**Gender and Foreign Policy**

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**Summary:** While explicit efforts at gender mainstreaming in foreign policy are relatively recent, a view of foreign policy through a feminist lens illustrates that foreign policy has always been gendered. Feminist scholarship in this area suggests that masculinity has historically shaped foreign policy in important ways, while the increased presence of women in national governments, government cabinets, and the diplomatic corps has produced some notable change in policy outcomes.

An examination of two key concepts related to policymaking and gender—securitization and gender mainstreaming—shows how gender issues have come to the forefront of national and international security agendas since 2000. In particular, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda promulgated by the United Nations has obligated individual states to address gendered security issues, and dozens of countries have responded with their own National Action Plans. While these national efforts have led to some improvement in the status of women and related humanitarian outcomes, feminist scholars generally agree that the WPS agenda has stalled in its efforts to produce transformative change. As a way forward, feminist foreign policy stances promise to produce more comprehensive outcomes; though a backlash toward gender mainstreaming and the re-emergence of more traditional security threats has led to questions about the future of such efforts.

**Keywords:** gender, gender-based violence, gender mainstreaming, securitization, masculinity, feminism

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**Introduction**

While the notion of “gender mainstreaming” has gained purchase in policy circles over the past 15-20 years, scholars who view international politics through a feminist lens would be quick to point out that foreign policy has always been gendered. As Tickner puts it, “feminists have… been suspicious of what they have claimed are ‘gendered states,’” whose institutions (both inward- and outward-facing) have been constructed to preserve and promote the interests of privileged groups (Tickner, 2001, p. 122). This has led many feminist scholars to view both institutions and policies as androcentric, normalizing the male point of view while simultaneously devaluing activities central to the female experience (Runyan & Peterson, 2013, p. 72).

Employing a feminist lens in foreign policy analysis means understanding that it is not just policymakers who are gendered. Policies, institutions, and the methodologies by which we assess outcomes can all be inflected based on our notions of gender. For feminist political scientists this often means that foreign policy issues which are feminized, like health and welfare, sexualized violence, and domestic violence, are often deprioritized in favor of issues deemed more important by predominantly male policymakers. A feminist perspective can also inform why policymakers view issues important to women as disposable and temporary, rather than as issues requiring ongoing commitment.

The following sections provide an overview of research that illustrates the role gender plays throughout foreign policy debates. First is a discussion of how the gender of policymakers shapes outcomes, with special attention to the ongoing underrepresentation of women in diplomatic circles. This is followed by a discussion of feminist perspectives on securitization, a dynamic that has proven a double-edged sword when applied to global gender issues. Gender mainstreaming is likewise explored, with a particular focus on the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of future directions, including the possibilities for work on masculinities in foreign policy and the emergence of feminist foreign policy.

**Sex, Gender, and Policymakers**

While the focus of domestic feminist movements has often been on forefronting issues like equal pay, family and childcare concerns, and questions of representation, scholarship on gender and foreign policy has also exposed how performative masculinity informed foreign policy decisions during the 20th century. For instance, Weber (1999) sees masculinity as an important referent point in shaping U.S. foreign policy during much of the Cold War era. Viewed as an emasculating act, the loss of American influence in Cuba under Fidel Castro becomes the impetus for (among other things) U.S. military incursions into the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Panama. Read as masculine acts, these incursions become a form of posturing, aimed at restoring the U.S. (and, by extension, its commander-in-chief) to a position as the alpha of the Western Hemisphere.

Cohn (1987) likewise exposes the encoded masculinity in Cold-War-era U.S. policies on security and defense. Hidden behind the technostrategic language of nuclear discourse, she finds language that conceals and devalues the human cost of war, sexualizes nuclear policy, and deifies those who create (and deploy) nuclear weaponry. Sociologically, she finds a predominantly male policy community that is engaged in a process of normalizing discourse surrounding some of humanity’s most devastating weapons. Through this process, Cohn illustrates how women who enter these circles can also become initiated into the process of thinking and speaking like men (Cohn, 1987, pp. 712–713).

