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CANADA'S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY: PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP OR DISCURSIVE HYPOCRISY?

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JCSP 44

Exercise Solo Flight

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It's time to become a little braver in foreign policy.

– Margot Wallström, Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs

INTRODUCTION

In June 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau unveiled Canada's new Feminist International Assistance Policy¹; one indication of many that Canada's foreign policy was heading in a decidedly feminist direction. Since then, the Canadian government has announced several foreign policy initiatives that focus on feminism, gender equality and the empowerment of women, and has stated that implementing a whole of government approach to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda is a priority.² As a vocal supporter of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, current President of the G7³ and as a country seeking a rotating seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2021, it is not surprising that Canada is trying to assert itself as a global leader in gender equality.

Critics have questioned whether this policy has actual practical applications that will withstand the activities of Canadian national interest, or if it is simply discursive tokenism, that is, an image to project on the international stage. Canada's leadership ambitions in this field are not without merit but must be examined to determine if they are realistic, given some of its current international relations behaviour. The concern over

¹Emily Fearson, "The three 'r's' of feminist foreign policy," last modified 8 December 2017, <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/december-2017/the-three-rs-of-feminist-foreign-policy/>.

²Global Affairs Canada, *Canada's National Action Plan 2017-2022*, 2017, <http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/cnap-eng.pdf>.

³G7 2018, "Gender Equality Advisory Council," last accessed 7 May 2018. <https://g7.gc.ca/en/g7-presidency/gender-equality-advisory-council/>.

whether this is all policy and no practice will be examined in relation to the current world leader in the field, Sweden.

This paper will examine what lessons, if any, Sweden's four-year experiment with a feminist foreign policy can provide for the current Canadian government. The paper will first examine feminist security theories and describe why a feminist foreign policy is of interest to states. The paper will thoroughly discuss Canadian feminist foreign policy, will provide an overview of Sweden's parallel policy and briefly highlight examples in the trade and economics, security and defence, and aid and development sectors, identifying changes in Swedish international relations behaviour based on their policy. It will then make recommendations on how the Canadian government could improve its current policy, to ensure it has practical and tangible outputs that will increase its credibility as a global leader. The paper will conclude by identifying further areas of research to aid in the continued examination of this topic.

FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Feminist theory of international relations is considered a contemporary topic that has only seriously begun being explored in the past thirty years⁴, as until recently, feminism and foreign policy were seen as disparate subjects that should only be studied together with extreme caution.⁵ In the post 9/11 context, however, there is a shift towards the desire for a more comprehensive study of security in an ever changing, increasingly

⁴Claire Turenne Sjolander, Heather Smith, and Deborah Stienstra, *Feminist Perspectives on Canadian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-2.

⁵*Ibid.*

globalized world⁶. Specifically, “feminist and gender scholars have launched an important critique of the core issues of the discipline: war, peace and the quest to secure the boundaries of the nation-state.”⁷ This is of particular timeliness as there is a resurgence of feminism around much of the world. This section will provide an overview of feminist security approaches, identify what characteristics a feminist foreign policy might include, and why having such a policy is of interest to states.

Feminist approaches to security

In order to understand a feminist foreign policy, one must first understand the aims of feminist security theory (FST). The term ‘security’ is itself rife with ambiguity but will, for the purpose of this paper, be considered as a function that is entrusted to the state, who strives to protect itself from perceived external threats⁸. However, feminist academics strive to question *who* is being secured by such security policies, in a patriarchal world where security for women remains partial and elusive.⁹ Feminist security seeks to combine the central tenants of feminism and international relations (IR) theories, critical geopolitics and political geography to highlight the experiences of women within networks of power, including those of the state that can fail to protect them.¹⁰

⁶Eric Blanchard, “Gender, International Relations, and the Development of Feminist Security Theory,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28, no. 4 (2003).

⁷*Ibid.*, 1289.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*, 1290.

¹⁰Paul Higate and Marsha Henry, *Insecure spaces: peacekeeping, power and performance in Haiti, Kosovo and Liberia* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2009), 139.

Though the question posed by feminist scholar Cynthia Enlow of “where are the women?”¹¹ when delving into global politics and security concerns is being asked more often, and there is a growing rate of acceptance that gender issues must be considered in security studies, it is not enough to merely consider feminist international relations theory ‘a women’s issue’. FST focuses on *gender*, or the socially constructed associations we have between masculine and feminine norms and roles, that include interactions between groups, states, and international organizations¹². If the focus of study in this area is only on women and not gender, gaps are created, causing a potential lack of legitimacy and relevance in the field.

Why a feminist foreign policy?

Given the mounting academic research in this area, it is not surprising that ‘gender mainstreaming’ is becoming more common amongst states, as FST “interrogates the philosophical, academic and political underpinnings of gendered insecurity and articulates an alternate vision of security.”¹³ In fact, according to Eric Blanchard, Political Science professor at Columbia University, the policy world is beginning to outpace FST in its acceptance of feminist issues.¹⁴ Gender-sensitive policies are becoming increasingly prevalent since the creation of UNSCR 1325, with many individuals and organizations acknowledging that hard security issues, such as war, genocides and terrorist attacks, are

¹¹Laura Sjoberg, “Seeing sex, gender, and sexuality in international security,” *International Journal*, 70, no. 3 (2015): 437.

