July 2024

Pushing Boundaries: Feminism, Female Leaders, and the Fate of Feminist Foreign Policy

Sannia Abdullah
sanniaabdullah@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/spaceanddefense

Part of the Asian Studies Commons, Defense and Security Studies Commons, International Relations Commons, Leadership Studies Commons, Science and Technology Studies Commons, and the Social Justice Commons

Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE

Recommended Citation
Abdullah, Sannia (2024) "Pushing Boundaries: Feminism, Female Leaders, and the Fate of Feminist Foreign Policy," Space and Defense: Vol. 15: No. 1, Article 5.
DOI: 10.32873/uno.dc.sd.15.01.1038
Available at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/spaceanddefense/vol15/iss1/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Space and Defense by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.
Cover Page Footnote
Dr. Sannia Abdullah is an expert in national security and nuclear nonproliferation with a special focus on South Asia. She is a former Stanton nuclear security fellow at Stanford University and visiting scholar at Sandia National Labs. Dr. Abdullah has served as a faculty member in Defense and Strategic Studies at Quaid-i-Azam University in Pakistan, where she dedicated over five years to teaching and research. Her articles have been prominently featured in various prestigious international journals.
Pushing Boundaries: Feminism, Female Leaders, and the Fate of Feminist Foreign Policy

Sannia Abdullah

The study challenges the clearest, unqualified liberal claim on feminist foreign policy: namely, women equal peace and security while men equal war. In fact, women approach foreign policy challenges as judiciously as men and have proven their statesmanship. Feminist foreign policy promotes gender equality, women empowerment, and socio-economic parity based on a non-hierarchal system, but it fails to offer a resilient, conflict preventing, and environmentally friendly alternative framework capable of reducing contemporary foreign policy challenges.

A persistent cross-cultural belief reflected from national security debates and discourse is that masculinity embodies notions of authority and power. The origins of this viewpoint can be traced to historical times because statistically men have ruled and fought wars far more in number than women. The patriarchal viewpoint in contemporary war literature, as articulated by male historians such as Thucydides, Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Liddell Hart, and Bernard Brodie, continues to influence formulation of defense and security policies. Moreover, patriarchy reinforces the Realist school of thought, often enamored with the calculus that more weapons, particularly more advanced and lethal weapons, are essential for maintaining global order.

Feminist IR theory, by contrast and in line with Liberalism, challenges the predominant Realist paradigm and questions: “If women were included in such discussions, would the national interest be interpreted differently?”1 International Relations Feminists argue that by excluding women from the national security table, the course of international political affairs constricts the space for alternative arguments and critical voices in understanding a wider range of political solutions. Feminist scholars have brought worldwide attention to the fact that women remain victims of sexual violence in armed conflicts when they were not the ones who initiate wars. Some voice nuclear abhorrence due to disproportionate health effects on women exposed to radiation from nuclear bombings (Hiroshima, Nagasaki) to nuclear testing (Marshall Islands), or accidents (radiological fallout in Chernobyl), including but not limited to miscarriages, stillbirths, reproductive and congenital disabilities. Some argue that naming nuclear weapons as Fat Man and Little Boy reaffirmed patriarchal beliefs in national security affairs. Others in favor of nuclear disarmament write about how “nuclear deterrence is a product of patriarchy...designed to justify outrageous behavior by those with power and privilege—the behavior of spending billions of dollars on weapons that risk the world’s total destruction...”

---

Despite varying viewpoints on foreign and defense policies, the proactive engagement of women in upholding democratic principles remains undisputed. They lead peace movements, serve in the armed forces, and participate in wars or in post-conflict rehabilitation zones. Nonetheless, this paper will show that their voice, as a gendered contribution on national security, has remained marginal.

Acknowledging the feminist critique of traditional national security realism, the UNSC unanimously adopted (October 31, 2000) the Resolution 1325 on ‘Women, Peace, and Security’ and emphasized the disproportionate impact of violence on women and girls in conflict zones. The Resolution called upon the UN member states for “promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making about conflict prevention and resolution.”2 The Resolution urged leaders to “adopt gender perspective” in peacekeeping operations and peace agreements. Some member states made noticeable efforts towards gender equality and women empowerment while some (such as Sweden, Canada, France, Luxemburg, Mexico…,etc.) took the lead and espoused Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP).