Scholarship on Japan has suggested that foreign policy can change in concert with norms about masculinity. Mikanagi (2011) traces the history of masculinity in Japan and notes that Japanese foreign policy had tended to be more conflictual in periods when Japan was dominated by men of warrior classes, and more cooperative when dominated by the literati—like scholar-nobles or businessmen. Dobson (2014), in a review of Mikanagi’s work, notes that a period of greater assertiveness under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s administration also coincided with a 2012 election in which Japan lost 25% of its female politicians.

A feminist analysis would suggest that the masculine bent of foreign policy leading up to the 21st century is unsurprising, given that these policies were so frequently made and enforced without any substantive input from women. While today a number of countries including the United States, Sweden, Finland, and the Philippines can boast that women make up 30% or more of their ambassador-level appointments, much of this reflects growth that has occurred only within the past 20 years (Towns & Niklasson, 2017). Historically, the primary contribution of women to global diplomacy was through their status as diplomatic wives--a role that was generally unpaid labor. One retired British ambassador recalls the “considerable burden” placed on his wife by the customs that required her to (among other things) entertain a variety of visiting dignitaries, call upon the wives of other diplomats, and attend national day festivals and other events--all without pay (Barder & Roberts, 2014, p. 183). Agitation by the wives of U.S. diplomats in the 1970s resulted in the formation of a Family Liaison Office within the U.S. State Department to meet the mental and emotional health needs of diplomats’ families. In 1986, diplomatic wives from 12 European countries met to discuss a number of issues including alimony, pensions, and the possibility of pay for diplomatic housework (Enloe, 2000, Chapter 5). Eventually, the British government created the paid position of “residence manager” as a means of extending pay and employment to diplomatic spouses (Barder & Roberts, 2014). For women who were themselves diplomats, the so-called “marriage bars” that forced women in many countries to leave the foreign service after marriage were lifted during the 1970 in countries including the U.S. and UK, yet discrimination in overseas postings remained. In the United States, until a 1989 federal court ruling, ambassadors could decline to have an applicant on their staff on the basis of gender. Yet while the career prospects for women in diplomatic service have generally increased over time, vast inequalities remain.

Towns and Niklasson (2016) conducted a study that looked at both the *number* and *placement* of women in diplomatic appointments in 2014. On the whole, they found that women held only 15% of all ambassadorial appointments worldwide, with a stark difference in the number of women appointed by some countries--like the Nordic states, where over a third of all ambassador-level appointments were women--and others--including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Iran, and South Korea--that appointed no women at all. Additionally, their findings suggest that women who are ambassadors are more likely to be sent to countries with high levels of gender equality, and are less likely to receive more prestigious appointments to countries that are powerful militarily or economically. Similarly gendered patterns can be found in cabinet-level appointments at the national level. While several recent world leaders including Michelle Bachelet of Chile, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of Spain, and Justin Trudeau of Canada have made a point of pursuing gender parity in their cabinets, on the whole women tend to remain concentrated in portfolios such as health, family, education, and the status of women. Women are much less likely to receive appointment as, for example, a Minister or Secretary of Defense--a position no woman has ever held in the United States (Krook & O’Brien, 2012; Paxton & Hughes, 2013). The dearth of women in outward-facing cabinet portfolios places further limits on women’s input into foreign affairs. But even where women do have the opportunity to shape foreign policy, does the involvement of women lead to different outcomes?

Evidence from studies of gender in legislative bodies suggests that women and men do, at times, approach the same problems differently. Research indicates that states with more women in national legislative bodies and/or in cabinet positions tend to allocate more funds to development aid (Lu & Breuning, 2014). The presence of more women in government also leads to a decline in military spending and a decreased use for force in pursuit of foreign policy objectives (Caprioli, 2000; Koch & Fulton, 2011). Finally, evidence from simulations also suggests that the inclusion of women yields negotiating teams that are more effective overall, as evidenced by measures showing increased communication and creativity in negotiations where both men and women are involved (Boyer et al., 2009; Florea et al., 2003).

