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WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

A REPORT OF THE CSIS
SMART WOMEN SMART POWER INITIATIVE

BY
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Commander Laura Richardson, commander of the United States Southern Command.
GERARDO MENOSCAL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

INTRODUCTION

What does having women sitting at international affairs decisionmaking tables ***actually*** get us? Are decisions—and is organizational decisionmaking—***actually*** improved by the inclusion of more women? Figuring that out is a tricky analytical problem. This is for at least two reasons: (1) restrictive cultural norms within organizations that grapple with foreign affairs and national security and (2) the lack of objective metrics against which to gauge success.

In the first instance, decisionmaking in international affairs and national security spaces is inherently opaque due to the necessarily secretive nature of the field. Individuals with security clearances tend not to be comfortable speaking about their work in public settings. In turn, these cultural norms discourage the kind of storytelling necessary to understand the impacts that individuals—and individual women—have had in their respective fields.

Second, unlike in the private sector, "success" in international affairs and national security matters is not easily or objectively measurable. This is because success can rarely be captured by objective economic indicators such as profit margins. Further, success is often viewed as a subjective judgment based on one's own standing on a given issue.

Recognizing these analytic obstacles, the **CSIS Smart Women, Smart Power Initiative (SWSP)** designed a qualitative research agenda to improve understanding of the contributions women have made in international affairs decisionmaking spaces. From April 2022 to December 2023, the **Smart Women, Smart Power (SWSP) podcast** hosted 54 conversations

with leading women and one man in international affairs, and in so doing, shed light on the powerful contributions that women make in some of the most influential spaces in the world.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

1 **Organizations take risks when they do not meaningfully include women's views when making decisions.**

For example, **Ambassador Don Steinberg**, former ambassador to Angola, attributes the collapse of the 1994 Angola Peace Accords to the lack of women and their perspectives in negotiations.

2 **Women appear to bring a more holistic view of issues and how they must be addressed.**

The Ukraine crisis is one of the first major international crises wherein **women have been present**, at all levels, in leadership and bureaucratic positions formulating the international response. There appears to be a correlation between their presence and the comprehensive approach that international actors have taken to supporting Ukraine.

3 **Women can serve as key assets when trying to understand on-the-ground dynamics and the root causes of organizational or societal conflict.**

From **South Sudan** to the inner workings of the **International Organization for Migration**, SWSP guests noted that women are more likely to report their issues of concern to other women. Organizations that do not create those vectors for information sharing may be overlooking or unaware of unreported tensions.

Nature or Nurture?

> **"The last thing I wanted to do for the majority of my career was to talk about being a woman in international security. . . . I'm here because I have something to contribute, not because I'm a woman."**
>
> ***Captain Erin Williams**, former commanding officer, United States Coast Guard, Activities Far East*

The question of whether one's perspective is fundamentally different due to one's gender is, for many, profoundly uncomfortable. Two principal reasons for this emerge from interviews. First, women leaders want to be viewed as experts and leaders in their own right; the notion that one's position or career advancement might be a result of gender-based favoritism or tokenism is anathema to many.

OBJECTIVES

of SWSP Podcast Research Design

- **Showcase the specific contributions that women make in international affairs spaces.**
- **Understand these women's sources of inspiration in joining these fields which are, particularly when it comes to national security, male-dominated spaces.**
- **Understand the unique advantages that having women in these decisionmaking spaces actually affords. In other words, why is it so important to have women at the table?**

> **"I'm always opposed to being thought of as a token woman. I certainly don't want to be a token woman. I don't want to be a token woman on a panel. But diversity and inclusivity, it is about people feeling seen. It's also about doing a better product most of the time, I think."**
>
> ***Dr. Heather Williams**, director, Project on Nuclear Issues, and senior fellow, International Security Program, CSIS*

Second, many find it problematic to discern a causal link between one's gender and a particular set of behaviors or common personality traits. Women are not necessarily inherently peaceful, and many women can be spoilers in organizations and political systems.

Yet intriguingly, what is clear from these interviews is that there is a significant degree of commonality between women's approaches to decisionmaking. Although discerning causal linkages is outside the scope of this research, one hypothesis that resonates with the research team is that women in international affairs fields are—and often remain—minority groups within their organizations. As a subgroup within broader organizational cultures, women may find themselves having to apply different approaches to decisionmaking and leadership roles in order to succeed. As a result, it is not necessarily women's biology that leads to

the difference in approach but rather the societal norms and embedded organizational hierarchies that women are often, and often subtly, expected to comport with.

QUESTION

What role, if any, did your gender play in the decision you took and/or its outcome?

In answering this question, participants often reflected on the ways in which their gender impacted their professional lives, the differences their perspectives brought to teams comprised of mostly men, and the kinds of attributes that they believed were more closely aligned with ideas of femininity.

Holistic Approaches to the Biggest Challenges

RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE

The Ukraine crisis resulting from Russia's invasion and occupation of eastern Ukraine continues to loom large over the international community. Several SWSP guests noted that gender—in this case, the inclusion of women—has led to a more immediate, more holistic view of the issues that need to be addressed when developing and executing the international response than we have arguably seen in prior conflicts. Ambassador Christina Markus Lassen, who at the time of the interview was the Danish ambassador to the United States, noted that for the first time there has been a significant proportion of women represented at many levels across the European and United States national security and foreign policy bureaucracies:

> **"I think [the Ukraine crisis] is the first major international crisis where there have been so many women in decisionmaking positions around the table. I mean, both among the leaders, at least when I look at the European side . . . but also, I think in bureaucracy, feeding into the process, it's the first time that I've seen all these decision supporting roles with really . . . key women . . . women were represented around the table when these major decisions were made."**
>
> ***Ambassador Christina Markus Lassen,***
> *former ambassador of Denmark to the United States*

In terms of the approach that international actors have taken to the Ukraine crisis, what is striking relative to other post-Cold War conflicts and conflict responses is the immediacy of the civilian responses in concert with military action and support. Recall that in Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003), the United States' broader post-conflict stabilization plan, developed prior to the war by the U.S. State Department, was shelved, and the decision was taken to worry about the invasion's aftermath only upon the conclusion of the first phase of the war. The lack of a meaningful, timely, coordinated civilian response was a direct causal factor for the postwar looting and instability that ensued, eventually leading the United States to become bogged down in a brutal counterinsurgency fight.

