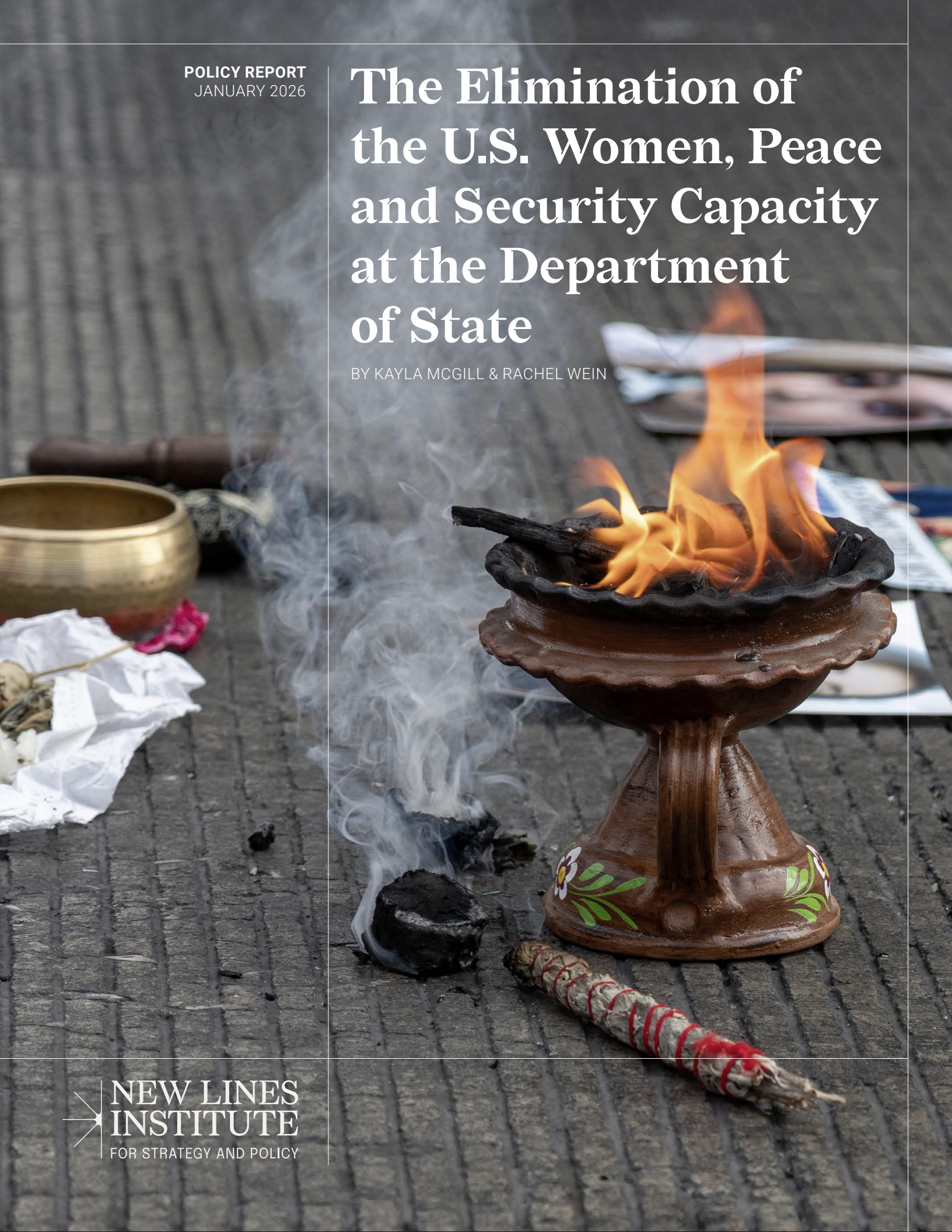


POLICY REPORT  
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# The Elimination of the U.S. Women, Peace and Security Capacity at the Department of State

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Cover Image: A makeshift altar with photos of femicide victims is seen during a march on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in Mexico City on Nov. 25, 2025. (Franyeli Garcia / AFP via Getty Images)

## Executive Summary

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Act of 2017, a bipartisan congressional mandate, remains federal law but has been effectively nullified through the systematic elimination of implementation capacity across the Departments of State, Homeland Security, and USAID. Between January and July 2025, the State Department dismantled the Office of Global Women's Issues, terminating over 65 experts and suspending active WPS programs in more than 50 countries. This development marks a critical inflection point that extends beyond routine policy disagreement, setting a precedent for executive circumvention of explicit congressional mandates through what may be termed "impoundment by elimination": the deliberate destruction of institutional mechanisms necessary to execute legislated directives.

The strategic consequences of these actions are significant. Eliminating approximately \$15 million in annual expenditures for targeted conflict prevention efforts is likely to result in billions in future intervention costs. Extensive evidence demonstrates that inclusive peace processes yield more durable outcomes and reduce the risk of conflict recurrence.<sup>1</sup> This policy reversal creates substantial coordination gaps with allied nations that continue to implement WPS frameworks, providing strategic opportunities for adversaries in fragile regions.