¹²*Ibid.*, 440.

¹³Eric Blanchard, “Gender, International Relations, and the Development of Feminist Security Theory,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28, no. 4 (2003): 1305.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 1305.

linked with issues of sex, gender and sexuality.¹⁵ It is in states' national interest to understand the gender implications of their policies, as understanding gender as a power relation or central facet of international processes¹⁶ can be to their benefit. FST argues that gender dynamics "do not just happen *to* people, but also *between* people, institutions and states in global politics"¹⁷ and strives to make the marginalized detectible in the macropolitical space. By examining how gender works, states can have a better understanding of global politics.¹⁸ This is useful, because gender never exists in isolation but is inflected through all aspects of society and power.¹⁹

Additionally, it is in states' interest to abide by the historic adoption of UNSCR 1325 and its legal obligations as ideas about gender continue to have an increased prominence. As UNSCR 1325 continues to grow into a broader framework, encompassing issues ranging from political participation to gender and sexual based violence, the growing field of feminist foreign policy continues to develop and offers practical solutions for gender inequality in both the domestic and international fora.²⁰ As explained by the Director of Oxfam Canada, feminist foreign policy is "about addressing the structural barriers to women's equality and changing the power dynamics".²¹ Proactively engaging on these issues can also result in success for the state; this was seen recently when the Swedish Ambassador to the US linked their feminist foreign policy to a

¹⁵Laura Sjoberg, "Seeing sex, gender, and sexuality in international security," *International Journal*, 70, no. 3 (2015): 435.

¹⁶Eric Blanchard, "Gender, International Relations, and the Development of Feminist Security Theory," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28, no. 4 (2003): 440.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 445.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Columba Achilleos-Sarl, "Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis)," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19, no. 1 (January 2018): 42.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 35.

²¹Emily Fearson, "The three 'r's' of feminist foreign policy," last modified December 8, 2017, <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/december-2017/the-three-rs-of-feminist-foreign-policy/>.

selection in the first round for a Security Council seat.²² Though not stated directly, it is likely that the Canadian government believes its own national interests will also be served by implementing such a policy.

CANADA'S POLICY

Canada has a long history of promoting gender equality and women's rights, which is likely why it self-identifies as a leader in this area. In the 1990s, Ottawa took the lead in international campaigns against sexual and gender-based violence as part of its peacebuilding and human security agenda and played a focal role in the adoption of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000.²³ These foreign policy activities are indicative of not just a changing world, but also a changing Canada: they reflect the influences that domestic norms and practices have on foreign policy, including the signing of the Canadian Charter, the work of Status of Women Canada, and the adoption of gender equality policies.²⁴

However, Canada's behaviour in this area has often been ambiguous and at times, contradictory, with varying levels of effort expended dependent largely on the interest of government of the day. Many of Canada's early efforts to promote gender equality were based on sound theory but were used in actuality to serve other state interests.²⁵ As an example, the Conservative government frequently used the protection of women and girls to justify their priorities and activities in Afghanistan, including increasing military

²²Fletcher Forum, "Leading a Feminist Foreign Policy, interview with Björn Lyrvall, Ambassador of Sweden to the United States," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 41, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 167.

²³Rebecca Tiessen and Stephen Baranyi, *Obligations and Omissions: Canada's Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 5-6.

²⁴Rebecca Tiessen and Stephen Baranyi, *Obligations and Omissions: Canada's Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 5.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 228.

spending and selecting ‘friendly’ governments. In this context, the instrumentalization of women and girls’ vulnerabilities was used repeatedly to justify other foreign policy priorities other than national value projection.²⁶

Other activities up to 2015, including broad Canadian government rhetoric and programming commitments to women’s health and the protection of girls have pointed to a more productive path on the promotion of gender equality, yet without tangible results.²⁷ In fact, between 2006 and 2015, Canada’s ranking on the Global Gender Gap Report fell from fourteenth to thirtieth place in 2015.²⁸ It is clear that the full picture of policy and practice together is extremely complex, with evidence of systematic challenges and only occasional successes in Canada’s foreign policy thus far.²⁹

What is Canada’s policy?

Seeing an opportunity, and with a self-declared feminist Prime Minister³⁰, the Trudeau government has strongly embraced gender equality since their election in 2015. Canadians are now seeing the beginnings of a strong gender-first approach in Canadian foreign and development policies.³¹

From a domestic perspective, the Trudeau government sought to establish itself as gender equal from the outset by immediately putting in place a cabinet that was fifty percent women. When asked why, Prime Minister Trudeau responded “because it’s

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 7.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰Robyn Urback, “You’re a feminist, Mr. Trudeau. We get it,” *CBC*, last modified 7 April 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/feminist-prime-minister-1.4059243>.