**Gendering Policy**

While the influence of masculinity on foreign policy debates has often gone undetected and/or unaddressed outside of feminist circles, gender issues have been at the forefront of several policy debates. The following sections explore two dynamics that produce foreign policies with gendered impact. The first dynamic, securitization, has often had the effect of minimizing concerns about gender and other social inequalities, but it is a dynamic that has at times been utilized successfully by transnational feminist networks to draw attention to gendered issues—particularly the issue of sexual violence in conflict. On the other hand, gender mainstreaming seeks to expose the gendered impact of policy, making these effects more visible and working toward policies that forefront gender. This is assessed in the context of the global agenda on Women, Peace, and Security.

**--Securitization in Foreign Policy**

The literature on securitization emerged from critical work on foreign policy and international relations, and it is most closely associated with the Copenhagen School. In his 1983 book *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, Barry Buzan explores the fluid nature of “security” as a concept, and how competing threats may be included or excluded from this agenda (Buzan, 1983). Later work builds upon this by suggesting that a wide variety of issues can be securitized, i.e. successfully presented to audiences as being central to national security, so long as securitizing actors leverage the discourse of security, create a credible sense of threat, and carry sufficient social capital to persuade audiences to internalize the threat that is being advanced (Buzan, Waever, & Wilde, 1997; Greaves, 2016).

Securitization becomes a goal because issues that are securitized receive attention and resources, while issues that are not often become relegated to the sphere of low politics. Because social capital is central to this process, securitization is often most successfully pursued by actors who already have power and often at the expense of marginalized groups. For example, research on Inuit populations in Canada indicates that native leaders have tried but failed to securitize issues important to native communities on the national stage (Greaves, 2016). In the case of refugee and migration policy in the EU, discourse presenting asylum seekers as a security threat had yielded new restrictions that expose refugees and migrants to literal and structural violence, with the effect of these vulnerabilities compounded for women (Gerard & Pickering, 2013). Gender has been a relevant consideration in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs like the one in Sierra Leone, where programing for female combatants was deprioritized in favor of programs that catered to a male combatant population that was viewed as more dangerous (MacKenzie, 2009).

In some cases, however, marginalized populations--especially women--have sought to claim the discourse of securitization with some success. In the case of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, sustained media attention and advocacy by feminist networks and other NGOs led to the securitization of rape--including prosecutions for rape as a war crime and the emergence of legal norms about wartime sexual violence (Hirschauer, 2014). In a similar vein, transnational feminist advocacy networks further advanced the agenda on violence against women, arguably opening the door to the further development of the global agenda on women, peace, and security discussed below (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, Chapter 5)*.* Generally, feminist scholars tend to view the process of securitization with a critical eye. While securitization has raised the profile of some issues impacting women, securitizing issues related to the health and well-being of women may also have the effect of pigeon-holing these concerns—paradoxically making them seem more specialized and less mainstream (Hudson, 2013).

**Gender Mainstreaming**

The term gender mainstreaming refers to the process of “integrating the principle of gender equality into any (inter)governmental policy ... to ensure that in practice it does not, wittingly or unwittingly, increase or sustain inequalities between women and men” (Runyan & Peterson, 2013, pp. 39–40; Squires, 2007). While a trend toward gender mainstreaming first emerged in the context of development policies in the late 20th century, has become much more broadly applied in recent years. Currently, over 100 countries have implemented some form of state-level bureaucracy for gender mainstreaming (True & Mintrom, 2001). While the recognition that *every* aspect of policy has a gendered impact represents a fundamental paradigm shift, the benefit of gender mainstreaming has not always been uniformly observed. Powerful forces like socialization and influential actors like religious leaders can resist the implementation of mainstreamed policies designed to empower women and transgender individuals. Institutionally, attempts to incorporate gender mainstreaming into politics without fundamental institutional reforms have sometimes served to create more bureaucracy or confine gender experts to outsider status (Runyan & Peterson, 2013, pp. 123–24).