The pattern of dismantling offices and government functions focused on inclusive governance and civil society engagement parallels democratic backsliding trajectories observed in authoritarian transitions globally, raising fundamental questions about executive accountability to legislative authority and the resilience of congressional mandates in U.S. governance.<sup>2</sup> We have seen these tactics before in other contexts: the deliberate erosion of specialized expertise, the systematic defunding of legislative mandates, the targeting of institutions that support accountability and inclusion. This familiarity with authoritarian methods allows us to anticipate what may lie ahead. It also illuminates tangible actions that Congress, civil society, and the public can and should take to respond to this moment and promote future democratic resilience.

To that end, the authors recommend three actions:

- 1 Congressional action and leadership:** Congress must reassert its role in U.S. democratic processes and take actionable steps to ensure oversight using hearings, documentation requests, and potential investigations to address noncompliance and restore lawful implementation.
- 2 Appropriations, compliance and coalition-building:** The FY2026 appropriations process can create protected funding lines, enforce compliance, and build a broader, cross-partisan coalition to safeguard WPS and prevention efforts.
- 3 Reframing:** Reframe WPS as a fiscal prevention strategy and a tool to expand bipartisan and cross-sector support and engagement before additional loss of institutional capacity.

1 Kim Thelwell, "2023 Budget Prioritizes Gender Equity and Equality," The Borgen Project, April 2, 2022, <https://borgenproject.org/gender-equity-and-equality/>.

2 Conny Roggeband and Andrea Krizsán, "Democratic Backsliding and the Backlash against Women's Rights: Understanding the Current Challenges for Feminist Politics," UN Women Discussion Paper No. 35 (New York: UN Women, June 2020), <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Discussion-paper-Democratic-backsliding-and-the-backlash-against-womens-rights-en.pdf>.

## INTRODUCTION

The United States has experienced an unprecedented rollback of its strategic diplomatic and soft power tools, as well as of its Women, Peace, and Security commitments and institutional capacity to uphold federal law. The Trump administration's failure to submit the mandated 2025 WPS Report to Congress, combined with the elimination of core implementation structures across the U.S. government security apparatus, signals a deeper crisis: the weakening of congressional authority, the normalization of executive noncompliance, and the strategic dismantling of U.S. prevention capacity at a time of rising global instability.

This analysis outlines what has been lost, why it matters for U.S. national security and international stability, and actions Congress and other key stakeholders must take to ensure laws are upheld and to prevent lasting institutional damage. These actions are placed within the context of the current global rollback on gender equality and human rights, and within broader patterns of democratic backsliding that sideline experts, dismantle inclusive policies, and disregard oversight functions. The opportunity to address these tactics remains open, but the window is narrowing. Preventive action is now a critical necessity for lasting peace and security.

## What is Women, Peace and Security?

WPS is a conflict prevention framework supported by decades of empirical research.<sup>3</sup> Its central premise is that including women in all decision-making spaces broadens the scope of negotiations beyond ceasefires and power-sharing to encompass community resilience, accountability, and long-term stability, resulting in more effective and sustainable outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

Research demonstrates that peace agreements with women's participation are 35 percent more likely to endure for over 15 years and that initiatives incorporating diverse voices are stronger and more sustainable.<sup>5</sup>

Fundamentally, WPS reframes security from a nation-state-centric concept to one that prioritizes individual security – particularly for women and other oppressed populations – at local, state, and national levels. Security is therefore constructed collectively and rooted in community participation and prevention rather than reactive measures.

This inclusion enhances the accuracy of early warning systems, strengthens conflict prevention efforts, and increases the sustainability of recovery initiatives. For example, gender-based violence (GBV) is a more accurate predictor of political instability than conventional security indicators.<sup>6</sup> Spikes in domestic violence, technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), and other forms of GBV frequently precede broader patterns of social unrest and fragility, serving as early indicators of impending conflict.<sup>7</sup>

Countries exhibiting higher levels of gender equality are significantly less likely to experience conflict. Conversely, democratic backsliding frequently begins with restrictions on women's equal participation in politics and public life.<sup>8</sup> Societies that systematically exclude half their population from political participation, economic engagement, and decision-making are unable to sustain democratic governance or long-term stability. The framework applies across all national security sectors, from counterterrorism and disaster risk reduction to economic resilience and security partnerships. Whether ensuring

3 United Nations, "Women, Peace and Security," United Nations Peace and Security, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/page/women-peace-and-security>.

4 Ibid.

5 Council on Foreign Relations, "Women's Participation in Peace Processes," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>.

6 Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks, "Why Empowered Women Are Authoritarianism's Targets—and How They Can Be Its Undoing," PolicyCast, Harvard Kennedy School, November 3, 2022, podcast, 42:00, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/policycast/why-empowered-women-are-authoritarianisms-targets-and-how-they-can-be>.

7 Criterion Institute, "Gender-Based Violence and Political Risk Analysis," Criterion Institute, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://www.criterioninstitute.org/resources/gender-based-violence-and-political-risk-analysis>.