³¹Rebecca Tiessen and Stephen Baranyi, *Obligations and Omissions: Canada’s Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 120.

2015”.³² Then followed the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls³³, and this year, the gender-balanced budget which includes 358 references to gender.³⁴ There has also been a resurgence of the importance of Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), which is mandated throughout all levels of government and across all departments for both domestic and foreign policies and programming. GBA+ “examines the potential impacts of policies, programs and initiatives on diverse groups of women and men, boys and girls, taking into account gender and other factors”³⁵; its aim is not limited to bi-nary sex identification, but the cross-sectionalities of gender and other identifying characteristics. While the focus of this paper is Canada’s feminist foreign policy, one must also acknowledge the role of domestic behaviours in altering state behaviour abroad.

From a specifically international perspective, the Trudeau government has put on a decidedly gender focus since June 2017, when it first unveiled its feminist foreign policy.³⁶ Canada’s *Feminist International Assistance Policy* was immediately touted by many as potentially groundbreaking work that could gain traction globally; a policy that had extraordinary potential.³⁷ The policy, as described by Development Minister Bibeau,

³²Joanne Smith, “Conservative women: Go call them feminists, but don’t call them Liberals,” *The Canadian Press*, last modified 6 May 2018. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/conservative-women-go-call-them-feminists-but-don-t-call-them-liberals-1.3917389>.

³³Nation Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, “Our women and girls are sacred,” last accessed 4 May 2018, <http://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca>.

³⁴Margaret Wentz, “Trudeau is an insult to feminism – and to seriousness,” *The Globe and Mail*, last modified 7 March 2018. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-trudeau-is-an-insult-to-feminism-and-to-seriousness/>.

³⁵Status of Women Canada, “What is GBA+?” last accessed 20 April 2018, <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/gba-ac/index-en.html>.

³⁶Robyn Urback, “You’re a feminist, Mr. Trudeau. We get it,” *CBC*, last modified 7 April 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/feminist-prime-minister-1.4059243>.

³⁷*Ibid.*

puts women and girls “at the heart of Canadian international assistance.”³⁸ In practice, immediate changes in the policy included the re-allocation of \$150 million to support women’s leadership and women’s voice through working with female-led organizations. Within five years, fifteen percent of Canada’s bilateral development assistance will go to programs that specifically target gender equality and the empowerment of women.³⁹

On 1 November 2017, Ottawa announced its second *Canada National Action Plan* (C-NAP) on Women, Peace and Security. This plan replaces the original, which was published in 2010, after the United Nations called on member states to act⁴⁰ and indicates that the new plan requires a more ambitious approach from the Government of Canada.⁴¹ According to academic Sarah Tuckey, the second version uses gender inclusive language, includes academic research and identifies whole of government utility; in essence “the new C-NAP has been placed squarely within a new feminist foreign policy movement in Canada.”⁴² C-NAP identifies a remaining gap between words and action in the field of women, peace and security, and the new policy provides “a unique opportunity for Canada to increase the well-being of women and girls in conflict-affected states, contribute to sustainable peacebuilding and de-crease the threats to international security.”⁴³

³⁸Rachel Pulfer, “Canada’s feminist foreign requires proper funding,” *The Star*, last modified 13 June 2017. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2017/06/13/canadas-feminist-foreign-policy-requires-proper-funding.html>.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Sarah Tuckey, “The New Era of Canadian Feminist Foreign Policy: Will the new National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security hold up to scrutiny?” *Canadian International Council*, last accessed 2 May 2018. <https://thecic.org/the-new-era-of-canadian-feminist-foreign-policy>.

⁴¹Global Affairs Canada, *Canada’s National Action Plan 2017-2022*, 2017. <http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/cnap-eng.pdf>.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*

Using momentum gained from the announcement of the new C-NAP, on 15 November 2017, Canada announced the Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations.⁴⁴ The aim of the Elsie Initiative is to work with the UN and interested member states to overcome barriers to women’s participation in peace operations, with Canada leading these approaches with other states that share its ambitions.⁴⁵ The initiative includes \$6 million in assistance to designated UN missions, and \$15 million towards a global fund to support the increased deployment of women peacekeepers.⁴⁶

Other significant examples of Canada’s feminist foreign policy articulated by the current Liberal government in the last year are the proposed gender chapter in the revised North American Free Trade Agreement⁴⁷, the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council⁴⁸, and the many gender references in the new defence policy, *Strong Secure Engaged*, including emphasis on diversity, GBA+ and an established target of twenty-five percent women in the Canadian Armed Forces.⁴⁹

These policies are indicative of the government’s priority of committing itself to “support and encourage growth in gender equality and female empowerment, human dignity, effective feminist growth, climate action, inclusive governance and peace and

⁴⁴ Prime Minister of Canada, “The Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations,” last modified 15 November 2017. <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2017/11/15/elsie-initiative-women-peace-operations>.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Ryan Maloney, “Trudeau: Gender chapter in revamped NAFTA is a step ‘we can’t afford not to take,’” *Huffington Post*, last accessed 2 May 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/10/13/trudeau-gender-chapter-in-revamped-nafta-is-step-we-can-t-afford-not-to-take_a_23242778/.