Yet, this laudable ambition rests on an underdeveloped concept of Feminist Foreign Policy; there is no universal definition, yet, although there is broader agreement on underlying assumptions. Countries that have adopted FFP generally customize it according to their demographic, socio-economic and political needs. This paper wrestles with why FFP has not made substantive progress on reducing violence and the risk of devastating war even though it brings attention to the most fundamental values of human security i.e., gender equity, women empowerment, and economic disparity. The study first argues that FFP needs to separate itself from misconstrued feminist assumptions such as ‘women as nurturers are innately peace lovers.’ Some contemporary feminist arguments make FFP seem utopian. Second, FFP, for the moment, should defer lofty expectations on conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and non-militaristic or non-violent foreign policy.

Some argue that the “feminist approach” would “strengthen deterrence overall and improve post-deterrence planning.”3 Others claim that “females attempt to mitigate threat through de-escalation (‘befriend’) and seek to bolster human security in situations of deterrence failure (‘tend’).”4 Such arguments place heavy moral weight not only on FFP supporters but also upon women in leadership roles, feminist scholars promoting gender inclusive/women empowered societies, and peace pundits who keep backing those ideals. Peaceful diplomacy, prosperity through trade, and non-violent approaches are not a one-way road. Decision makers (even those groups meeting gender equity standards) should not, on behalf of others, unduly

---


3 Valerie M. Hudson and Rose McDermott, “Feminist Foreign Policy and Deterrence,” Center for Feminist Foreign Policy, July 07, 2021, at https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/2021/07/07/feministforeignpolicyanddeterrence/

4 Ibid.
risk national security to foreign aggression.

To elaborate this *amicus* brief for prudent realism, this paper points to Pakistan as a major case and England, India and Bangladesh as secondary examples, where female elected leaders perceived national security threats and responded *in the same way* as their male counterparts. These cases challenge the key pillar of FFP that assigns heavy lifting for women to clean up the mess left by centuries of patriarchy through gender-centric foreign policy.

WHAT IS FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY?

FFP draws strength from the UNSEC Res 1325 WPS (Women, Peace, Security) agenda that was followed by nine supporting resolutions that stresses upon “strengthening women’s meaningful participation in preventing conflict and violent extremism or increasing the number of women in peacekeeping.”5 The academic literature on women’s rights and inclusion in the political realm included two distinct yet overlapping arguments. One group of scholars suggests that an equal representation of women and men in leadership and parliament is critical for democracy and improving development indicators. This debate emphasized the need “to address patterns of exclusion, structural barriers, stereotypes, and unequal power relations that produce and reproduce exclusionary practices and outcomes in societies…”6 This scholarly debate evolved into gender equality that basically says, ‘women rights are human rights.’

The second group of scholars argues that gender equality is not a goal in itself, but it’s an essential process for achieving the objectives of peace and security apart from sustainable development. This debate is inspired by feminists’ work and women’s rights’ activists who rightfully argue that women are considered a minority group because they do not share equal power and privileges as men, even though they constitute half of the world population. The significant distinction between these two debates is that the latter envisions more promising policy outcomes from women’s role in policymaking. This perspective eventually evolved into a feminist foreign policy vision.7 According to the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW): Feminist foreign policy is the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states, as well as movements and other non-state actors, in a manner that prioritizes peace, gender equality and environmental integrity; enshrines, promotes, and protects the human rights of all; seeks to disrupt colonial, racist, patriarchal and male-dominated power structures; and

---


6 “Gender Equality and Inclusion in Democracy.” Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance at https://www.idea.int/our-work/what-we-do/gender-democracy

allocates significant resources, including research, to achieve that vision.8

Different countries interpreted the needs of gender inclusion and economic liberty and redefined Feminist Foreign Policy according to their needs. For instance, the Sweden was the Feminist first country to formally adopt feminist foreign policy (2014) in the world. Swedish feminist foreign policy set the example of implementation and focused on 3R’s: 1) Rights, 2) Resources, 3) Representation, to elevate women’s social, economic, and political status. EU provided an action plan to implement UN resolution by ensuring that “the rights, agency and protection of women and girls are observed and upheld at all times, and to confirm that a meaningful and equal participation of women is secured in all institutions and processes of conflict prevention, peace-making, peacebuilding and post-conflict rehabilitation.”9 EU’s FFP framework lays out five key ingredients including (1) purpose, (2) definition, (3) reach, (4) intended outcomes and benchmarks, and (5) plans to operationalize. Mexico ranks third on feminist global index after Sweden and Norway to adopt feminist foreign policy in 2020.