8 Conny Roggeband and Andrea Krizsán, "Democratic Backsliding and the Backlash against Women's Rights: Understanding the Current Challenges for Feminist Politics," UN Women Discussion Paper No. 35 (New York: UN Women, June 2020), <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Discussion-paper-Democratic-backsliding-and-the-backlash-against-womens-rights-en.pdf>.

equitable participation in peace negotiations, embedding gender analysis in counter-extremism strategies, or strengthening women's roles in security institutions, WPS enhances the effectiveness, credibility, and endurance of U.S. and global security operations.

The work and overarching framework of WPS is not peripheral to national security – it's essential. It is founded on redefining security as institutions' capacity to be responsive to the people they serve, to mitigate harm, protect rights, and build trust throughout the conflict cycle. The security of a nation depends fundamentally on the security of its people, particularly its most vulnerable populations. When GBV, political exclusion, and systemic inequities remain unaddressed, instability follows – domestically and internationally.

This logic is rooted in prevention. Prevention costs millions; intervention costs billions.<sup>9</sup> Yet preventive frameworks are often eliminated in the name of "efficiency," even though they are among the most cost-effective and stabilizing tools available.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Institutional Infrastructure**

Since the passage of the WPS Act of 2017, the Department of State's Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI) has served as the coordinating hub for U.S. WPS implementation across the federal government. As of July 2025, this coordination infrastructure no longer exists.

The loss of S/GWI represents the elimination of irreplaceable institutional capacity built over decades. At the time of its termination, the office employed more than 65 expert staff possessing critical competencies that cannot be easily rebuilt: language fluency, deep regional expertise, established relationships with local civil society organizations and women leaders, and specialized knowledge in conflict early warning systems and prevention methodologies. These professionals served as the connective tissue linking the State Department with the departments and agencies required to implement the WPS Act's whole-of-government mandate.

S/GWI's elimination has already had devastating effects on WPS work across sectors and borders. Active conflict prevention programs have been canceled mid-implementation. Interagency coordinating mechanisms – including regular convenings that aligned diplomatic, development, and defense efforts – have been dissolved. Established partnerships fostered by and through WPS diplomatic engagement have been hobbled or abruptly severed, to the detriment of both long- and short-term U.S. strategic security.<sup>11</sup> The office's role in monitoring early warning indicators, coordinating with allies on joint initiatives, and maintaining institutional memory of what works in different conflict contexts has simply ceased to exist.<sup>12</sup>

This rollback reveals the fragility of U.S. commitment to a core component of its prevention strategy, as the ability to anticipate and respond to crises, coordinate with allies, and uphold laws enacted by Congress has been compromised.<sup>13</sup> This has a ripple effect: As U.S. leadership in this domain disappears, some nations have either continued to maintain and even expand their robust WPS programs while many others have stepped back from

9 William Braniff, "The Costs of Targeted Violence and the Value of Investing in Prevention," *Homeland Security Today*, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/terrorism-prevention/the-costs-of-targeted-violence-and-the-value-of-investing-in-prevention/>.

10 "Study: 14 Million Lives Could Be Lost Due to Trump Aid Cuts," NPR, July 1, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goats-and-soda/2025/07/01/nx-s1-5452513/trump-usaid-foreign-aid-deaths>.

11 Kathleen McInnis, "Why the Women, Peace, and Security Act Strengthens U.S. Defense Strategy," CSIS, February 11, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/why-women-peace-and-security-act-strengthens-us-defense-strategy#:~:text=WPS%20as%20a%20mechanism%20to,and%20partners%20in%20the%20theater>.

12 Ibid

13 Rachel Wein, "The Office of Global Women's Issues is Gone. America is Less Safe Because of it," *More to Her Story*, October 31, 2025, <https://www.moretoherstory.com/stories/the-office-of-global-womens-issues-is-gone-america-is-less-safe-because-of-it>.



More than 1,000 students and staff lie down for 15 minutes in protest against Gender-Based Violence And Femicide at University of Cape Town on Nov. 21, 2025. (Brenton Geach / Gallo Images via Getty Images)

their WPS engagement, highlighting a strategic void where U.S. influence, leadership, and coordination once existed.<sup>14,15,16,17</sup>

## Interconnected Crises

We are currently observing a series of interconnected crises that threaten the structural integrity of U.S. governance and global leadership. What began as targeted minimizing of human rights, development, and WPS initiatives governmentwide has evolved into a deliberate dismantling of bureaucratic infrastructure and safety mechanisms meant to protect the daily lives of every American. If left unchecked, these actions could redefine the balance of power in the U.S. government, undermine national security, and fracture longstanding global alliances.