⁴⁸ G7 2018, “Gender Equality Advisory Council,” last accessed 7 May 2018. <https://g7.gc.ca/en/g7-presidency/gender-equality-advisory-council/>.

⁴⁹ Department of National Defence, *Strong Secure Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy*, 2017. <http://dgpapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>.

security.”⁵⁰ While these commitments have been praised as Canada living up to its obligations in changing international development and security norms⁵¹, the Trudeau government has also been criticized for their policies being tokenistic in nature and unrepresentative of practical outcomes⁵².

Why is it in our national interest?

The Trudeau government has many reasons for seeking such a direct feminist foreign policy. One of these reasons is our own perception of Canada as a global leader in the protection of human rights, and a global good citizen. This is tied to our Canadian identity and projection of our values outwards, and also to our status as a middle power, as middle powers are often “promoters of global governance and international law as a cooperative modality for a range of economic, security and humanitarian interests.”⁵³

While the Trudeau government outwardly indicates these policies exist to project Canadian values abroad, they are also greatly in Canada’s own national interest to pursue and promote. Just as Sweden’s feminist foreign policy allows it to project itself in “a diplomatic world crowded with bigger, wealthier and more powerful countries”⁵⁴, so too is the benefit to Canada. The government has gone so far as to identify advancing gender equality as one of the five central themes to its G7 presidency, hoping to be seen as a

⁵⁰Emily Fearson, “The three ‘r’s’ of feminist foreign policy,” last modified December 8, 2017, <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/december-2017/the-three-rs-of-feminist-foreign-policy/>.

⁵¹Rebecca Tiessen and Stephen Baranyi, *Obligations and Omissions: Canada’s Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 4.

⁵²Margaret Wentz, “Trudeau is an insult to feminism – and to seriousness,” *The Globe and Mail*, last modified 7 March 2018. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-trudeau-is-an-insult-to-feminism-and-to-seriousness/>.

⁵³Alison Brysk, *Global Good Samaritans: Human Rights as Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 39.

⁵⁴Ryan Brown. “Can foreign policy be feminist? Sweden says yes,” *Christian Science Monitor*. 7 February 2018, last accessed 2 May 2018. <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2018/0207/Can-foreign-policy-be-feminist-Sweden-says-yes>.

leader amongst peers in this area. Canada's bid for a rotating seat on the UNSC in 2021⁵⁵ is also of significance. According to Prime Minister Trudeau, it would benefit the world and global security if Canada has a seat on the UNSC, as Canada can use its strong voice to contribute to protecting marginalized groups:

Defending the rights of women and girls and the opportunities to grow our economies through supporting women and girls, to create peace and prosperity through supporting women and girls, through defence of marginalized and vulnerable people around the world, to lifting people out of poverty as a way of not just creating opportunity but creating security and stability.⁵⁶

The Trudeau government, both through its domestic behaviour and through its feminist foreign policy is clearly trying to distinguish themselves from previous governments and establish themselves as a gender equality leader in the world. The rhetoric, including the infamous 'Canada is back' catchphrase, shows the Liberals' desire to "(re)claim Canada's leadership role in the promotion of gender equality."⁵⁷ Yet the government continues to face questions and concern about whether its policies indicate real, active change or simply a national slogan.

In addition, Canada is not actually seen as the leader in this field. The Scandinavian countries, in particular Sweden, are significantly further ahead and carry more credibility in their promotion of gender equality. By examining Sweden's foreign policy and international relations behaviour, Canada may be able to learn how to practice a feminist foreign policy that is less ambiguous and more substantive.

⁵⁵CBC News, "Justin Trudeau says the 'world benefits' with Canada on the UN Security Council," last modified 21 September 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/united-nations-security-council-trudeau-1.4301095>.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 13-14.

LESSONS FROM SWEDEN

In October 2014, Sweden became the first state to adopt a distinct foreign policy that was explicitly feminist,⁵⁸ though it has been considered the ‘gold standard’ of human rights foreign policy promotion around the world for several generations.⁵⁹ Sweden has based its Swedish Foreign Service Action Plan for Feminist Foreign Policy on three areas of liberal feminism: rights, representations and resources⁶⁰ which puts the pursuit of gender equality at the center of nearly all their foreign policy initiatives.⁶¹ As Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström stated in 2015, “Striving toward gender equality is therefore not only a goal in itself, but also a precondition for achieving our wider foreign, development and security policy objectives.”

Such bold statements indicate what a distinctly feminist foreign policy could include⁶² and how it might alter a state’s behaviour. Sweden’s unconventional policy, and its subsequent IR behavioural changes, has generated uncomfortable diplomatic relationships with a number of foreign powers⁶³. Given Canada’s shift in a similar

⁵⁸Columba Achilleos-Sarl, “Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis),” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 19, no. 1 (January 2018): 34.