Mexico in 2020 announced to adopt FFP and became the first country of global south to adopt this vision. According to Mexico, “it is not only a Feminist Foreign Policy, but a Feminist Foreign Policy plus, because we are also including LGBTQI individuals and the disabled.”10 Cristopher Ballinas, Director General of Human Rights and Democracy, said for Mexico, FFP: Demonstrates the constant and committed effort of the Mexican State with human rights and mainly with the rights of women, adolescents, and girls in all their diversity. It is not only a recognition, but also a great responsibility to maintain the highest standards in international action, and to ensure that these have an impact on domestic politics and thereby reduce femicides and the gender violence that has so greatly affected women in our country.11

Canada is another leading nation to adopt FFP. Canadian government announced feminist international assistance policy (June 09, 2017) with action plan that focuses on six areas: 1) Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, 2) Human Dignity, 3) Growth, 4) Environment and Climate Action, 5) Inclusive Governance, and 6) Peace and


Feminist Foreign Policy

Security.12 FFP provides an alternate perspective of national security to interrogate the norms of violence in the hierarchical structure of decision-making dominated by militaristic and patriarchal thoughts. The key pillars include actionable policies to make foreign policy more democratic, challenge dominant neoliberal political discourse, restructure the hierarchical patterns of suppression and discrimination, empower the voices that suffered from militarized oppression, and update while eliminating the domestic and foreign policy decisions for a more just global order.

The advocates of the feminist foreign policy (FFP) argue that governments need to rethink the meaning of security and incorporate perspectives from the oppressed and marginalized groups of the society, including women and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Many countries have not adopted FFP but pledged to uphold some of its fundamental values. For instance, U.S. vice president Kamala Harris in support of the FFP vision, stated, “The status of democracy depends fundamentally on the empowerment of women, not only because the exclusion of women in decision-making is a marker of a flawed democracy, but because the participation of women strengthens democracy.”13 Likewise, France renames its feminist foreign policy approach as ‘feminist diplomacy’ that aims to support the “empowerment of women around the world through combating sexual and gender-based violence, fighting for occupational equality and fighting for the education of girls.”14 Yet, FFP framework envisions deeper claims than merely supporting women’s rights and increased representation in policy making.

FEMINIST DISCOURSE AND FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

A comprehensive review of the literature demonstrates the existence of gender bias towards male scholars who supported women rights, endorsed feminism, and even facilitated anti-nuclear movements led by women. Some argued the nuclear discourse being divided into pro-peace feminists and pro-deterrence male policy makers. This gender-driven academic divide underscores the extent to which gender biases and stereotypes have shaped nationalist perceptions and security policies surrounding nuclear weapons and the larger anti-nuclear movement, leading to a dichotomy wherein peace was linked with female gender and war with male gender. As a result, those scholars and policymakers who advocated for nuclear disarmament were also perceived as weak, while those supporting nuclear armament were seen as brave, embodying warrior-like qualities. Lawrence Wittner writes that during the early years of the Cold War, male scholars supporting disarmament received judgment within nuclear

---

12 “Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy,” Pan American Health Organization, at Canada’s feminist international assistance policy - PAHO/WHO | Pan American Health Organization


policymaking circles. “To ‘be a man,’ after all, was to show an unfailing readiness to fight for one’s country. Thus, the masculinity of male antinuclear activists was often called into question.”15

Feminist scholars supporting FFP argue that women’s under-representation at leadership levels affect political discourses and foreign policy choices; therefore, inclusive policy outcome perhaps could lead countries to a safer and peaceful world.16 One of the misleading facts within the FFP debates is that it builds a strong, linear, and affirmative connection of women with peace-oriented goal. For instance, some FFP authors argue that “There cannot and will not be peace without feminism.”17 The argument that women who are mothers and nurturers would always support peace and vote for economic stability and environmental sustainability over country’s sovereignty, is contested within feminists’ debates. The supporters like Helen Caldicott, the author of Nuclear Madness, argue that women are nurturers responsible for human production and are a natural antidote to warring males. Likewise, Micaela di Leonardo, in her intriguing article on “Morals, Mothers, and Militarism: Antimilitarism and Feminist Theory” linked feminism with nonviolence. She questioned “what women have to do with war,”18 particularly when men decide on wars. Her argument served as a catalyst for existing feminist movements, which have been critical of the hierarchical and bureaucratic structures that exist within military institutions. However, in history, there have been women emperors and warriors who fought like men, led armies, and conquered lands when they were also mothers. For instance, Queen Gwendolen of Britain (the 9th century BC) gathered an army and fought her ex-husband, King Locrinus, at River Stour. She led the war, killed Locrinus, assumed the throne, and ruled independently as Queen.19 Cleopatra II was a queen of Ptolemaic Egypt who ruled from 175 to 116 BC who also led a rebellion against her husband Ptolemy VIII in 131 BC and drove him out of Egypt. Tang Sai'er led an army against the Ming Dynasty in China (1420). Likewise, Rani Velu Nachiyar, the Indian queen from Tamil Nadu, was the first Queen to fight against the East India Company in India from 1760 to 1790.