### Constitutional Crisis: “Impoundment by Elimination”

The WPS Act of 2017 remains federal law, yet implementation has become operationally impossible through a quiet form of administrative nullification that circumvents the Impoundment Control Act.<sup>18</sup> This strategy operates by eliminating personnel and dissolving offices responsible for executing congressionally mandated requirements. Without designated implementers or coordinating mechanisms, technically available funds remain unspent –

14 Jacqui True, “Taking Stock of the WPS Agenda”, *The Strategist* (ASPI), July 29, 2025, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/taking-stock-of-the-wps-agenda/#:~:text=Closer%20to%20Australia%2C%20in%202022,agenda%20outside%20of%20overt%20conflict>.

15 Kim Hart, “Meeting the Moment: How GIWPS is Defending 25 Years of Progress in Women, Peace and Security and Advancing the Field”, *The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security* (GIWPS), October 31, 2025, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/2025/10/31/meeting-the-moment-25-years-of-progress/>.

16 Heather Barr, “Trump spurs global rollback on the rights of women and girls”, *Human Rights Watch*, May 7, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/07/trump-spurs-global-rollback-rights-women-and-girls>.

17 Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Michael E. Brown, “The WPS Agenda Beyond 2025: Time for a WPS Treaty” *Politics & Gender* 21, no. 3 (2025): 718–25. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X25100421>.

18 U.S. Government Accountability Office, *The Impoundment Control Act of 1974*, GAO-095406 (Washington, DC: GAO, 1979). <https://www.gao.gov/products/095406>.

not through explicit refusal but through eliminating those who could obligate resources.

This approach provides a blueprint for nullifying any congressional mandate without political or legal consequences. The WPS Act's mandated report to Congress, which was due Oct. 31, 2025, has not been produced. Regional bureaus supposedly "absorbing" WPS functions remain understaffed and underfunded, making implementation impossible. If accepted as precedent, any administration could use this tactic to erase laws it opposes without congressional consent or oversight.

### **National Security Crisis: The Efficiency Paradox**

Programs designed to prevent conflict before military intervention have been deemed "inefficient," equating prevention with waste and reaction with productivity.<sup>19</sup> This is not only dangerous but reverses sound strategic logic: WPS programming reduces costly interventions by advancing durable peace agreements, localized capacity building, community investment, and early warning systems that prevent crises rather than react to them.<sup>20</sup>

The current administration measures efficiency by immediate headcount and budget reduction; however, business metrics are inadequate in national security contexts, as demonstrated by the measures led by the Department of Government Efficiency failing to achieve significant budget reductions.<sup>21</sup> True government efficiency must be assessed by the extent to which conflict, displacement, and instability are prevented. Short-term political decisions have produced long-term vulnerability. The loss of WPS coordination mechanisms has severely undermined U.S. institutional integrity, dismantled early warning systems, and weakened moral authority with international partners.<sup>22</sup>

### **Alliance Crisis: The Coordination Gap**

At the same time, walking back the WPS architecture in U.S. systems and foreign policy is producing a cascading alliance crisis. NATO allies, which have embedded WPS into their operations and strategic planning, now find themselves without strong support from the U.S. Burden-sharing is becoming more difficult as allied confidence in the U.S. erodes due to actions (or inaction) in multilateral fora. The vacuum the U.S. is leaving has opened new space for malign influence – particularly from China and Russia, which for years have been exerting influence and presence across the globe through resource partnerships but are now ramping up efforts both jointly and unilaterally with few to no checks.<sup>23</sup>

For decades, NATO allies, Japan, Australia, and European nations relied on U.S. leadership for operational coherence across peacebuilding, humanitarian response, and governance assistance. The WPS framework played a quiet, albeit often sidelined, but crucial role in sustaining strategic partnerships, creating space for both military and diplomatic coordination.<sup>24</sup> Its dismantling represents not merely a policy lapse but a collapse of strategic infrastructure underpinning alliance trust and burden-sharing.

19 "The Great Fragmentation Driving Conflict: World Peace Plummetts," Vision of Humanity, September 11, 2025, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/the-great-fragmentation-driving-conflict-world-peace-plummetts/>.

20 Tazreen Hussain, Carolyn Washington, and Rachel Wein, "America's Bipartisan Peace Agenda Is Going Dark, Along with US Leadership," Devex, November 7, 2025, <https://www.devex.com/news/america-s-bipartisan-peace-agenda-is-going-dark-along-with-us-leadership-111270>.

21 "DOGE-flation: DOGE's Actual Savings Are a Fraction of What It Claims," Politico, August 12, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/08/12/trump-doge-contract-claims-savings-inflation-00498178>.

22 Tazreen Hussain and Kim Hart, "Why is America Abandoning One of its Smartest Tools for Peace?" The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), July 28, 2025, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/2025/07/28/why-is-america-abandoning-one-of-its-smartest-tools-for-peace/>.

23 Richard Fontaine, and Robert D. Blackwill, "No Limits? The China-Russia Relationship and U.S. Foreign Policy," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed November 21, 2025. <https://www.cfr.org/report/no-limits-china-russia-relationship-and-us-foreign-policy>.