⁵⁹Alison, Brysk, *Global Good Samaritans: Human Rights as Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 42.

⁶⁰Emily Fearson, “The three ‘r’s’ of feminist foreign policy,” last modified December 8, 2017, <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/december-2017/the-three-rs-of-feminist-foreign-policy/>.

⁶¹Katrina, Vanden Heuvel, “Trump’s machismo vs. Sweden’s ‘feminist foreign policy,’” *Washington Post*, last modified 28 February 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trumps-machismo-vs-swedens-feminist-foreign-policy/2017/02/27/3f707478-fd2d-11e6-8ebe-6e0dbe4f2bca_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c3f1a04ee929.

⁶²Columba Achilleos-Sarl, “Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis),” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 19, no. 1 (January 2018): 41.

⁶³Adam Taylor, “Sweden’s subtly radical ‘feminist’ foreign policy is causing a stir,” *Washington Post*, last modified 7 October 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/10/07/swedens-subtly-radical-feminist-foreign-policy-is-causing-a-stir/?utm_term=.937e0fd8a00c.

direction in terms of its policies and promises in the area of gender equality, it is useful to briefly examine Swedish examples for behavioural changes three sectors. This will allow potential lessons learned to be identified that could benefit Canada's current policy, to include more palpable outputs that reflect its feminist approach.

Trade & Economics

One of the first examples of behavioural shift in trade was that Morocco, set to open its first Swedish Ikea store in 2015, supposedly blocked the deal as punishment for Sweden's foreign policy. Since then, Sweden's hardline stance on its feminist foreign policy have led to certain states including Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to recall their ambassadors at various times⁶⁴. While Sweden can be lauded for remaining firm, it has impacted its credibility in trade, as there is concern about what actions Sweden will and will not take; this instability in turn has caused displeasure with its own domestic industries. Canada must be careful to take heed of this and carefully consider the impact of its feminist policies on trade and economic interactions with other states, particularly those states that do not espouse the values of modern western democracies. One success story of the Liberal government so far is the updated trade deal with Chile, which includes a gender chapter referencing commitments in gender equality made by both countries.⁶⁵

Foreign Minister Wallström was also uninvited from addressing the Arab League after her public criticism of human rights issues in Saudi Arabia, which in turn led

⁶⁴Aggestam, Karin, and Bergman-Rosamond, Annika. "Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making: Ethics, Politics, and Gender." *Ethics & International Affairs*, 30, no. 3 (2016), 323-334.

⁶⁵Center for Global Development, "Canada's feminist foreign policy: building on a strong start," last accessed 6 May 2017 www.cgdev.org/blog/canadas-feminist-foreign-policy-building-strong-start

Sweden to cancel a major arms deal with Saudi Arabia, despite a long and prosperous arms trade relationship between the two countries⁶⁶. Though a strong advocate for preventive diplomacy, Sweden is also one of the world's top ten leading arms exporters, exporting arms to repressive authoritarian regimes,⁶⁷ making its response to this situation somewhat surprising to outsiders. Canada faces a similar issue, having recently completed the 'Saudi arms deal', a \$15 billion sale of light armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia, despite concern that those vehicles may be used for internal repression or interventions abroad, in direct contradiction of its current feminist stance.⁶⁸

Although Sweden does not currently follow up its criticism with bilateral economic sanctions, in a few situations it has responded with “vigorously coupled diplomatic condemnation with a package of humanitarian aid, mediation attempts and refugee protection beyond the multilateral norm.”⁶⁹ Canada must consider in advance an appropriate and measured response in terms of sanctions should another state act in contravention to Canada's stated feminist policies.

Security & Defence

Another challenge of feminist foreign policy is its correlation with soft power and its inability to confront aggression, hard security issues, and threats coming from hostile

⁶⁶Srdjan Vucetic, “A nation of feminist arms dealers? Canada and military exports,” *International Journal*, 72, no. 4, (2017), 503.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸Srdjan Vucetic, “A nation of feminist arms dealers? Canada and military exports,” *International Journal*, 72, no. 4, (2017), 503.

⁶⁹Alison Brysk, *Global Good Samaritans: Human Rights as Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 43-45.

states or terrorist organizations.⁷⁰ This is particularly of concern when a liberal state pursues a state-centric feminist foreign policy through militarism.⁷¹ Peacekeeping missions have historically been considered masculine spaces,⁷² and this has led to many governments seeking to increase the number of women in peacekeeping missions. Sweden has been long seen as a leader in this area, and currently owns the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations, which teaches gender advisors assigned by allied militaries how to conduct their jobs to ensure gender perspectives are taken into account on all missions.⁷³

Only recently has there been substantive movement on the regular use of gender advisors on military operations and within certain commands. In the Canadian context, this is still a novel concept being met with some uncertainty in its application. Though the Elsie Initiative strives to bring Canada onto the global stage as a leader in female peacekeeping, thus far the results have been intangible and centered on an increase in female peacekeepers, rather than an increase in peacekeepers of either sex who are familiar with the importance of applying gender perspectives.