17 Nina Bernarding and Kristina Lunz, “A Feminist Foreign Policy for European Union,” Center for Feminist Foreign Policy, (June 2020) at Study-Feminist-Foreign-Policy-for-the-European-Union.pdf (centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org) op cit, p. 12
MISSING LINKS IN FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Despite women’s contribution to global initiatives towards peace and anti-nuclear campaigns, it is troubling that their representation in national security roles is marginal. This issue of empowerment can be effectively tackled through legislative measures at the state level. To safeguard human and women's rights within a nation, it's imperative for countries to establish internal laws and mechanisms for their enforcement. The presence of women in leadership positions is crucial for a democratic society that genuinely represents its entire populace, including all genders, with a special focus on women. However, how such measures would contribute to a feminist foreign policy framework – offering non-militaristic, non-violent, anti-war, pro-peace, anti-capitalist, anti-weapon, non-hierarchical, non-discriminatory – is not convincing. FFP clearly states that: a) it rejects patriarchy as a social norm, b) it declines militarism, c) and capitalism. It also declares its goal: to move decision-makers away from investing in military security and global dominance, but it fails to elaborate: How FFP would be instrumental in perceiving national security threats or find peaceful resolution to conflicts heavily brewed in armaments or how will it replace the interests’ of allies when interstate conflicts are intertwined with capitalism and weapons exports are key drivers of world’s biggest economies. Understanding these fundamental flaws, the Swedish government last year (2022) abandoned feminist foreign policy. Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Tobias Billström said, “Gender equality is a fundamental value in Sweden…But we’re not going to continue with a feminist foreign policy because the label obscures the fact the Swedish foreign policy must be based on Swedish values and Swedish interests.” Critics argue that Sweden confronted with practical obstacles to enforce gender parity within all departments/institutions and faced challenges in incorporating a gender-focused outlook into all aspects of foreign policy.

The feminist foreign policy debate lacks clarity about interstate interactions, particularly with other nations that have not embraced or align their values with FFP. For example, Sweden's feminist foreign policy recognized tough choices because it had a “clear conflict between Sweden’s strong standpoint for women’s rights and democracy and its weapons export to dictatorships like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Thailand.” FFP debates are unclear about protecting national security if they denounce weapons war is imposed on them? Another bigger challenge for Sweden was selling weapons when feminist foreign policy clearly opposes militarism. Because of conflicting tensions emanating from different feminist debates


22 Elis Liss, “10 Reasons Why We Need Feminist Foreign Policy,” Open Canada, 10 reasons why we need feminist foreign policy - Open Canada

Spring 2024
that FFP lacks conceptual clarity. As Diana Thorburn notes, “there can never be a truly singular voice of feminist foreign policy simply because of the diversity of views within feminism itself.”

Since feminist foreign policy also draws strength from anti-nuclear peace movements where women led disarmament campaigns, it remains unclear if nuclear weapons states (or potential nuclear weapon states) would adopt feminist foreign policy? For instance, in Japan, feminism has mostly stayed on the fringes of Japanese politics and hasn't been considered a primary policy focus. They actively backed the worldwide advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, even though it is still underperformed within its own borders. If Japan were to choose between pursuing a nuclear weapons path or adhering to a feminist foreign policy, their decision-makers would face a challenging dilemma. Although Japan has witnessed the tragedies of human history, the choice to obtain such weapons isn't a straightforward one; otherwise, Japan would have done so a while back. Feminist envisioning foreign policy oversimplified the security needs for nuclear deterrent as Ray Acheson, author of Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy, argues that nuclearism is an “epic feat of gaslighting that insists that weapons that can kill everyone on the planet many times over are the only things; keeping us safe.”

Feminist foreign policy advocates should settle some claims coming from feminism regarding gender equality and women empowerment. For instance, women empowerment gives women the right to choose their profession even if its armed forces or even if they choose to be mothers. The value judgment of women to be nurturers/caregivers, born to be peace lovers negates the very definition of gender equality that reaffirms ‘the rights and access to opportunities is unaffected by gender.’ Adam Jones, in his famous article, “Does ‘Gender’ Make the World Go Around,” writes: If woman's equal peace and men war, then we are again looking at a project to feminize politics. However, suppose these associations are more construed than innate. In that case, the dichotomy (men-as-militarist, women-as-caregiver) reflects stereotypical patterning of the kind that has always inhibited the expression of women's full potential and personality. These conceptually blurred boundaries limit the scope of the feminist foreign policy framework which is why western/liberal democracies like Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, Australia, South Africa, and the United States upheld their commitment to gender equality but did not publicly confirm to feminist foreign policy.