By contrast, while the response to Ukraine has significant room for improvement, one area that deserves credit is the manner in which international actors, alongside the Ukrainians, have been able to deliver multifaceted assistance packages that include civilian and military components. As Ambassador Lassen continued:

> **"It's so widely accepted that obviously military donations and weapons support is crucial for this war. But at the same time, this year Ukraine cannot survive . . . [without] help to keep the government running and to alleviate some of the humanitarian consequences and take care of the refugees until they're able to go back and even start some of that early recovery that we do in some of those cities now where there's been a push back to the Russian troops, for example, helping reestablish water and sanitation systems."**
>
> ***Ambassador Christina Markus Lassen***

Another example: EU commissioner for home affairs Ylva Johansson worked to combat the trafficking of Ukrainian refugee women and children in the wake of Russia's invasion. This was, at least to some degree, informed by her more holistic view of what constitutes security and how it can be achieved:

> **"But I think it's maybe a little bit easier to imagine what could happen when you are in this vulnerable situation, and when I called the head of Europol, the executive director, she's also a woman. And it was very easy to convince her [to act]."**
>
> ***Ylva Johansson,***
> *commissioner for home affairs, European Union*

During the interview she makes the point that a male commissioner might also have prioritized human trafficking in the wake of the Ukrainian refugee crisis; once it was apparent that it was an issue, most agreed that it needed to be tackled with speed. But she goes on to note:

> **"I think it's important to realize that there are terrible crimes that sometimes are a little bit hidden because women are the main victims. And I think it's important [to] make sure this is really high up on the agenda and then you can make a difference."**
>
> ***Ylva Johansson***

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

At least 10 participants suggested that they tended to bring a broader perspective to the issues with which they grappled with than their male counterparts. For example, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, women in leadership roles demonstrated a wider view of the issues at play and, critically, the stakeholders with whom they needed to collaborate to manage pandemic responses. **Sandra Douglass Morgan, the president of the Las Vegas Raiders**, who was, at the time, also the head of the Nevada Gaming Control Board, reflected on her experience reopening casinos that had never before been closed:

> **"But I do think, again, wanting to be collaborative and to be transparent, so people really knew what to expect. We know that women control a lot of how family dollars are spent, and want to plan, and want to know what to expect before just kind of hopping on a plane and coming to Vegas . . . And people would say, oh, people don't care about that. And I think being a woman and being a mother actually gave me a different lens on saying, yeah, you may not care about it, but people want to hear about it. And what's the harm of sharing what the process is, right?"**
>
> ***Sandra Douglass Morgan**, president of the Las Vegas Raiders*

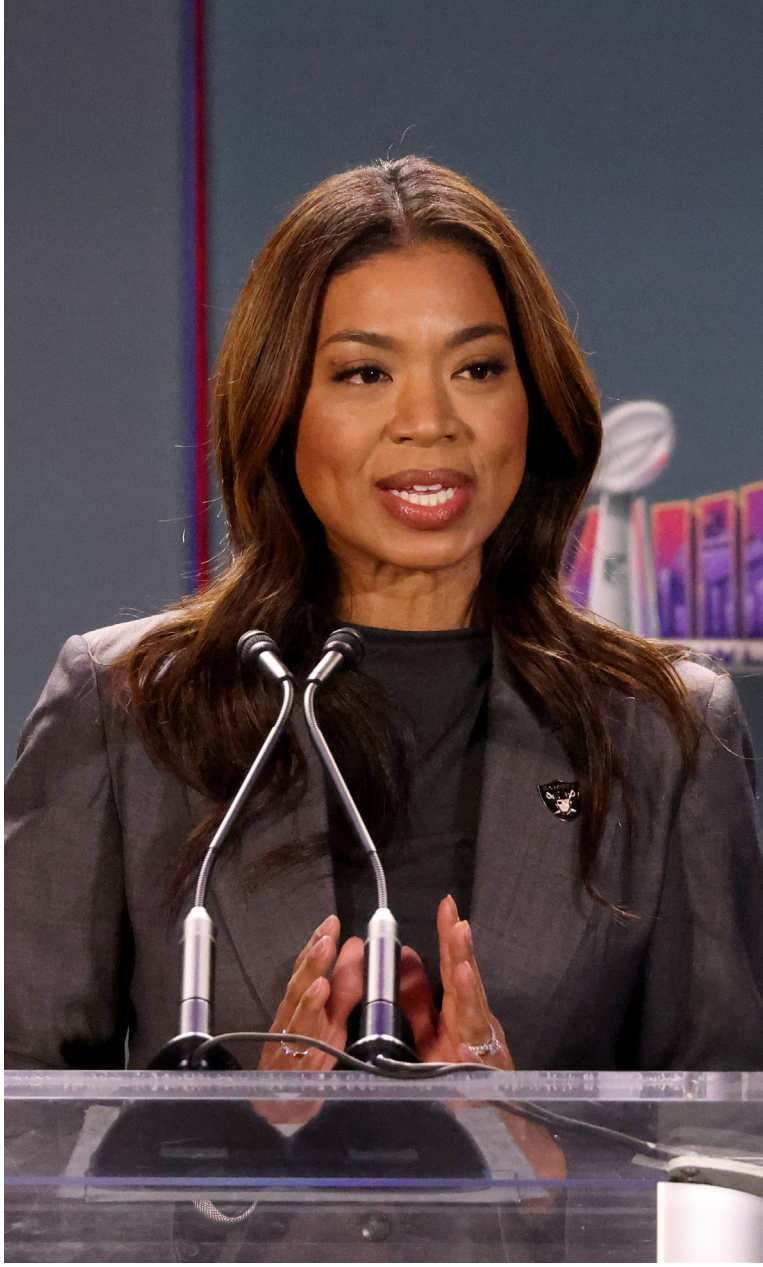
Similarly, **Michelle Nunn, CEO and president of CARE USA**, made the point that women's perspectives and needs were essential to on-the-ground Covid-19 pandemic management:

> **"When you think about the Covid crisis as an example, I think women immediately understood, for instance, what this was going to mean in terms of education and for their children, because they were experiencing it directly. I think women also—we also understood that 70 percent of the frontline health care workers that were going to deliver care and/or vaccinations were women. I think fundamentally, I think the real understanding of our interdependence, at a gut level, is I think profoundly held by women."**
>
> ***Michelle Nunn**, CEO and president of CARE USA*

Still: It's Complicated

In talking about her efforts to have human security and protection of civilians integrated into the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) 2022 Strategic Concept**, **Dr. Benedetta Berti, the head of policy planning at NATO**, brought out the complexity of discerning whether her gender played an impact on that work:

> **"Obviously, we bring who we are to everything we do, and I am very much aware of that. So, I am a woman who has worked for over a decade on conflict and worked on protection of civilian issues and witnessed firsthand the impact of conflict on civilians in general, but on vulnerable populations specifically. And of course, it is to me intuitively true that conflict has a disproportionate impact on women and girls, but also minority groups. I don't know if it's because I'm a woman. I would say it's my experience, what I brought to the table as an individual. I've been working in this field, and I've spent quite some time thinking through issues related to civilian harm mitigation. I think that definitely influences the way I look at conflict and the way I think through those issues; probably, of course, my personal experience as a woman working in some of these settings . . . I'm pretty sure that even if I don't know it consciously or unconsciously shapes the way I look at the work."**
>
> ***Dr. Benedetta Berti**, head of policy planning at NATO*



Las Vegas Raiders president Sandra Douglass Morgan speaks to the media during the Super Bowl Host Committee Handoff Press Conference on Monday, February 12, 2024.
MARC SANCHEZ/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Michelle Nunn speaks onstage at the 2024 CARE International Women's Day Dinner at National Museum of the American Indian on March 13, 2024, in Washington, D.C.
PAUL MORIGI/GETTY IMAGES FOR CARE

HIGHER STANDARDS

Ten participants noted that they felt that being successful in their organizations required them to be more prepared, more collected, and more effective than their male counterparts. **Lisa Kaplan, CEO of Alethea**, shared her own experiences on that account:

> **"I think honestly, being a woman and growing up in the national security space, you just had to be better than every male counterpart. I remember being in meetings and I got yelled at by my boss because I knew the answer, and he didn't. And I was like, 'Well, sorry for being competent and knowing the answer and saying it.' Like, yeah, it was the kind of, I, like, I actually just saved you in that meeting. I believe this is a 'you're welcome' situation. So, I just kind of grew up accepting that I was going to have to work three times harder than everybody."**
>
> ***Lisa Kaplan**, CEO of Alethea*

The sentiment that women have to work harder than their male counterparts has been a long-understood truism for women professionals:

> **"I had a female boss, man, one of the toughest bosses I've ever had when I was back in politics in Michigan. And she told me, she goes, 'Here's the deal. You want to work in this space, you're going to have to work harder. You're going to have to work longer. And you're just going to, you're going to have to be smarter because you're likely going to be the only female that's walking into the room.'"**
>
> ***Kristi Rogers**, managing partner and cofounder of Principal to Principal*

MISSION FOCUS

Seven participants noted that their core motivation to perform stemmed from ensuring that a particular task or objective that would benefit others was accomplished:

> **"I've been here for a long time. I have a lot of competence. I have a lot of energy, strengths, knowledge. My children are grown up now, and I think really I have also an obligation to use my capacity for others. . . . And now politics is my arena. So, others have other arenas. If you have the capacity to do things also for others, I think you're obliged to do it."**
>
> ***Ylva Johansson***

A HUMAN-CENTRIC APPROACH

Fifteen participants noted that they brought a more people-centric approach to their leadership and management styles. "Caring," "empathy," and "humility" were terms participants used to describe the way that they worked on teams, analyzed information, and made decisions. Yet many women experience an almost reflexive fear of being seen as caring or empathetic, as these are attributes that are viewed as being damaging to one's career or professional development. This dynamic was evident in the conversation with **Lieutenant Colonel Jody J. Daniels, chief of Army Reserve and commanding general, U.S. Army Reserve Command**, who noted:

> **"Partway through my career, I was very worried that as a female, my evaluations started talking about how I was caring. I cared for my soldiers, that I care, care, care. And I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, is this a female characteristic? Am I going to be unsuccessful because**

I'm too caring? People see me as caring. Does that translate to emotional? What does that mean? . . . So finally, I just said, "You know what? I care, but I don't care. I care about my soldiers . . . I'm just going to be me because if this is who I am and how I operate, I'm either going to be successful as that or not, and we'll move on . . . I'm just going to be me. And we'll see how that turns out.' And sure enough, it worked out just fine."

***Lieutenant General Jody J. Daniels**, chief of Army Reserve and commanding general, U.S. Army Reserve Command*

The Honorable Erin Conaton, the former under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness, reflected on her work and the role that being a woman played in some of the key decisions made at the time. Her gender's interaction with the issues at hand was perhaps subtle, yet it was important for the lived experiences of service members and their families:

"There are some decisions like when I got to be under secretary for personnel and readiness, we spent a ton of time on sexual assault and we spent—toward the end of my time there, there was a push by many military spouses for more support for autistic kids on the spectrum. And I think in an issue like that, I think my feminine side, if you will, came out a bit more because, yes, I always think about the budget. Can we afford it? What are the tradeoffs here? If we funded this by $50 million, where does the $50 million come from to support it? But again, people first and talking to predominantly moms—but not always—and the children—you know, I was able to talk to the secretary of defense who was calling back a member of Congress, kind of the human aspect of it. . . . I don't mean to suggest at all that the men in the department don't have a deep connection to what families need, but I just found myself, like, being a little bit more comfortable talking about that issue."

