

WPS Opens New Horizons for Japanese Diplomacy: Toward “Dignified Japanese Diplomacy”

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The year 2025 marked the 25th anniversary of the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Over the past quarter-century, Women, Peace and Security (WPS) has developed significantly as an international norm promoting the protection of women in conflict and their participation in decision-making. Today, its significance is expanding further, as WPS is evolving into a policy concept that calls for reconsidering the very nature of security itself.

Since 2025, the Japan Forum on International Relations has been conducting the Study Group for Applying Japan’s Strengths to Further the WPS Agenda with grant support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Through sustained dialogue with researchers, practitioners, and civil society actors in Japan and abroad, as well as overseas research institutions, the study group has examined the distinctive characteristics of Japan’s approach to WPS and its future direction. Its work has included a systematic analysis of Japan’s three National Action Plans (NAPs), comparative research with European and North American countries, and discussions on increasingly important issues such as Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in the digital sphere and cognitive warfare. Through these multifaceted inquiries, one conviction has emerged.

WPS is no longer merely one field of “women’s policy.”

The security environment today differs markedly from that of a quarter-century ago. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has once again brought the reality of interstate war into sharp relief. At the same time, the front lines of security have expanded into society itself, encompassing disinformation and cognitive warfare, the rapid development of artificial intelligence, information manipulation in cyberspace, and online harassment. As the information environment underpinning democracy becomes increasingly unstable and social divisions deepen, the participation and resilience of diverse actors, including women, young people, and civil society, have become essential elements supporting national security itself.

In this new era, WPS should therefore be repositioned not as a policy for “protecting women,” but as a national strategy for strengthening the resilience of society as a whole. Japan’s approach to WPS possesses distinctive strengths that can respond to this changing environment.

Japan has long embraced human security as a principle of its diplomacy, pursuing policies that protect the dignity of every individual through disaster risk reduction, education, health, development cooperation, and the inclusion of local communities. Japan's First National Action Plan established the conceptual foundations of its WPS policy, the Second advanced its institutionalization, and the Third broadened its scope. In this way, Japan's approach to WPS has developed along its own trajectory while remaining rooted in the principle of human security.

The Fourth National Action Plan, however, must go a step further. Responses to TFGBV, cognitive warfare and disinformation, gender-related challenges in the AI-driven information environment, and the strategic resilience of democracy and social trust should be positioned as core elements of the WPS agenda. Ultimately, this would be an effort to adapt human security, a guiding principle of Japanese diplomacy, to the security environment of the Reiwa era.

As this research progressed, it also prompted me to reconsider the nature of diplomacy itself.

At an open class held at Utsunomiya University last November as part of the WPS Special Colloquium, I asked the students a simple question: "Do you practice diplomacy?" Diplomacy is not the work of governments alone. It is the practice of engaging in dialogue with people from different backgrounds, building trust, and seeking mutual understanding. The accumulation of these efforts sustains society and, ultimately, the international community.

Over the past year, however, repeated discussions with experts and civil society representatives in Japan and abroad have led me to recognize something even more fundamental. Diplomacy does not begin with agreement. It begins with respect. Respect is necessary precisely because values differ. Dialogue is necessary precisely because cultures, religions, interpretations of history, and political systems differ. It is only through an attitude of mutual respect that trust can develop, cooperation can emerge, and the foundations of sustainable peace can be built.

Drawing on this insight developed through approximately a year of WPS research, I would like to propose a new guiding concept for Japanese diplomacy: "GRACE-Japan (Dignified Japanese Diplomacy)." GRACE-Japan does not simply refer to elegance or refinement. In an era of deepening division and confrontation, it represents the dignity that Japanese diplomacy should embody: respecting the dignity of others, acknowledging differences, and working together to foster peace. It offers a guiding principle for further developing the "people-centered diplomacy" that Japan has pursued through human security in a "shared-spheres" international order.

GRACE consists of the following five principles.

G — Grow Together

Grow together. Peace cannot be sustained if it serves the interests of only one side. Mutual development and trust support a stable international order.

R — Respect Diversity

Respect diverse values and cultures, as well as the dignity of every individual. Dialogue does not begin with agreement, but with recognizing differences.

A — Act Together

Translate principles into action. WPS gains strength only when it moves beyond principle and is put into practice through policies, institutions, local communities, and civil society.

C — Connect Communities

Connect people with people, societies with societies, and states with states. In a “shared-spheres” international order, creating connections is Japan's central diplomatic role.

E — Empower Everyone

Empower every individual. Foster a society in which not only states, but also women, young people, civil society, and local communities become active agents of peace and security.

I believe that these five principles reorganize, in the language of Japanese diplomacy, the values that WPS has cultivated over the past quarter-century.

The world is now moving into an era in which international order can no longer be sustained solely through agreement on values. In the new international environment that I describe as a “shared-spheres” international order, diverse actors must coexist within the same international system while holding different values.

The diplomacy required in such an era should ask not “Whom should we confront?” but “With whom can we build the future?”

Japan has long advocated the principle of human security to the international community and has steadily built trust through development, disaster risk reduction, education, and the rule of law. This experience resonates deeply with the principles of WPS. Precisely for this reason, as Japan prepares to formulate its Fourth National Action Plan, this may be an opportune moment to redefine WPS not merely as a component of women’s policy, but as a guiding principle of Japanese diplomacy itself.

GRACE-Japan is not simply a diplomatic technique. It is a new diplomatic vision from Japan to the world that seeks to protect human dignity, respect diversity, and build sustainable peace through trust and dialogue in a “shared-spheres” international order.

I hope that the next 25 years of WPS will become the era of GRACE-Japan.

(This is the English translation of an article written by TAKAHATA Yohei, Distinguished Research Fellow and Executive Director at the Japan Forum on International Relations, and President, The Global Forum of Japan. The original Japanese version was published on the JFIR website on July 1, 2026.)