Sweden has been active in increasing women's political participation as a criterion for long term stability, as seen with their roles in the Columbian peace process alongside

⁷⁰Aggestam, Karin, and Bergman-Rosamond, Annika. "Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making: Ethics, Politics, and Gender." *Ethics & International Affairs*, 30, no. 3 (2016), 323-334.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²Paul Higate and Marsha Henry, *Insecure spaces: peacekeeping, power and performance in Haiti, Kosovo and Liberia* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2009), 137.

⁷³Swedish Armed Forces, "Nordic Center for Gender in Military Operations," last accessed 4 May 2018, <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/swedint/nordic-centre-for-gender-in-military-operations/>.

Canada,⁷⁴ as well as in Mali and Syria. They have also created a network for women peace mediators and have actively strengthened gender perspectives in disarmament.⁷⁵ However, their feminist foreign policy has also resulted in a weakened role in aiding talks between Israel and Palestine. Canada must note these changes and risks, as geopolitical realities may be the guiding factor on how to act, rather than steadfastly behaving in line with a feminist agenda.

Aid & Development

Though Sweden has significantly increased its aid based on its new policy using systematic international budgeting focused on gender, including a 35% increase to women's organizations and a billion dollars allocated to gender equality development strategy⁷⁶. This is in comparable with Canada's own aid commitments through the *Feminist International Action Plan* yet both countries focus on dollar amounts and have not yet published targeting metrics or accountability frameworks to transparently track these funds. In Canada's case, despite the significant aid contributions of a gender focus, "Canada's overall aid budget fell by 4.4% last year."⁷⁷

However, in terms of altering their behaviour in terms of refugees and immigration, "several civil society organizations have already criticized the Swedish

⁷⁴Ryan Brown. "Can foreign policy be feminist? Sweden says yes," *Christian Science Monitor*. 7 February 2018, last accessed 2 May 2018. <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2018/0207/Can-foreign-policy-be-feminist-Sweden-says-yes>.

⁷⁵Government of Sweden, "Examples of what Sweden's feminist foreign policy contributed to," last accessed 6 May 2018, <http://www.government.se/articles/2018/03/examples-of-what-swedens-feminist-foreign-policy-has-contributed-to/>.

⁷⁶Government of Sweden, "Examples of what Sweden's feminist foreign policy contributed to," last accessed 6 May 2018, <http://www.government.se/articles/2018/03/examples-of-what-swedens-feminist-foreign-policy-has-contributed-to/>.

⁷⁷Center for Global Development, "Canada's feminist foreign policy: building on a strong start," last accessed 6 May 2017 www.cgdev.org/blog/canadas-feminist-foreign-policy-building-strong-start

government for failing to live up to its feminist foreign policy during the recent migration crisis.”⁷⁸ Though Canada has been publicly praised for maintain its ongoing commitment to welcome Syrian refugees, some critics have questioned if the refugee and immigration policy will be further opened or adjusted to specifically target at risk women from varying conflict zones⁷⁹. Both governments will need to ensure that their refugee and immigration policies do not contradict their new feminist policies; they should not only be projecting their values outward but also accepting them domestically as well.

In January 2017 when Trump cancelled American family planning aid to any organization that performed or promoted abortions, both Sweden and Canada were among quick to commit to replacing those funds on the international stage⁸⁰. Though a perhaps unfavourable deviation from the United States’ policy, these commitments to fill the family planning void were greatly welcomed on the international stage and indicate a willingness to stand up against the world’s super power when required.⁸¹

Through the aforementioned areas Sweden has tried to change its international relations behaviour to match its firm feminist foreign policy but has had limited success. These examples demonstrate the complexity of implementing a feminist foreign policy and taken superficially, indicate realist, if not entirely hypocritical, behaviour from both Sweden and Canada. In this regard, Sweden is not as far ahead of Canada as some might

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹Center for Global Development, “Canada’s feminist foreign policy: building on a strong start,” last accessed 6 May 2017 www.cgdev.org/blog/canadas-feminist-foreign-policy-building-strong-start

⁸⁰Ryan Brown. “Can foreign policy be feminist? Sweden says yes,” *Christian Science Monitor*. 7 February 2018, last accessed 2 May 2018. <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2018/0207/Can-foreign-policy-be-feminist-Sweden-says-yes>.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

believe, as they too must maintain a balance between practical actions that allow them to conduct business and theoretical policies that reinforce their values.

CHALLENGES

These examples of Sweden's international relations behaviour in the three specific areas discussed highlight two broad but significant challenges for states considering a feminist foreign policy. Understanding the challenges seen in the Swedish example will assist Canada in determining ways forward and should be taken into consideration with recommendations for changes.