***The Honorable Erin Conaton**, former under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness*

DIFFERENT DECISIONMAKING STYLES

Elizabeth Shackelford, a former career diplomat, noted that in her view, an empathetic, human-centric approach is one key difference in women's decisionmaking styles as opposed to those of male counterparts. After telling the story of how women were being raped in tents outside of UN refugee camps in South Sudan—a story she only learned of because local women felt they could only trust their story to another woman—she reflects:

"I hate to be cliché and talk about women having more empathy, but women do have more empathy. It's a gross generalization, but it's a gross generalization for a reason. I think that I took the offenses more seriously. I will say, I mean, my immediate boss [was] a man. I mean he was horrified when he heard, and he was very supportive of trying to take this up. But I do believe that being a woman is essential for having the empathy and the less compartmentalized view of these conflicts."

***Elizabeth Shackelford**, former career diplomat*

Shelly O'Neill Stoneman, former special assistant to the president, described her work in the White House and balancing two incredibly important legislative agendas—START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) II and repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"—to make a point repeated in a number of SWSP podcast conversations: that women tend to be good at multitasking:

"This is why having a diverse workforce with gender parity and having women and all their diversity at the table, not to be a proponent of a stereotype, but we're really good multitaskers. . . . We can do a lot of things at once. This was one tenth of my day job. My day job was answering every single national security issue that either the White House was driving or that was incoming."

***Shelly O'Neill Stoneman**, former special assistant to the president*

Dr. Maryna Baydyuk, president of United Help Ukraine, amplified this point in another SWSP conversation as she explored why she believes women are so good at multitasking:

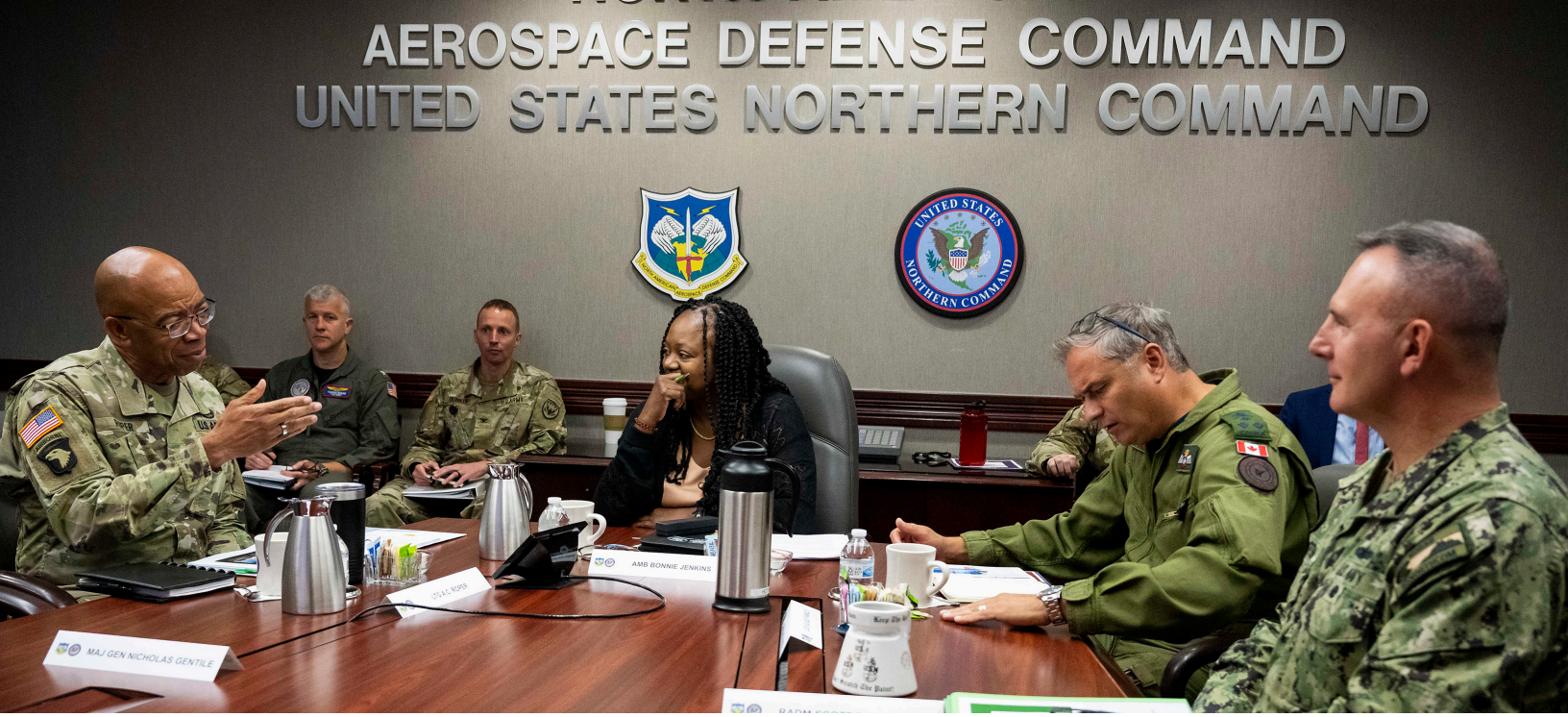
"Women are good at multitasking. This is our superpower. If men can, you know, focus on one task, women certainly have a better idea of how to do several tasks at once. And I think this is something that a lot of women in our organization do. So, they multitask, they have families, they have jobs, and they have this organization that they dedicate their time [to]. But also choosing some of the projects, some of the programs, I think we come from a motherly perspective, I would say. So, we want to make sure that people survive, they get enough help and they're taken care of. We have started several psychological projects this year. And those are for rehabilitation of children with postwar trauma. This is something that will go on for years."