The application of gender mainstreaming to security policies at the international level has been of particular interest to feminist researchers in foreign policy and security studies. An overview of this research illustrates how efforts to mainstream gender in this policy area has met some success, but also resistance. It also shows how the dynamic of gender mainstreaming is interrelated to the securitizing forces addressed above.

**-- -- The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda**

As noted above, international advocacy surrounding mass rape during the Yugoslav Wars of the early-mid 1990s succeeded in drawing attention to and action on the issue of gender-based violence during conflict. Sustained advocacy by transnational feminist networks and within the United Nations itself eventually led to the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which became the first in a series of resolutions seeking to mainstream gender in the processes of conflict management, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. Significantly, this resolution also outlined the obligation for individual UN member states to also address gendered issues of security, by means including:

1. Ensuring “increased representation of women of women at all decision-making levels.”
2. Incorporating training on the importance of gender issues into programs designed to prepare military and civilian personnel who contribute to peacekeeping operations.
3. Taking gender issues into account in the national treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

(UN Security Council, 2000)

Later resolutions added to the list of recommendations to national governments. UNSC Resolution 1820 noted that states bear the “primary responsibility” for protecting the human rights of citizens and those within their borders, and demanded that states take appropriate measures to act against sexual violence. It also explicitly endowed the United Nations with the authority to sanction governments whose security forces engage in sexual violence (United Nations Security Council, 2008). UNSC resolution 1888 added a call to states to reform their laws and judicial systems to ensure the adequate prosecution of those who perpetrate sexual violence in conflict (UN Security Council, 2009).

Central to the development of a WPS agenda is the understanding that men/boys, women/girls, and individuals who fall elsewhere on the spectrum of gender all deserve security, yet they experience insecurity in fundamentally different ways. As such, these differences need to be explicitly addressed in policy. While the mainstreaming of solutions to women’s experience of insecurity is certainly a step forward, a gender-based approach that treats women’s experiences as uniform across cultures is nonetheless problematic. One of the challenges of implementing the WPS agenda has been that the definition of “security” adopted by states and international organizations has not always coincided with local understandings of security/insecurity (Olonisakin & Barnes, 2011).

Adoption of the international agenda on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) with its calls to responsibility on the part of individual states has led to the creation of National Action Plans (NAPs) in over 50 states. A national action plan is “a document that outlines a policy or course of action that a country plans to follow in order to fulfill objectives and reach goals pertaining to specific national or global matters” (Miller, Pournik, & Swaine, 2014, p. 10). The first NAP related to the WPS agenda was formalized by Denmark in 2005, five years after the passage of Resolution 1325. A timeline of implementation indicates that, perhaps unsurprisingly, European countries and Scandinavian countries generally were norm entrepreneurs in this area, with 10 of the first 12 NAPs implemented by European countries including Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Miller et al., 2014). Russia and China, both permanent members of the UN Security Council, have not implemented an NAP, while Iraq became the first MENA country to implement such a plan in 2014.

While many NAPs contain similar goals, such as calls for greater inclusion of women in militaries and civilian law enforcement, and action on gender-based violence, there is some variation between countries. In the United States, the NAP was announced in 2011, two years after the country created the first ambassador-level position to head the newly renamed Office of Global Women’s Issues within the State Department. As such, the NAP was one part of a larger range of foreign policy actions on gender issues ranging from child marriage to violence against women to issues of health and nutrition (Nossel, 2016). Bosnia and Herzegovina’s plan contains action items specific to human trafficking, while the plan for Cyprus links the WPS agenda to reconciliation across ethnic groups (Hadjipavlou, 2013; Lynne, 2010; Miller et al., 2014).