---

23 Diana Thorburn, “Feminism Meets International Relations,” SAIS Review vol. 20, Issue. 2 (Summer-Fall 2000): 1-10


25 Ray Acheson, “75 Years of Nuclear Violence Must End Now,” WILF, August 06, 2020, at https://www.wilpf.org/75-years-of-nuclear-violence-must-end-now/

WOMEN’S TAKE ON NATIONAL SECURITY

There is not much evidence to prove that women in bureaucracy/power seemingly pushed for pro-peace and anti-militaristic policies. Survey research by William Bendix and Gyung-Ho Jeong, analyzing several decades of US (House and Senate) voters’ patterns, questioned if the existing literature showed any correlation between female lawmakers pushing for cuts in defense budgets. Their research found no evidence to support increasing female representation, decreasing militarism, and affecting legislative behavior. Therefore, the argument of women as doves and men as hawks “offers suggestive correlations, but no direct evidence.” Bendix and Jeong’s research explained that “gender plays a small role in shaping legislatures [U.S.] foreign policy preferences. Members appear to take on national security positions largely in line with what their voters want.” Like any other nation, it’s not unusual for election candidates to tailor their campaigns to appeal to their supporters, regardless of their gender. Prof. Scott D. Sagan and Prof. Benjamin Valentino on "Revisiting Hiroshima in Iran." The authors surveyed a hypothetical scenario replicating the 1945 decision by the U.S. administration to use nuclear weapons against Iran to end the war in response to imposing U.S. economic sanctions. The survey sample is the American public that approved U.S. atomic bombings “killing 2 million Iranian civilians if they believed that such use would save the lives of 20,000 U.S. soldiers.” Their research shows that American women supported “nuclear weapons use and violations of noncombatant immunity no less (and sometimes more) than male respondents.” Authors recorded public opinion and found that American women are equally hawkish as American men when it comes to self-defense.

Likewise, Pakistani women’s perspectives on national security are no less different on defense and security. Most of the women scholars working in thinktanks on national security support nationalist stance with respect to need for armaments and strategic parity with India. Like Benazir Bhutto, women in positions of leadership also expressed a favorable stance towards the nation's nuclear armament policies and offered minimal objection. Pakistan’s


28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.


31 Ibid.
former ambassador to the United States, Maleeha Lodhi, supported Pakistan’s development of battlefield nuclear weapons “to counterbalance India’s move to bring conventional military offensives to a tactical level.”32

Although, FFP is still in its formative stages and has yet to become a successful framework, it is important that FFP debates also suggest a comparative framework that is resilient against foreign invasion/nuclear threats. Feminist writings on anti-nuclear policies received a push-back from policy makers contesting the utopianism of the disarmament argument. The realpolitik within the corridors of power remained inflexible towards pro-peace perspectives, mostly shunning them down as unrealistic, weak, or unpopular ideas. Therefore, feminist scholars (whether male or female) despite valuable contributions could not impact states’ strategic state preferences in favor of disarmament. These academic/scholarly biases will keep throwing curveballs in the way of FFP debates.

FEMALE LEADERS: A TEST FOR FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

In modern history, this paper showcases three minor cases of female leaders who addressed national security threats no different from male decision-makers. Unfearful of risking their popularity, some women leaders took bold decisions. For instance, Margaret Thatcher, Britain's first female prime minister (1982), is a good example. She risked severe criticism from her cabinet and public yet decided to go to war. Mrs. Thatcher’s domestic policies made her unpopular initially: she ordered government spending cuts and constraints on unions amid a decline in manufacturing that brought about simultaneous inflation and high unemployment. When Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, Conservative Party members of Parliament, close friends, and allies, including U.S. President Ronald Reagan, advised her for peace talks instead of war. However, Margaret Thatcher chose war, sending a British naval task force 8,000 miles in South Atlantic to expel Argentina. After seventy-four days of fighting, the conflict ended with the Argentine surrender on June 14, 1982. Undeterred by her declining popularity and domestic criticism, strong-willed Mrs. Thatcher earned the title of ‘Iron Lady’.