***Dr. Maryna Baydyuk**, president of United Help Ukraine*

INCLUSIVITY

Several women noted that when taking on a challenge, they reflexively look to build teams in order to do so. For example, Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, under secretary for arms control and international security, noted:

"I'm very inclusive, making sure everyone's input is there. That's how I approach things. Now, some of those characteristics have been more tied to a female perspective. That's probably how I would put it. Because I don't want to offend anyone who's going to say, 'Oh, you're just—' Those characteristics have, in a positive way, been identified as [ones] that women



Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins visits NORAD and USNORTHCOM at the commands' headquarters on Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado, August 30, 2023.
JOSHUA ARMSTRONG/DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

bring to the table. Which is why the studies say that, you know, when [women are] in peace negotiations, peace tends to last longer."

Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins,
under secretary for arms control and international security

SOLVING PROBLEMS OUTSIDE FORMAL STRUCTURES

Five interviewees noted that they saw themselves as being more willing to go outside of formal decisionmaking channels when it came to making progress on an issue or resolving a problem. The SWSP interview with **Elizabeth King, majority staff director for the Senate Armed Services Committee**, outlined an intriguing point that highlights the strategic efficacy of inclusivity. Namely, women and women's relationships can create new pathways for cooperation in high-stakes political arenas like Capitol Hill:

"But the women senators do have relationships outside the offices, and they do have dinners together. And I think that helps. And there is a natural friendliness there or willingness to, you know, to do something, to get to know each other . . . this is completely a people business, and it's who the people are and who they're willing to work with. And thinking about everybody's needs and having the voices to remind everyone of their needs, I think is the way we're going to go forward and make it better for everyone and more inclusive for everyone in the military."

Elizabeth King,
majority staff director for the Senate Armed Services Committee

DIFFERENCE IN PERSPECTIVE

A frequently heard argument is that diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are needed in order to ensure that government—and therefore public policy—reflects some of the lived experiences of the people it serves. In the words of the **Honorable Anita Anand, former Canadian minister of national defence**:

"I would say that I believe fundamentally in the importance of having women at the decisionmaking table in many capacities, in every institution. And one of the reasons I ran for office was because I believe that the demographic composition of our population should be reflected in our institutions—whether it's government, whether it's hospitals, whether it's universities—and the list goes on. And so that's the general frame that I carry with me all day every day."

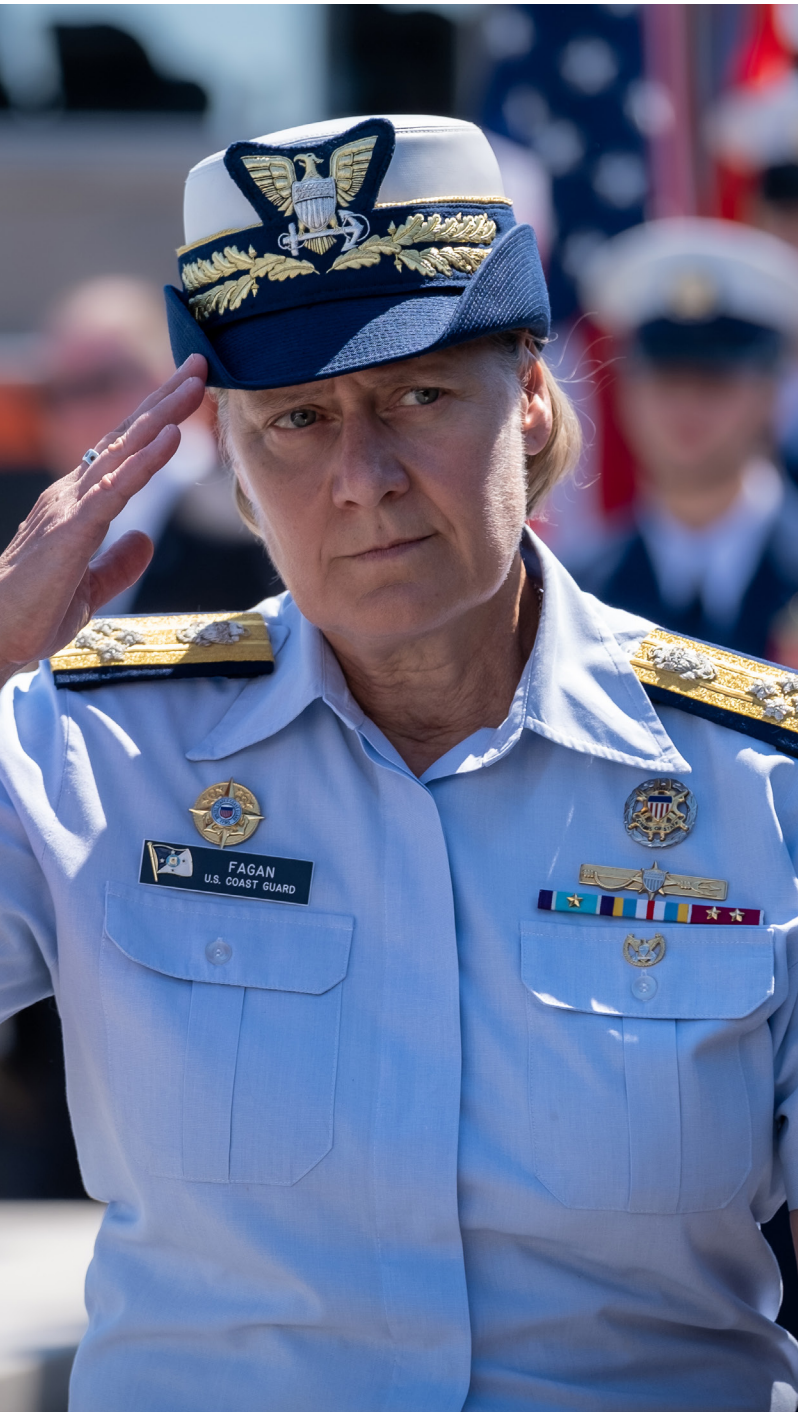
Honorable Anita Anand,
former Canadian minister of national defence