For states heavily involved in peacekeeping, NAPs include foreign policy-relevant goals. Addressing the status of women in the military and police has been a goal for Nigeria, given the country’s status as a major troop contributor to international and regional peacekeeping efforts (Ikpe, 2011). Australia’s plan includes benchmark items for gender-related training programs aimed at personnel who may participate in humanitarian missions, and the 2015 annual report card cited the inclusion of more women in humanitarian operations and efforts to combat gender based violence in such operations as areas of success (Australian National University, Australian Council for International Development, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, & UN Women, 2015). The European Union, while not having a unified NAP, sought to implement UNSCR 1325 by staffing peace operations with gender advisers and undertaking a commitment to promote gender equality abroad as part of its Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men (Barnes, 2011). Individual states, such as Finland, have also developed expansive NAPs that link the WPS agenda to other policy areas, like climate change (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2012).

So what has been the impact of these initiatives? Miller at al. (2014) conducted a content analysis of 41 of the National Action Plans and found some overall troubling themes. First, of the plans they analyzed only about 5% specifically discussing how initiatives related to these efforts might be funded. Additionally, they found that the majority of plans did not specifically indicate how (and, indeed, whether) governments had consulted with civil society in the formation of the plans. More than three-quarters of plans they examined also failed to include a specific timeline for implementation.

Full implementation of 1325 National Action Plans has been hampered by a number of factors that vary from state to state. In Nepal, civil society actors were visible and well-networked; however, in the wake of the country’s civil war, the development and implementation of an NAP was slowed by a lack of capacity and human resources in the government (Abdela, 2011). In Kosovo, on the other hand, delays in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 have been attributed to both financial constraints and a lack of political will (Hall-Martin, 2011).

Generally, feminist researchers have critiqued the implementation of NAPs and the global WPS agenda as a whole as a “stalled” process (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016). Some of the concerns outlined above have raised questions about whether the implementation of NAPs in some countries has been the result of interstate “peer pressure,” rather than arising from a genuine interest and intent toward implementation (Miller et al., 2014). At the same time, others have noted the grindingly slow pace of implementation, with relatively few states having adopted an NAP by the 10th anniversary of Resolution 1325’s passage. Implementation timelines show that the adoption of such plans has actually *slowed* in recent years, following peak years of implementation from 2010-2012 (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Miller et al., 2014).

Larger, conceptual criticisms of the WPS agenda as a whole have also focused on how states have framed the role of women in theory and practice. Many plans seem to carry forward the essentialist notion that women are of interest as victims and peacemakers, while there is also the troubling tendency toward presenting “women” as a monolithic category, diminishing the differing interests and needs of women of different ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations, etc. (Hudson, 2013). The focus on women experiencing sexual violence has likewise been critiqued on the grounds that it creates moral panic and normalizes the view of “rape as worse than death,” while at the same time ignoring many other forms of violence experienced by women and girls (Otto, 2016). From the perspective of LGBTQ populations, the WPS agenda has also passed them by entirely. Despite the daily reality of physical and structural violence experienced by LGBTQ individuals worldwide, the WPS agenda has completely ignored the existence of gender identities outside of male and female. Additionally, there has been little communication between the high-level officials overseeing the implementation of the WPS agenda and the newly created UN architecture designed to promote LGBTQ rights (Hagen, 2016).

In the decade and a half since the passage of Resolution 1325, two overarching trends observed by analysts are: 1) A trend toward the narrowing of the WPS agenda, focusing on the needs of women in security emergencies or crisis situations, as opposed to interrogating the everyday violence experienced by women worldwide; and 2) a trend toward viewing women as victims rather than as participants and agents of change (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016). To address these shortcomings, some have suggested that the WPS agenda (and individual national action plans) should take on additional flexibility, addressing emergent concerns like the role of women in preventing and responding to violent extremism, or environmental issues like the threat of climate change (Humanitarian Advisory Group, 2015). Others have expressed an interest in drawing focus to non-sexual forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, and to engaging men as partners in the fight against gender-based violence—the so-called Men, Peace, and Security agenda (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016; Otto, 2016).