Likewise, Ms. Indira Gandhi, daughter of the first Indian prime minister (Jawaharlal Nehru), a central figure of the Indian National Congress, also served as the first female prime minister of India for three terms (from 1966-1977; 1980-84). She envisioned India’s foreign policy known as Indira’s Doctrine ‘to increase India’s power into the extended neighborhood and beyond.’ One manifestation of her rule was Ms. Gandhi’s support of West Bengal’s movement that separated East Pakistan from the West and successfully launched a diplomatic campaign to shape international opinion in favor of India’s military intervention. In 1975, she was convicted of electoral corruption in the 1972 elections by the High Court of Allahabad.

prohibiting her from another election for six years.33 Instead of resigning, Mrs. Gandhi responded with a state of emergency, restricting the civil liberty rights of the citizens, censoring the press, and detaining her opponents without trial. Many critics in India remember the time of suppression as ‘Reign of Terror’. Some argue that Ms. Gandhi was “a no-nonsense Prime Minister and demanded total and unquestioned obedience. Some also stated that Indira Gandhi was the only ‘man’ in the Cabinet.”34 Ms. Gandhi was assassinated in 1984 while she was the prime minister of India by her security guards seeking retribution for the communal violence of the Sikh community. The Sikh uprising ignited when Indira ordered to suppress the demands of Sikhs using force.

In 1996, Sheikh Hasena Wazed - daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman - the founding father of Bangladesh, became an elected prime minister. She is the longest-serving female prime minister (from June 1996-July 2001 & Jan 2009 - today). Ms. Wajid joined politics in 1981 as president of the Awami League. Ms. Haseena’s life struggles to explain her political determination. In 1975, her parents and three brothers were assassinated before she stepped into politics. She faced six years in exile in India, several detentions, and house arrests followed by protests and strikes during the martial law regime. Under her premiership, Bangladesh progressed on several fronts, including a high literacy rate, employment opportunities, and six percent economic growth; however, “enforced disappearances, in particular, have become a hallmark of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed’s current decade-long rule.”35 The report cites an activist stating political suppression in the country around the 2018 general elections where Haseena’s ruling government ordered mass arrests. He says, “In terms of media space and civil society space, I don’t think we’ve ever had such a bad situation. Even under previous military regimes, people had the right to speak up. They were not subject to disappearance.”36 While the international community raised concerns about extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances, the government ignored all requests for an independent investigation. Haseena Wajid’s political tenure is no different from her counterparts and cannot “escape some controversies.”37 Haseena’s authoritative policies despite being an “elected” member do not offer a hopeful case of increased women’s representation. It is hard to dismiss the notion that there is no rule to feminist exception. Power and authority, even when vested through

---

33 “Indira Gandhi: Prime Minister of India,” Britannica Encyclopedia at https://www.britannica.com/biography/Indira-Gandhi


36 Ibid.

democracy, may not always be non-hierarchical and non-violent.

PAKISTAN’S NUCLEAR PROGRAM UNDER FEMALE PRIME MINISTER, BENAZIR BHUTTO

Benazir Bhutto was an extraordinary woman in South Asia’s politics. She was the daughter of the former prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who won the elections twice and served as Pakistan’s first female prime minister. Ms. Bhutto’s premiership brought hope for liberal democracy, women empowerment, and nuclear nonproliferation norms. Mrs. Bhutto was an ambitious political leader who studied abroad in the world’s best universities and married another feudal lord, Mr. Asif Ali Zardari (also former president of Pakistan). Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a proud patriarch who shared his words of wisdom with his daughter in the last days of his execution. Born of rich parents, Benazir’s education and international exposure contributed to her bold and courageous personality that fulfills 3R’s of FFP: Rights, Resources, Representation. Emily MacFarquha describes Benazir Bhutto as “a product of the anti-war years at Harvard, was seen to be the real anti-nuclear thing. She was everyone’s best hope for a democratic, bomb-free Pakistan.”38 However, when it came to power, she was no less different from her counterparts. She supported nuclear weapons as a necessary deterrent after India’s (1975) nuclear explosion and believed that Pakistan’s nuclear program was critical for the regional balance of power. After India’s nuclear tests of May 1998, Benazir Bhutto (who was not in power) writes in Los Angeles Times, “If a preemptive military strike is possible to neutralize India's nuclear capability, that is the response that is necessary.”39 Many Indian critics blame Benazir Bhutto for ‘supporting terrorism’ in Indian-held Kashmir. Ajai Sinha, executive director of the Institute for Conflict Management, told ABC News, “I would find it very difficult to find a single element with her relationship to India that is positive and for the betterment of her country or the region.”40 India’s leading newspaper Hindustan Times describes Benazir as: “hawkish on India and Kashmir, giving New Delhi sleepless nights by raising the human rights issue in Geneva...It was a period of virtual non-contact between India and Pakistan.”41 In her interviews during foreign visits, Benazir Bhutto projected her perseverance to fight for democracy against military dictators who killed her father, yet, back