24 Katharine A. M. Wright 2025. "Moving beyond a 'Hollow Concept': Realising Women, Peace and Security at NATO under a Trump Presidency." *Defence Studies* 25 (3): 731–39. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14702436.2025.2474059>

When evidence-based policy is reframed as partisan ideology, long-standing government and civil society partnerships are severed, and offices dedicated to marginalized populations are dissolved, the United States mirrors the institutional practices of authoritarian competitors in a trajectory that characterizes democratic backsliding.

The absence of U.S. global engagement has created voids within international partnerships. Long-standing initiatives, including joint operations and information-sharing, are deteriorating as allies adjust their strategies. Without the U.S. as a reliable convener, partners are forming alternative coalitions. Although this may preserve regional stability in the short term, it diminishes U.S. influence over global norms and partnerships.

China and Russia have moved quickly to occupy this strategic space, building partnerships without the gender, human rights, or transparency standards that once defined U.S.-led efforts.<sup>25</sup> The result is not merely the absence of U.S. leadership but the active reorientation of the international system toward models prioritizing control over inclusion and power over human dignity.

### **The Authoritarian Playbook Applied Domestically**

Tactics once used to diagnose authoritarianism abroad are now appearing in the United States.<sup>26</sup> Civil society partnerships strengthening transparency and accountability have been targeted or dismantled. Career experts have been removed, occasionally replaced with politically loyal appointees lacking expertise. Legislative mandates are circumvented through administrative actions limiting implementation capacity. Evidence-based policy has been recast as partisan ideology. Offices dedicated to marginalized groups – housed within institutions designed to uphold inclusion and equal representation – have been dissolved.<sup>27</sup>

The cumulative effect establishes patterns characteristic of authoritarian governance: consolidating control by weakening expertise, suppressing dissenting analysis, and centralizing decision-making around political loyalty rather than public service.<sup>28</sup> The same offices and professionals who developed expertise in identifying warning signs abroad have now been eliminated domestically. Analysts who previously documented democratic backsliding in other countries now observe similar dynamics within the United States. Tools originally designed to counter authoritarianism overseas, such as transparency safeguards, civil society engagement, human rights initiatives, and data collection and analysis, are now urgently required at home.

### **Strategic Competition and Democratic Backsliding**

The elimination of U.S. WPS capacity fundamentally undermines U.S. strategic competition with China and Russia at a time when gender-informed analysis is central to understanding authoritarian expansion. China's genocidal campaign against Uyghur women and girls constitutes both ethnic cleansing and systematic gender-based persecution intended to destroy community cohesion.<sup>29</sup> Russia's weaponization of sexual violence in Ukraine, where systematic rape and forced deportation serve explicit genocidal objectives, illustrates how patriarchal authoritarianism operates as an instrument of territorial conquest.<sup>30</sup> By dismantling the institutional infrastructure that enabled such analysis, the U.S. has removed the expertise required to counter adversaries who intentionally use gender-based oppression as a geopolitical strategy. When evidence-based policy is reframed as partisan ideology, long-

25 Kinsey Spears and Emily Prey, "Why U.S.-China Relations Need a Gender Analysis," New Lines Institute, March 3, 2022, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/gender/gender-as-an-analytical-tool-for-foreign-policy/why-u-s-china-relations-need-a-gender-analysis/>.

26 Kathryn Beck, "The authoritarian playbook in action: Insights from Trust Conference 2025," Thomson Reuters Foundation, November 13, 2025, <https://www.trust.org/2025/11/13/the-authoritarian-playbook-in-action-insights-from-trust-conference-2025/>.

27 Frank Langfitt, "Hundreds of Scholars Say U.S. Is Swiftly Heading Toward Authoritarianism," NPR, April 22, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/22/nx-s1-5340753/trump-democracy-authoritarianism-competitive-survey-political-scientist>.

28 Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks, "Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women," *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 2 (March/April 2022): 103–16, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-02-08/women-rights-revenge-patriarchs>.

29 New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, "The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China's Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention," March 2021, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Chinas-Breaches-of-the-GC3.pdf>.

30 Kateryna Busol, "Russia's Weaponising of Sexual Violence, and Ukraine's Response, Reveals a Grim War of Values", *The Guardian*, March 25, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/25/russia-weaponising-sexual-violence-ukraine-values>.

**Adversaries will exploit this disadvantage, expanding influence in domains vacated by the United States, while American foreign policy becomes increasingly reactive, militarized, costly, and less effective.**

standing government and civil society partnerships are severed, and offices dedicated to marginalized populations are dissolved, the United States mirrors the institutional practices of authoritarian competitors in a trajectory that characterizes democratic backsliding.

The removal of prevention-focused diplomatic infrastructure fundamentally alters American power projection by eliminating alternatives to military intervention. This change increases the likelihood of offensive military action by removing specialized expertise, early warning systems, and coordination mechanisms essential for conflict prevention. In the absence of diplomacy, policymakers are left with binary choices between military intervention and strategic abandonment, lacking the infrastructure and expertise to pursue cost-effective, research-based prevention strategies. China and Russia treat bureaucratic continuity and specialized expertise as strategic assets, preserving institutional capacity as tools of long-term state power, while the United States dismantles in months what took decades to establish. The consequences are clear: increased conflict, diminished prevention capabilities, greater loss of American lives, higher fiscal costs, and accelerated erosion of global prestige. Adversaries will exploit this disadvantage, expanding influence in domains vacated by the United States, while American foreign policy becomes increasingly reactive, militarized, costly, and less effective.