The first issue identified in Sweden's policy is ambiguity. As explained by Ambassador Lyrvall, while many working in the foreign policy realm welcome the challenge to engage on gender inequality due to its profound significance, many are learning on the job: "it's not always easy to know exactly how to proceed, what to do, and how to contribute."⁸² Lyrvall states that even for those with decades of experience in foreign policy and those who acknowledge that it is a priority for their government, there remain unknowns: "some issues are not possible to answer with very simply replies; you have to have a more complex approach to deal with them."⁸³ The engagement of men on issues pertaining to a feminist foreign policy is also pivotal in combatting ambiguity.⁸⁴ This lesson is relevant in the Canadian context, as members of the current government struggle to fully implement a brand new and unconventional policy.

⁸²Fletcher Forum, "Leading a Feminist Foreign Policy, interview with Björn Lyrvall, Ambassador of Sweden to the United States," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 41, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 163.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 166.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

Another significant challenge is the tension that exists between idealism and realpolitik, and the risk of hypocrisy⁸⁵. As seen in the Swedish example, there is a disconnect between their self-perceived image and their image on the international stage in terms of ethics and principles. If this balance is not carefully maintained it could lead to a reputation of naivety or a loss of credibility. In the case of Sweden, while the policy has caused turmoil in relationships with certain Middle Eastern countries, the feminist foreign policy has “found sympathetic ears in other countries”⁸⁶ and is unlikely to lead to isolation. For Sweden, feminist foreign policy is about strategic leadership. The balance of such an unconventional policy benefitting rather than complicating Canada’s relations with the rest of the world is an important challenge for Canada to understand, given there is significant room for harmful political missteps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Acknowledging that the broad challenges facing Sweden in its implementation of its feminist foreign policy are also applicable to Canada, there are several ways that the Canadian government could improve its current policies and practices in this area.

First, relating to the challenge of ambiguity, is the issue of proper funding and clear direction. The Liberal government has been focused on getting the policy ‘right’, but in doing so may be neglecting the practical aspects of implementing it, such as

⁸⁵Ryan Brown, “Can foreign policy be feminist? Sweden says yes,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 February 2018, last accessed 2 May 2018. <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2018/0207/Can-foreign-policy-be-feminist-Sweden-says-yes>.

⁸⁶Adam Taylor, “Sweden’s subtly radical ‘feminist’ foreign policy is causing a stir,” *Washington Post*, last modified 7 October 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/10/07/swedens-subtly-radical-feminist-foreign-policy-is-causing-a-stir/?utm_term=.937e0fd8a00c.

financial and human resources and guidance⁸⁷. It is important for the government to focus on interdepartmental collegiality and consensus on priorities to ensure unified foreign policy on international stages.⁸⁸ Otherwise, this type of ‘build it as you fly it’ mentality can be risky, as it means that while the discourse surrounding the policy as a priority is clear, the sharing of resources and establishment of operational level priorities may be more vague, leading to. Gender experts and academic research should be present at all times, to ensure the feminist lens is not an afterthought.⁸⁹

Second, relating to both challenges, is that the current policy is fairly limited to aid and development and security and defence. There has not yet been significant tangible activity in the trade and economics fora but the routine addition of a gender chapter in trade deals would be beneficial. Additionally, the current are not forward thinking to encompass longer term issues such as the Arms Trade Treaty, nuclear disarmament, and cyber. If the government intends to continue in the direction of a feminist foreign policy, it must lean forward proactively and start applying this lens to all international relations issues.

A third recommendation is to ensure that accountability and transparency are evident throughout the application of the policy at all government levels. By partnering with non-governmental organizations, Canada can develop accountability measures to

⁸⁷Rachel Pulfer “Canada’s feminist foreign requires proper funding,” *The Star*, last modified 13 June 2017. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2017/06/13/canadas-feminist-foreign-policy-requires-proper-funding.html>.

⁸⁸Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, “Interdepartmental Leadership and the Beijing Conference on Women,” in *In the National Interest: Canadian Foreign Policy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1909-2009*, ed. Greg Donaghy and Michael C. Carroll (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011), 239-240.

⁸⁹Rebecca Tiessen and Stephen Baranyi, *Obligations and Omissions: Canada’s Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 205.

track Canadian spending on gender initiatives, highlight the value of field-based research, and open up access to information.⁹⁰ This would provide greater transparency on the priorities of the Canadian government and assist in the creation of measurable objectives.⁹¹

Another recommendation is for the Canadian government to expand on the Swedish governments ‘three R’s’ of rights, representation and resources by adding research and reach.⁹² This will assist in ensuring the policy is comprehensive, open and innovative. This is important to ensure that mainstream organizations, such as governments and institutions, move to address the more fluid, complex nature of deep rooted gendered practices.