Several countries continue apace with the implementation of their National Action Plans, others have revised and updated their plans, and still more countries are expected to finalize plans for the first time in the coming years. The implementation of UNSCR 1325 has thus far led to some beneficial outcomes, including more women in national governments, greater attention to gender in peace operations, and improved consultation between government agencies and civil society groups dealing with women (Abdela, 2011; Australian National University et al., 2015; Barnes, 2011). However, with data indicating that--aside from slow implementation--countries have missed international targets calling for the inclusion of more women in peace operations and peace talks, significant questions hang over the future of the WPS agenda (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016).

**Future Directions**

For scholars interested in the intersection of foreign policy and gender, policies and research are proceeding in new directions. One is the emergent idea of “feminist foreign policy,” an concept explicitly adopted by the Swedish government in 2014. Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström, who coined the term, has overseen the creation and ongoing implementation of a national action plan that promises to implement “systematic gender mainstreaming, based on knowledge and analysis, throughout the foreign policy agenda, not least in peace and security efforts” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, 2016, p. 1). While the Swedish plan specifically calls for renewed efforts to assist women and girls in humanitarian, conflict, and post-conflict settings--building upon the WPS agenda--it also aims to promote the active participation of women and girls in conflict resolution and sustainable development, at the same time providing them with the resources to achieve a decent income and take control of their own reproductive health. The latter explicitly includes the goal of promoting comprehensive sex education and access to “legal and safe” abortions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, 2016, p. 11).

The emergence of this policy has been applauded by scholars working in the area of gender, who see it as a means of expanding the global WPS agenda while also addressing its failures. With a basis in what Wallström calls the three Rs: “Representation, Rights, and Reallocation,” feminist foreign policy aims to take gender issues out of the realm of gender mainstreaming and into a framework that “explicitly seek[s] to renegotiate and challenge power hierarchies and gendered institutions” (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016). In the wider political realm, policy actions explicitly linked with feminist foreign policy have met with mixed reactions. A 2015 standoff with Saudi Arabia over women’s rights and torture led to the cancellation of an arms deal, which outraged business leaders in Sweden (Nordberg, 2015; Standish, 2016). Yet later in the year, Sweden was named as one of the top three countries in terms of influence on EU foreign policy, behind Germany and tied with the UK (Standish, 2016). With some feminist scholars and advocates cautiously presenting feminist foreign policy as a logical next step beyond the WPS agenda, the success of this approach is likely to be a topic of discussion for years to come (Kirby & Shepherd, 2016).

At the same time, the global resurgence of populist nationalism raises questions about whether we might see a backlash against gender mainstreaming or a re-masculinization of foreign policy, marked by a return to more traditional security priorities. Certainly, one risk associated with the securitization of gender issues is that securitization itself is a fluid process. The emergence of new or renewed threats may create a situation in which some issues fall out of relevance, displaced by the priorities identified by newly elected/appointed political actors. In this sense, more traditional security issues like the War on Terror, geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and Russia, maritime disputes in the Asia-Pacific, and even emerging threats like cyber warfare may create a dynamic similar to what feminist scholars observed after September 11, 2001. In the weeks and months following 9/11, analysis showed that women’s voices almost completely disappeared from the media, while feminists (along with LGBT activists and civil rights advocates) were blamed for creating the societal conditions that brought about the attack (Bunting, 2001; Scheer, 2001; Tickner, 2010). The resurgence of “hard” security concerns in the wake of 9/11 created a dynamic in which heroism and machismo were celebrated, while women were viewed as a population in need of rescue (Tickner, 2010). To the extent that such dynamics are relevant, masculinity and foreign policy remains a fecund ground for future research.

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