Admiral Linda Fagan, commandant of the United States Coast Guard, elaborated on the benefits of having diverse teams, noting that diversity impacts not just what was what was said in decisionmaking spaces, but what was understood:

"You know, the number of times that I've come out of a meeting—this isn't unique to now, this has been happening for years. You come out of a meeting, and you're talking to a male counterpart and offer a perspective, and they'll offer [a] perspective. And I think, like, were we even in the same room, right? It's so different what they took out of the—out of the meeting. And so, for me, it just highlights how critical

it is that we bring that differing perspective into the room. And I—you know, I do not have all the answers at this point. And so, I lean heavily on a team of advisors who bring that perspective and strength and opportunity into the equation."

***Admiral Linda Fagan**, commandant of the United States Coast Guard*



Admiral Linda L. Fagan, Commandant of the Coast Guard, salutes as she is called on stage during a celebration of the construction of the Coast Guard Museum in New London, Connecticut on August 19, 2022.
PETTY OFFICER 1ST CLASS BRANDON GILES/U.S. COAST GUARD

Shelly O'Neill Stoneman, when talking about her role in repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell—the policy of requiring LGTBQ+ service members to remain in the closet while serving in uniform—noted:

"But when you think about it from the perspective of this was as, as I mentioned at the time, impacting like over 50 percent of [Don't Ask, Don't Tell] discharges were women. Can you imagine if that conversation is literally only being held by men?"

Shelly O'Neill Stoneman

No Impact

Gender is not the critical variable in all cases. Some issues—some challenges—transcend gender differences and differences in approach. Five participants maintained they did not believe their gender had a meaningful impact on the decision they chose to discuss during interviews; rather, anybody would have likely made the same judgement call given the circumstances. For example, **Erin Clancy, former career diplomat**, believes that anyone in her position would have worked to save the White Helmets in Syria—regardless of gender (although she notes later in the podcast that gender impacted her life in different ways while at the U.S. State Department):

"But in this decision point, Kathleen, gender was not a factor overall in the outcome of saving 400-something lives, earning the State Department's highest award despite the department's reticence. They, everyone, liked the outcome. And I think I have to be fair and in generous of heart to colleagues who weren't supportive initially. I think everybody in the U.S. government, every American was supportive of doing anything and everything we could to help save those folks."

***Erin Clancy**, former career diplomat*

QUESTION

Why did you decide to join the field of international affairs?

Guests were asked to share their "origin story" and reflect on the specific set of circumstances or relationships that led them to pursue an international affairs-oriented career.

► The college experience

Twenty-three participants stated that they were hooked on a career in international affairs through either a set of relationships or experiences they had during their university

years. A further four referenced their experience interning in an international affairs-oriented organization that led them to pursue their chosen careers.

► Childhood

Eleven participants noted that they felt they could trace their interests in their respective fields through some kind of childhood experience. Several further noted that it was an experience with a family friend that gave them exposure to their career field.

► Crisis moment

Nine participants reflected that it was a moment of international crisis, such as the September 11, 2001, attacks, that led them to pursue their paths. The crisis served as a moment of clarity and mission focus; many participants decided they wanted to help their country solve the hard strategic problems that the moment made apparent.

► Building a better world

Six participants reflected that they were motivated by the idea of making their organizations, communities, and countries better, safer places.

The above suggests the importance of reaching out to—and connecting with—women early in their careers. It also points out the heightened call to service: the desire for many women to find solutions and contribute to organizational problem solving in the wake of international crises.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS

Risks of Gender Inequality: Missing Critical Decision Inputs

One dynamic that the SWSP podcast highlights is the risks that gender inequality poses to organizational decisionmaking. Had women not been present in the spaces discussed by interviewees, there is a significant chance that vital perspectives would have been absent. In the case of South Sudan, women outside of UN refugee camps only felt comfortable sharing the ground truth of the egregious human rights violations in the area with another woman. On Capitol Hill, women's perspectives are vital in debates about the future of the U.S. military force, in which women are becoming a larger demographic. And in the case of the Angola Peace Accords, the absence of women at the negotiating table meant that key perspectives that were essential to understanding the root causes of the conflict were also missing, leading to the peace accords' collapse:

> **"First, the agreement didn't require the participation of women in the peace implementation body. And so typically we would have 40 men and no women sitting around a table. What that did was silence women's voices. It meant that issues like sexual violence and human trafficking and abuses by government and rebel security forces, girls' education, reproductive health, were all given short shrift, if they were addressed at all. And these were some of the reasons for the instability in Angola that led to the civil war."**
>
> ***Ambassador Donald Steinberg,***
> *former United States ambassador to Angola*

Ambassador Steinberg went on to note that when mentoring foreign service officers, one's career can be negatively impacted by failing to think about women and girls in the issue sets they grapple with:

> **"You know, your peace process is two-thirds more likely to fail over the next decade if you don't involve women, and you, for the rest of your career, will be associated with a peace process that has failed. You're not going to get another assignment and it's going to impact the rest of your career."**
>
> ***Ambassador Donald Steinberg***

Despite this recognition of the criticality of women's inclusion, Ambassador Kelley Currie, former U.S ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, points out that there is still a long way to go towards meaningfully representing women's views in key decisions and at key decision tables:

> **"I saw it at the UN where the same group of white male negotiators was sent to do peace negotiations and women were kept out of the rooms and that mattered. And then, 'Oh yes, we have to do some Women, Peace, and Security activity.' You're like, 'No, Women, Peace, and Security is not an activity. It's not fairy dust. You don't sprinkle it on something.' It's got to be like integrated from the beginning. And you've got to look at women as integral parts of solving the problem. Not as, [we've] got to have a box checking exercise. You saw this with Afghanistan. I would just constantly be fighting. I'm like, 'Where are the women?' We need to listen to the women. They are telling us things. You need to listen to them. Why aren't you listening to them? They have knowledge, they have information. They are the front lines of this."**
>
> ***Ambassador Kelley Currie,***
> *former U.S. ambassador-at-large for global women's issues*

Amy Pope, who now leads the International Organization for Migration, argued forcefully for the inclusion of women in order to mitigate against gender-oriented blind spots:

"I went to a displaced persons camp just outside of the Darién in Panama. One of the first things that was evident were that the bathrooms available to people in the camp were way at the back in the dark in a corner. And you think about it just for a second, how you would feel going to the bathroom and the potential for sexual violence that exists; for better or worse, that is a point of view that I and many women will bring to the issue set that is extraordinarily valuable in ensuring that we are protecting all people."

***Amy Pope**, now director general of the International Organization for Migration*

Indeed, Kristi Rogers powerfully noted the very fact that she was a woman allowed her to experience and understand the Iraq conflict in ways that her male counterparts could not:

"And we can, we, the giant we, that us females, you know, we do bring a different perspective. Like when I was on the ground . . . in Iraq, a lot of times I was the only female . . . and I had to respect the culture and I had to learn that, you know, sometimes you can't walk in front of a sheikh, right? There were a lot of things that I could do, a lot of conversations I could have that men couldn't, that was extraordinarily eye-opening for me. And there were a lot of things that were happening on the ground that as a female, I just wasn't equipped to do. Like, I wasn't equipped to put 500 pounds of rucksack across my back and, you know, and if my comrade in front of me got shot or wounded, I wasn't—keep my ruck and then grab my comrade—I couldn't do that. But some of the other things, getting into a small village and having a conversation with a group of women about where their husbands were, you know, that's something different."

Kristi Rogers

If we're going to be able to solve this puzzle that we call strategic competition, we need to have our people empowered, being their authentic selves in these decisionmaking spaces.

***Dr. Kathleen McInnis**, director of the Smart Women, Smart Power Initiative*

Risks of Gender Inequality: Cultures of Quietness and Bad Decisionmaking

There is also the matter of gender equity and the extent to which it influences organizational culture and norms. Put candidly, when women are vastly outnumbered by their male counterparts—which is often the case in national security and international affairs institutions—they often implicitly feel compelled to comport with the norms and behaviors of their male counterparts.

"To have gotten a seat at the table, you're doing the balancing act of expressing yourself more in a way that is comfortable for a male group."

The Honorable Erin Conaton

This can have a dampening effect on the willingness of women to trust in and assert their unique viewpoints, which in turn can damage an organization like the U.S. government's ability to accomplish its objectives:

"We often tend, as women in this field, to not prioritize the issues like human rights and violence against women, you know, gender-based violence, because it feels like the soft thing and we're always trying to overcome that baseline that women are soft."

Elizabeth Shackelford

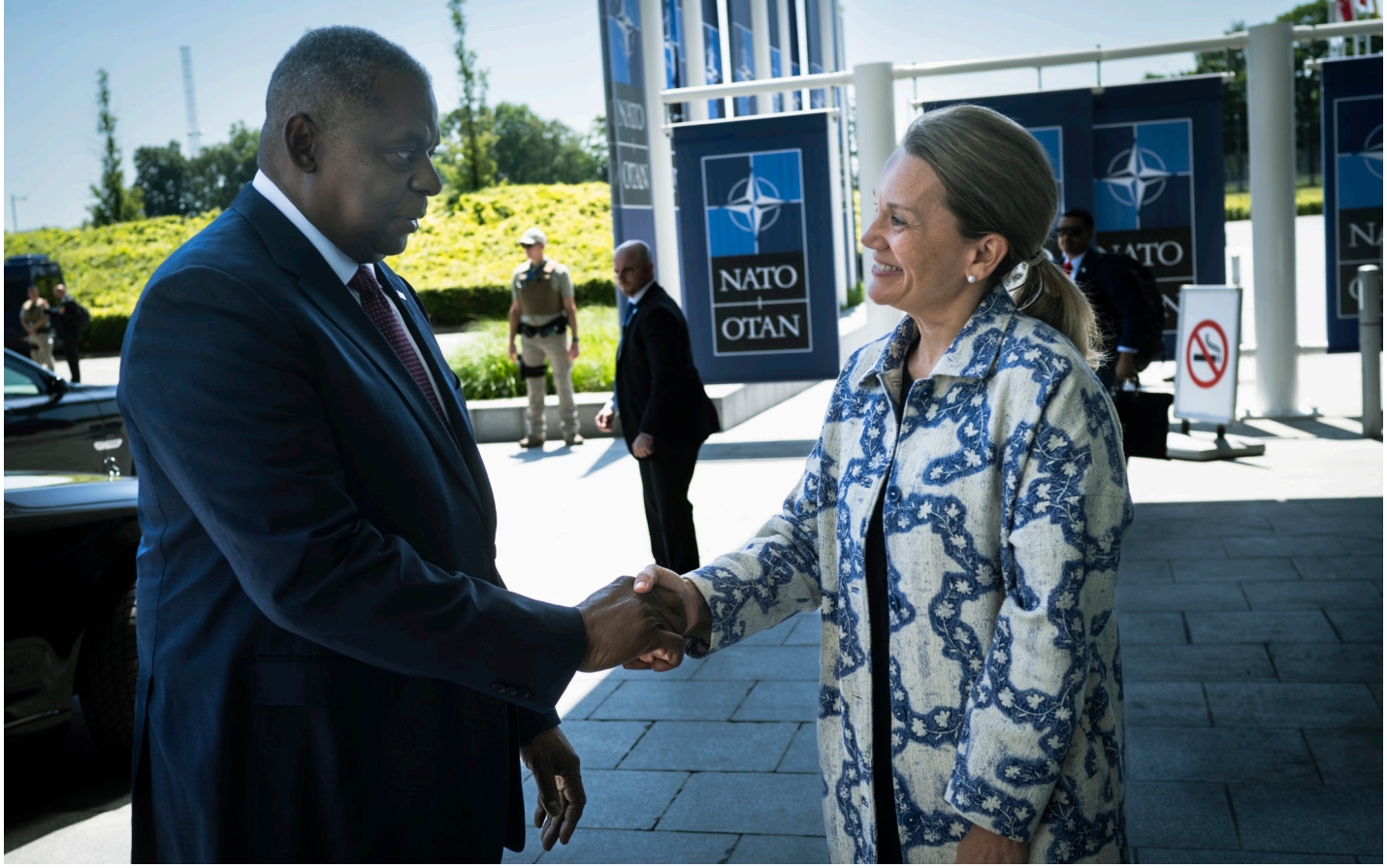
Conversely, organizations with greater gender equity tend to create spaces in which women feel more comfortable raising their viewpoints and contributing to solution building, often with better, more sustainable decision outcomes:

"I've witnessed it firsthand. If you're the only woman at the table and it's all men, it's sometimes hard to get your point across and to insert an alternative viewpoint. But when I see multiple people bringing diverse perspectives to the table, it's a much richer set of conversations. And we ultimately, as a government or as a corporation, you benefit from that. So, I will continue to stay focused on that day after day, and support efforts that can showcase the value of diversity."

***Ambassador Julianne Smith**, permanent representative to the United States Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*

This is why leaders like Admiral Linda Fagan prioritize creating spaces where people have voice and value:

"Diverse work teams out-perform non-diverse work teams. And so this, you know, is also about readiness and resiliency of the force. And effectiveness, and perspective. And, you know, when I use the term "diversity," I use it as broadly as possible. It's not just gender and ethnicity. It's everything that makes each



Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III greets U.S ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith at NATO headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, June 15, 2022.
CHAD J MCNEELEY/U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

of us different and unique, because it brings—it brings strength and resiliency to the team in a really key way. . . . I just try and create the environment where people feel safe and valued and have a voice. You know, you're in the room for a reason. So, you know, be empowered to share that perspective. Don't presume that I've got the same perspective. And it's really been a—it is a privilege, leading this organization and advocating for the incredible workforce that is the United States Coast Guard."

Admiral Linda Fagan

Importance of Allyship

The importance of allyship was another theme that was reflected in many of the SWSP conversations. Men have been instrumental in mentoring, cultivating, and propelling many women to the next levels in their careers, something for which many women express sincere gratitude. In the words of Captain Erin Williams:

"But in that the powerful role that men have played in my life as mentors, again, seeing me, recognizing me, and pushing me forward to excel. I mean, that's something that is noteworthy as well."

Captain Erin Williams

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The value of including women in decisionmaking in the national security and international affairs fields is obvious from the many interviews covered in this paper. Whether due to innate or social differences in priorities, or because of their frequent status as a minority at the table and of the perspective that lends, women enrich and strengthen decisionmaking at every level. It is to everyone's benefit, and is therefore everyone's responsibility, to reach out to women early in their career paths in order to let them know there is a spot for them at the table, that they are welcome—and that they make a critical difference in the organizations and institutions they are part of.

This report was made possible due to support from Thales, Lockheed Martin, and BAE Systems.

APPENDIX A

Methodology

Most SWSP podcast interviews explored a decision that guests either took themselves or supported as part of a team within a large organization. All guests, bar one, identified as female. Guests were asked to set the scene and describe the issue that they were confronted with, who the stakes and players were, and what the ultimate outcome was. In order to facilitate cross-case comparisons within each conversation, the discussion of the decision was bounded by two key questions:

- **Why did you decide to join the field of international affairs?**
- **What role, if any, do you think your gender played in the decision or its outcome?**

It was clearly stated both before and during interviews that the answer to the latter question could be an assessment that their gender played no role in the decisionmaking process. Transcripts of podcasted conversations are posted on the CSIS website.

In terms of overall research design, SWSP employed a **most alike** case study approach. This allowed the research team to build a body of case studies that illuminate the subtle differences between women's views on their own contributions to international affairs-oriented fields. SWSP also utilized a grounded theory-informed analytic approach to case study analysis—that is, key themes and insights were developed based upon the insights from the case studies themselves.

Answers to questions were organized by theme. As different individuals use different language to express themselves, coding was done by assessing the overall sentiment being expressed rather than unique key words per se. Several themes were often expressed within single interviews.

Individuals' titles included generally correlate with the decisions that they discussed.

APPENDIX B

Podcast Guest List, 2022–2023

Elizabeth Shackelford

Shawn G. Skelly

Erin Clancy

Shelly O'Neill Stoneman

Lara Seligman

Anita Anand

Elizabeth King

Kristen Silverberg

Phyllis Wilson

Celeste Wallander

Amy Gilliland

Erin Conaton

Bonnie Jenkins

Lisa Kaplan

Maryna Baydyuk

Julianne Smith

Ylva Johannson

Enoh Ebong

Kamila Sidiqi

Erin Williams

Kelley Currie

Sandra Douglass Morgan

Jenny Ström

Julie Callacott

Christine E. Wormuth

Michelle Nunn

Christina Markus Lassen

Benedetta Berti

Gayle Smith

Linda Fagan

Morgan Ortagus

Amy Pope

Kristi Rogers

Paula Dobriansky

Shannon Clark

Mollie Breen

Donald Steinberg

Chris Levinson

Judith Batty

Ashley Davis

Heather Williams

Kari Bingen

Laura Richardson

Caitlin Chin

Samantha Kutner

Kathleen (Taffy) Kingscott

Leila Sadat

Masih Alinejad

Jody Daniels

Susan Markham

Mackenzie Eaglen

Natalia Gavrilita

Sherri Goodman

Ashley O'Connor