### **Beyond WPS**

The elimination of the capacity to implement WPS represents far more than the termination of a single policy initiative or office – it constitutes a fundamental challenge to congressional authority and the constitutional separation of powers. This is not about WPS specifically but about legislative power generally and the precedent being established for executive nullification of statutory mandates.<sup>31</sup> The administration that dismantles WPS infrastructure today creates a template that tomorrow's administration can deploy against entirely different congressional priorities, whether related to defense, agriculture, education, or any other legislatively mandated program. Accepting this erosion of implementation capacity as a permissible governance strategy invites the broader undermining of congressional authority across the policy spectrum. The separation of powers depends fundamentally on Congress's willingness to defend its institutional prerogatives, not simply the content of particular policies.

### **The Fiscal Illusion**

The fiscal implications reveal a shortsighted budgetary calculus. The elimination of the Office of Global Women's Issues yields modest immediate savings of approximately \$15 million annually, but decades of conflict-prevention research demonstrate that this specialized capacity helps avert escalations that ultimately require billions in humanitarian assistance, military intervention, and post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>32</sup> This constitutes a budget gimmick in which savings accrue immediately under the current administration while costs materialize years later, likely under different leadership, with no mechanism for accountability regarding long-term consequences. The political incentives reward present-day elimination while diffusing responsibility for predictable future failures.

31 ArtI.S1.2.1, "Origin of Limits on Federal Power", Constitution Annotated, accessed November 21, 2025, [https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/artI-S1-2-1/ALDE\\_0000208/](https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/artI-S1-2-1/ALDE_0000208/)

32 Kim Thelwell, "2023 Budget Prioritizes Gender Equity and Equality," The Borgen Project, April 2, 2022, <https://borgenproject.org/gender-equity-and-equality/>.

## The Border Security Paradox

Perhaps most paradoxically, this policy directly undermines the administration's stated priority of border security by eliminating tools that address why people migrate in the first place. The root causes of displacement from Central America, sub-Saharan Africa, and other migration-source regions include pervasive violence (including gender-based violence that disproportionately affects women and children), economic insecurity (exacerbated by women's systematic exclusion from formal economies), lack of opportunity (particularly for women and youth), and political instability that worsens when half the population is excluded from governance structures.<sup>33,34,35</sup> By dismantling prevention-focused policies and programming, the administration has adopted a purely reactive enforcement approach without corresponding preventive measures – a strategy consistently documented as both more expensive and less effective than addressing root causes of migration pressure.<sup>36</sup> The contradiction is stark: prioritizing border security – a claim often viewed as a dog whistle by the Trump administration to expand presidential power – restricts the civil and human rights of migrants and asylum seekers while systematically eliminating the diplomatic and development tools that reduce the conditions generating migration flows in the first place.

## Risks of Inaction

The immediate consequences of dismantling the capacity to implement the WPS agenda are already manifesting in specific conflict theaters where U.S. influence and early warning systems have been degraded. The Democratic Republic of Congo, where systematic sexual violence has been weaponized as a conflict tactic, now lacks dedicated U.S. diplomatic attention to the gender dimensions of escalating militia violence.<sup>37</sup> Haiti's humanitarian catastrophe, driven partly by gang violence that disproportionately targets women and girls, proceeds without the specialized U.S. engagement that previously connected security sector reform to women's protection.<sup>38</sup> Sudan's civil war continues its devastating trajectory with diminished U.S. capacity to support women-led civil society organizations that have historically bridged ethnic and political divides.<sup>39</sup> In the Pacific, particularly Papua New Guinea, where gender-based violence rates are among the world's highest and directly affect political stability,<sup>40</sup> U.S. engagement has evaporated precisely as China expands its regional influence.<sup>41</sup> Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, the withdrawal of programming addressing femicide, trafficking, and women's economic exclusion removes pressure valves that prevent conditions from escalating to displacement

33 Doctors Without Borders, "Displacement and Forced Migration", Doctors Without Borders, updated November 20, 2025, <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/focus/displacement-and-forced-migration#:~:text=There%20are%20more%20forcibly%20displaced,%2C%20extortion%2C%20and%20human%20trafficking.>

34 UN News, "Millions of women and girls forced to flee face high risk of gender-based violence: UNHCR," UN News, November 29, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1157596>.

35 USAFacts Team, "What can the data tell us about unauthorized immigration", USAFacts, updated August 1, 2024, <https://usafacts.org/articles/what-can-the-data-tell-us-about-unauthorized-immigration/>.

36 Vanda Felbab-Brown, "The Biden-Harris Strategy on the Root Causes of Migration (and Fragility) in Central America," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), August 12, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/biden-harris-strategy-root-causes-migration-and-fragility-central-america>.