home, she was in a Feminist constant struggle to prove her loyalty to the nuclear cause and emerging nationalism. Therefore, to argue that Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was in constant disagreement with the military is an overstatement. Bhutto's strained relationship with the military was primarily limited to General Zia, who ordered the execution of her father in a highly controversial trial. However, she remained critical of military generals for obstructing democracy in Pakistan and keeping nuclear matters secret from her.42 Shuja Nawaz, author of Crossed Swords, who interviewed (late) Benazir Bhutto writes that “she had been kept in the dark about these issues” and when “she asked for briefings and was told they would be given but never were.”43 Feroz Khan, Pakistani American scholar, explains that Benazir Bhutto’s entry into Pakistani politics as part of a political deal with then army chief General Aslam. From historical standpoint, Pakistan’s elections and political wins are mostly orchestrated by military establishment’s approval at the behest of the sitting army chief. Feroz Khan, in his famous book Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb, writes: General Beg brokered a five-point deal with Benazir as quid pro quo for her becoming prime minister: (1) not to be vindictive toward the family of Zia-ul-Haq; (2) not to change defense policies or interfere in the affairs of the armed forces; (3) not to make sweeping bureaucratic/administrative policy changes; (4) not to alter the Afghan policy, and to keep the experienced Sahabzada Yaqub-Khan as foreign minister; and, most important, (5) not to alter nuclear policy, and to let the veteran President Ghulam Ishaq Khan guide and control the secret nuclear program.44

General Aslam Beg confirmed his plan to bring Benazir Bhutto to power in his interview to Herald (2001) where he and General Hamid Gul decided to create an electoral alliance of religious and conservative parties to avoid PPP from coming into power with two-third majority. According to Hamid Gul (then DG-ISI), “a sweeping election win by the PPP would be detrimental to the causes dear to the military.”45 Therefore, the Pakistani military establishment strategized a covert political maneuvering to prevent any political party from obtaining a two-thirds majority in parliament, that would enable them to wield constitutional powers to implement reforms in the country. To maintain its hold on power, the establishment employed a weak coalition governance, consistently subjected to scrutiny and reproach from opposition parties, and insufficiently empowered to effect significant governmental reforms. As a result, the military remains the preeminent force capable of regulating, supervising, and adjusting the power dynamics among the various stakeholders within Pakistan. Any political leadership that garners significant public support and seeks to employ that popularity to effect substantial changes to the powers of the executive branch or to curtail the authority of the


judiciary or military is met with strong resistance. In such cases, the opposition parties are mobilized to dissolve the government through the exercise of power politics. Given the military's pervasive influence in the country, exemplified by the controversial trial and execution of Benazir Bhutto's father by a former military dictator, Bhutto sought to maintain cordial relations with the military and supported its policies on key issues such as, nuclear program, military weaponry and equipment, Kashmir issue, relations with Afghan Government. In one of her official trips to Washington, she tried to convince American leadership that Pakistan was not pursuing the nuclear weapons path so that the U.S. would release the confiscated weapons, including F-16 aircraft. Although she was unsuccessful in her diplomatic stunt, “She had shown her military generals that she still carried clout enough in Washington to resist nuclear concessions and yet bring some military hardware home.”46 Benazir Bhutto held a steadfast commitment to Pakistan's nuclear program, which she viewed as an essential aspect of her father's political legacy. The vision of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who initiated the country's nuclear program,47 served as a driving force behind Benazir Bhutto's support for the program. During her two terms as Prime Minister, she provided substantial funding for various national security and defense initiatives. In terms of nuclear policies and national security, her political beliefs aligned closely with those of the military. Zahid Hussain writes that Benazir’s stance was firm about Pakistan’s nuclear weapons that it is “linked with the Jammu and Kashmir issue” and vowed that “Pakistan would not give up its nuclear weapons program despite pressure from Washington.”48 Nonetheless, “Pakistan’s generals and intelligence officials have never trusted Bhutto, and they still believe she is too beholden to the Americans.”49 However, with regard to matters concerning nuclear affairs, critics contend that the military’s covert nuclear program was impervious to the involvement of civilian authorities. Some individuals assert that it was not a matter of gender but rather that “civilian engagement in the secretive military program was not deemed desirable.”50