It is also essential that the Canadian government moves away from simply ‘adding more women’ to increase female representation both domestically and abroad. While targets are admirable, simply adding female representation on policy and programming decisions will not effectively provide the desired gender perspectives, as changing masculine institutional cultures that have existed for centuries requires more than just putting women into those organizations.⁹³ Acknowledging women’s historical underrepresentation is important, but simply ‘adding’ women does not address the deeply

⁹⁰Emily Fearson, “The three “r’s” of feminist foreign policy,” last modified December 8, 2017, <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/december-2017/the-three-rs-of-feminist-foreign-policy/>.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³Laura Sjoberg, “Seeing sex, gender, and sexuality in international security,” *International Journal*, 70, no. 3 (2015): 444.

rooted gendered biases that exist within the practice and implementation of institutions, foreign policy making.⁹⁴

Of final importance in the realm of credibility is to ensure that any future policies do not place Canada in a paternalistic, patriarchal relationship with the state it aims to assist⁹⁵. The Canadian government must recognize that applying gender perspectives means also considering the culture and gender norms of the state receiving aid, and that a modern western democratic solution may not be appropriate in all scenarios. Canada must thus ensure that foreign policies are subject to a second critique, in order to identify any imperialist or patriarchal biases in its own approach, so as to avoid further marginalizing certain groups.⁹⁶

By employing these recommendations, it is likely that the Trudeau government will be able to successfully overcome the challenges of ambiguity and hypocrisy that are common in the implementation of a feminist foreign policy. This will then put the government in a position to fulfill its promises in this area on the international stage, thereby achieving its aim of being an example that other countries can follow.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Rebecca Tiessen and Stephen Baranyi, *Obligations and Omissions: Canada's Ambiguous Actions on Gender Equality* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 105.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 197-198.

⁹⁶Columba Achilleos-Sarl, "Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis)," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19, no. 1 (January 2018): 36.

⁹⁷The Lancet, "Canada's feminist foreign aid agenda," last accessed 25 April 2018. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)31860-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)31860-3/fulltext).

FUTURE AREAS OF RESEARCH

Given the relative newness of the field of feminist foreign policy, its complexities and challenges there are areas for potential future research. The first topic is the potential strengthening of international law. This would assist in alleviating the tension between idealism and pragmatism, by ensuring that states that are conducting flagrant human rights violations, particularly against women and girls, are held to account. Another area of study is in comparative politics, to examine how many states currently have a feminist foreign policy, and identify areas where they could work together to promote gender equality in solidarity.

It takes entrepreneurial leadership, calculating political parties, and transnationalized civil society constituencies to strategically mobilize historic norms and persuasively project globalizing logic. Once mobilized, it takes domestic and international institutionalization to maintain states' incentives and momentum for human rights policy.⁹⁸

Sweden has had some success in bringing attention to the issue of gender inequality by launching a feminist foreign policy, and hopes that it will motivate other states to get involved.⁹⁹ This type of study would also allow for deeper comparison of states in terms of how they are applying their policies and maintaining the balance of policy vs pragmatism, and establish and share best practices for the implementation of such policies.

⁹⁸Alison, Brysk, *Global Good Samaritans: Human Rights as Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40.

⁹⁹Fletcher Forum, "Leading a Feminist Foreign Policy, interview with Björn Lyrvall, Ambassador of Sweden to the United States," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 41, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 163.

CONCLUSION

The links between gender perspectives and the intersectionality of other marginalizing identifiers to security are easily observable and acknowledged through UNSCR 1325, and their role will continue to have an increasingly important influence on international relations and global security. States are now striving to include gender perspectives of varying degrees in their foreign policies, with some even altering their behaviour internationally. As states continue to adopt feminist foreign policies, they have the ability to generate momentum in this field, leading to a more inclusive world overall.¹⁰⁰

Canada's feminist foreign policy is a step in the right direction; a starting place to promote Canadian values on equality and women's rights. However, managing expectations in the implementation of these policies is essential as cultural change of this magnitude takes time. The challenges of ambiguity and risk of hypocrisy are broad and complex, as has been exemplified in the Swedish example. Canada must find a way to maintain the tension between idealist policy and pragmatic international behaviour that allows it to continue working with other states while promoting Canadian views abroad. Otherwise, Canada's feminist foreign policy could be seen as tokenism at best, damaging the country's internationalist reputation.

Canada should strive to learn lessons from Sweden's still developing feminist foreign policy experience, particularly in terms of the challenges of ambiguity and the

¹⁰⁰Columba Achilleos-Sarl, "Reconceptualising Foreign Policy as Gendered, Sexualised and Racialised: Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Foreign Policy (Analysis)," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19, no. 1 (January 2018): 46.

tension of idealism vs. realpolitik. Canada must review its own policies to ensure that it has practical applications that are in line with its national interests and global behaviour in the areas of military and security, aid and development and trade and economics, while also taking into consideration the cultures and norms of other states. Canada has made a strong start in terms of implementing a feminist foreign policy, but it will take time for this new path to be solidified and fully practiced, with regular adjustments and evaluations required to confirm its direction and to determine where Canada's hard line on gender inequality really lies. However, if Canada truly wants to see gender equality grow internationally, persistence in this field will pay off. As stated by Laura Shepherd in *Gender, UN Peacebuilding and the Politics of Space: Locating Legitimacy*, "it is only through engaging with humility, persistence and hope that we might contribute in some small way to the construction of a different world."¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹Laura Shepherd, *Gender, UN Peacebuilding and the Politics of Space: Locating Legitimacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 170.

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