37 UNFPA, "Sexual violence systematically used as a weapon of war in the DR Congo," UN News, April 23, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1162536>.

38 Christopher Shell and Zuri Linetsky, "How the Trump Administration Can Make the United States and Haiti Safe Again" Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, May 27, 2025, <https://gija.georgetown.edu/2025/05/27/how-the-trump-administration-can-make-the-united-states-and-haiti-safe-again/>.

39 William Brundage, "The Case for U.S. Involvement in the Sudanese Civil War," New Lines Institute, August 6, 2025, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/political-systems/the-case-for-u-s-involvement-in-the-sudanese-civil-war/>.

40 Martha Louis, Rebecca Bush, and Virginia Harrison, "The Women Breaking the Cycle of Violence in Papua New Guinea," The Guardian, August 26, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2025/aug/27/reducing-violence-against-women-png-papua-new-guinea>.

41 Jared G. Tupuola, "U.S.-Papua New Guinea Relations: Issues for Congress," CRS Product, Library of Congress, September 11, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11255>.

crises.<sup>42</sup> The fiscal arithmetic is striking: each military intervention costs at minimum between \$2 billion and \$4 billion annually, while the entire Office of Global Women's Issues operated on roughly \$15 million per year – a ratio demonstrating that prevention is not merely more humane but exponentially more cost-effective than reactive deployment.<sup>43, 44, 45</sup>

The medium-term consequences center on irreversible institutional degradation and the establishment of dangerous precedents for executive power. The expertise developed over decades within the WPS architecture is dispersing permanently to think tanks, universities, and allied governments, taking with it institutional knowledge that cannot be reconstituted through hiring alone. The next administration, regardless of its policy orientation, will confront an impaired capacity and must choose between starting from scratch or accepting diminished effectiveness – with reconstruction costs estimated at three to five times the expense of preserving existing infrastructure. Alliance relationships are simultaneously eroding as partner nations that have invested in WPS frameworks find the United States an unreliable coordinator, forcing development of alternative mechanisms that exclude U.S. participation and influence.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps most significantly, the “impoundment by elimination” strategy has now been validated through utilizing the WPS Act as a trial to be an effective mechanism for nullifying congressional mandates, a precedent that transcends any single policy domain and threatens legislative authority across the entire spectrum of governance.

The United States' long-term strategic position will be fundamentally degraded if this trajectory continues. Its capacity for conflict prevention, already modest compared to military capabilities, has been permanently reduced, ensuring a more reactive and militarized foreign policy that is simultaneously more expensive and less effective at achieving sustainable outcomes.<sup>47</sup> Adversaries are gaining influence in the governance, civil society, and conflict mediation domains that the United States has abandoned, building relationships and institutional capacity that will shape future geopolitical alignments.<sup>48</sup> U.S. leadership is increasingly questioned globally, not simply because allies disagree with specific policy choices but because the deliberate destruction of implementation capacity signals unreliability and the subordination of long-term strategic thinking to short-term political imperatives.

Perhaps most insidiously, the elimination of expertise specifically trained to recognize authoritarian patterns and democratic backsliding accelerates these very phenomena by removing early warning systems and response tools. The patterns of democratic erosion remain visible to remaining professionals but increasingly invisible to the broader public, creating an expertise gap that makes resistance more difficult precisely when such expertise is most needed.<sup>49</sup> When the institutional capacity to recognize and name authoritarian consolidation has been deliberately dismantled, societies lose not just particular policy tools but the very ability to diagnose their own democratic deterioration.

42 Edgar Maciel, “The fallout from USAID cuts: Latin America faces a humanitarian and environmental crisis,” DevelopmentAid, February 24, 2025, <https://www.developmentaid.org/news-stream/post/191864/usaaid-cuts-to-latin-america>

43 Costs of War Project, Brown University, “Costs of War: Promoting Research and Public Awareness of the Human, Economic, Social, and Environmental Costs of U.S. Militarism,” accessed November 21, 2025, <https://costsofwar.watson.brown.edu/>

44 Noor Al-Aubi, “The costs of military intervention versus the benefits of foreign aid,” The Borgen Project, September 22, 2022, <https://borgenproject.org/costs-of-military-intervention/>

45 USASpending, Department of Defense (DoD) Agency Profile, data through September 29, 2025, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://www.usaspending.gov/agency/department-of-defense?fy=2025>

46 Tazreen Hussain and Kim Hart, “Why Is America Abandoning One of Its Smartest Tools for Peace?,” Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), July 28, 2025, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/2025/07/28/why-is-america-abandoning-one-of-its-smartest-tools-for-peace/>

47 Ibid.

48 Jovan Kurbalija, “The USAID’s closure: Soft power at a crossroads,” DiploFoundation, February 27, 2025, <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/soft-power-at-a-crossroads-the-implications-of-usaids-closure/>

49 McKenzie Carrier and Thomas Carothers, “U.S. Democratic Backsliding in Comparative Perspective,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 25, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/08/us-democratic-backsliding-in-comparative-perspective?lang=en>

## 1 CONGRESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

### Recommendations

For the first time since the bipartisan WPS Act of 2017 became law, the U.S. government has failed to submit its required report to Congress, marking a serious breach of federal law and a troubling erosion of U.S. leadership on global peace and security. In response, a shadow WPS report to Congress was released by former U.S. WPS advisers on Oct. 31, 2025,<sup>50</sup> which reiterates the law's importance, documents what has been lost due to dismantled programs and funding cuts, and calls on Congress to act immediately to restore implementation. Members of Congress should review and consider the recommendations outlined by the experts who did this work and understand the implications of the U.S. walking away from U.S. WPS commitments and obligations.