Shyam Bhatia, an Indian-born British investigative journalist, cites his interview with Benazir Bhutto (2004), in his book Goodbye Shahzadi: A Political Biography of Benazir Bhutto. Bhattia writes that when Benazir Bhutto visited North Korea for the second time as Prime Minister, she was requested by A.Q. Khan to ask for No-Dong missiles. The book recounts that during a state banquet featuring chestnuts and steamed fish, Bhutto nervously

stammered while requesting the favor from North Korea’s founding father, Kim Il-Sung. She “reportedly returned home with design details for a North Korean NoDong missile.”51 Bhatia claims that “Before leaving Islamabad she shopped for an overcoat with the 'deepest possible pockets' into which she transferred CDs containing the scientific data about uranium enrichment that the North Korean wanted.”52 According to Benazir Bhutto, A.Q. Khan was used as a scapegoat to cover up the involvement of higher-ups including some military officers who sanctioned A.Q. Khan’s visits and had the details of his visits to North Korea. She said, “He [A.Q. Khan] couldn’t even leave the country without somebody watching everything he did, and to accept that he ran an international operation — that Israeli businessmen were involved, Indian businessmen were involved, that parts were coming from South Africa and Malaysia without anyone knowing — is unbelievable.”53 Despite the contention of some critics who argue that Shyam Bhatia lacks evidence to support his claim of an off-the-record conversation,54 David Albright, a prominent expert in nuclear nonproliferation, asserts that the narrative is plausible because of “the timing of the data transfer would correspond to other information suggesting North Korean interest in acquiring uranium enrichment technology.”55 Benazir Bhutto was an authoritative political leader who wanted to enjoy power over all affairs, much like her father.

In case of Iran, she not only voiced her opposition but also attempted to stop the transfer of centrifuge technology agreed between two militaries because the deal was negotiated without her knowledge. Douglas and Collins write, “Bhutto…was furious to find out from Rafsanjani that Pakistan was providing its nuclear technology to Iran. She said she responded by ordering that no nuclear scientist be permitted to travel outside Pakistan without her approval.”56 Nonetheless, her stance was notably divergent in the case of North Korea, as A.Q. Khan garnered her trust and solicited her aid in brokering discussions with the North Korean leader pertaining to missile designs. Here, Benazir not only approved A.Q. Khan’s move to seek designs but also became part of the game. In fact, “When she returned from her trip, Bhutto

---


53 Ibid.

54 Karan Thapar, “Wish I had Said No,” Hindustan Times, June 14, 2008, at https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/wish-i-had-said-no/story-me3gaTWQ4aljuP0Rh2an7O.html


handed over the designs for the missile to Khan.”

Pakistan’s military exercises strong control on political and national security affairs of the country for decades. The civilian leadership in the national command authority (NCA) receives information on a need-to-know basis that constricts decision-making powers of the head of the government as well as the state. Similarly, it was not Benazir Bhutto “as a woman” but “as a civilian” threat to Pakistani military authorities who were reluctant to give her more space on nuclear/security-related details. The civil-military relations (CMR) in Pakistan operates in favor of pro-war, pro-weapons, pro-nuclear and hence higher defense budget stance coming from military. The civilian leaderships encountered the classic predicament where “Prudent leaders make choices that they think will help them retain power: they choose in such a way that they do not precipitate an internal overthrow of their authority.”

Many Pakistani prime ministers (male) received the similar treatment from military leaderships of the time and were ousted either through martial law regimes or replaced by quasi-martial law/pseudo-democratic governments in Pakistan because they tried to control authority relationship vis-à-vis military.

CONCLUSION

The adoption of a feminist foreign policy by democracies that uphold women's empowerment, inclusive social norms, and increased women's representation in leadership encounters serious practical hurdles some of them stem from broad assumptions of feminism. The FFP framework involves debates that lack coherence and consistency both among themselves and when compared to historical approaches. This paper addresses through academic, analytical, and empirical approaches that women led, or women/gender inclusive foreign policy vision may not sponsor anti-militarist, non-hierarchical, non-nuclear/denouncing weapon exports, conflict preventing and diplomacy over war kind of policy outcomes.

FFP does not explain how increased women representation in leadership roles would shape pro-peace policies or would stop on-going armed conflicts. The proponents of feminist foreign policy have not explained how interstate conflicts could be avoided if feminist foreign policy was in place? The study showcases four examples from the recent history with countries led by female leaders Mrs. Thatcher, Mrs. Indira, Mrs. Bhutto, and Mrs. Wajid, who decided for conflicts when national security was called into question. These cases revolve around strong-

---

57 Ibid.

willed leaders which make it hard to believe that women representation would have decided diplomacy over armed conflicts. The option of diplomacy was always on the table, but they approached national security with *Realism*.

*Dr. Sannia Abdullah* is an independent scholar. She formerly served as a Stanton Nuclear fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation, Sanford University and as a research post-doc at Sandia National Laboratory. The author extends heartfelt thanks to the ISA Annual Convention, where the draft of this paper was presented and received invaluable feedback. The author also wishes to express deep gratitude to the anonymous peer reviewers for their time and insights, which have significantly contributed to the value and quality of this paper.