As detailed in the report, reversing the harm done to the WPS agenda during this administration will require immediate, coordinated action across multiple fronts, beginning with vigorous congressional assertion of its constitutional authority. Congress must convene oversight hearings that compel State Department leadership to explain how eliminating an entire office fulfills rather than violates statutory obligations under the WPS Act of 2017. It also must issue comprehensive documentation requests that establish a complete record of decision-making processes, cost-benefit analyses (if any were conducted), and communications regarding the office's elimination. A formal Government Accountability Office investigation should be requested to assess whether administrative actions constitute impoundment, evaluate the fiscal implications of eliminating prevention capacity, and document the broader precedent being established for executive nullification of legislative mandates.

## 2 APPROPRIATIONS, COMPLIANCE, AND COALITION-BUILDING

The FY2026 appropriations process provides a critical leverage point: Congress should include specific funding lines that cannot be eliminated through reorganization, mandate quarterly reporting on WPS implementation with consequences for noncompliance, and establish that funds appropriated for conflict prevention and women's inclusion programming must be spent for those purposes or returned rather than redirected. Beyond procedural mechanisms, success requires a sophisticated coalition-building strategy that transcends traditional partisan alignments.

## 3 REFRAMING AND COALITION EXPANSION

Some leaders recognize that conflict prevention reduces military deployment costs, that effective border security requires addressing the root causes of migration, and that relinquishing governance capacity to adversaries undermines the U.S. strategic position. These arguments should be advanced by voices within the Republican Party coalition rather than dismissed as partisan rhetoric. Simultaneously, WPS should be reframed for various audiences: for fiscal conservatives as a matter of prevention economics and long-term budget sustainability; for national security advocates as a force multiplier that reduces military burden and counters adversary influence; for institutionalists as a separation-of-powers issue that transcends individual policies; and for border security proponents as a tool addressing the causes of migration rather than merely managing its consequences. The window for reconstitution is narrow and closing. Once expertise fully disperses and institutional memory is lost, the costs of rebuilding will increase exponentially while effectiveness permanently declines.

50 "Women, Peace, and Security Shadow Report to Congress: What Was Built, What Was Lost, and Why Congress Must Act Now," Report by former U.S. government interagency leads for Women, Peace, and Security implementation, November 2025, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Q5T1PbDjnsFdPvQUjUd9wCkznpjmC4Vi/view>.

## Conclusion

The dismantling of Women, Peace and Security implementation capacity ultimately transcends its specific policy domain. At stake are foundational questions about U.S. governance and the durability of democratic institutions: Can congressional legislation be rendered functionally meaningless through administrative elimination of implementation capacity, or does the separation of powers retain sufficient vigor to ensure that statutory mandates translate into actual policy? Can evidence-based policymaking survive systematic politicization? What does it mean for national security when decisions are decoupled from decades of empirical research demonstrating what works and what fails? Does prevention capacity matter more than immediate budget savings that accrue today while costs compound silently for years before manifesting as crises, or has the political incentive structure become so distorted that long-term consequences no longer factor into executive decision-making? Can U.S. foreign policy maintain the institutional expertise and continuity necessary for effective statecraft when each transition potentially eliminates entire categories of professional knowledge?

These questions demand answers not merely from policymakers but from the American public, Congress, allied governments, and civil society organizations committed to accountable governance. Congress must reassert its constitutional authority by establishing enforceable mechanisms that prevent administrative nullification of legislative mandates – whether through mandatory reporting requirements, funding conditions that cannot be eliminated through reorganization, or consequences for executives who deliberately undermine statutory obligations. U.S. citizens should demand that their representatives explain how dismantling conflict prevention capacity advances national security and insist on accountability when short-term savings predictably generate long-term costs. Allied governments must consider whether coordination mechanisms that exclude unreliable U.S. participation better serve their security interests while maintaining pressure for U.S. re-engagement. Professional communities – in academia, think tanks, and international organizations – must document and safeguard institutional knowledge before it disperses entirely and preserve the evidence base that demonstrates prevention's effectiveness.

The precedent being established extends far beyond any single policy initiative. If this erosion of congressional authority and institutional capacity is accepted as normal, no legislated program is secure, no evidence-based policy safe from politicization, and no long-term strategic investment protected from elimination for immediate political advantage. The choice is not whether to support Women, Peace and Security but whether to defend the constitutional architecture and policy rationality upon which effective governance depends.

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