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Understanding Gender Equality in Foreign Policy

Jamille Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein

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What the United States Can Do

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INTRODUCTION

A growing body of research definitively establishes a link between gender equality and global prosperity and security. Closing the gender gap in workforce participation could add as much as \$28 trillion to the global gross domestic product (GDP).¹ Ensuring women's meaningful participation in peace processes would make agreements more likely to last and be implemented.² Greater numbers of women in parliament decrease the likelihood of human rights abuses and conflict relapse.³ Equalizing access to agricultural resources for women could reduce global hunger for up to 150 million people.⁴ The bottom line: nations seeking to advance national security, maximize the utility of foreign aid, and bolster stable and democratic partners should prioritize women's advancement.

Focusing on women's rights is not new in the realm of public policy. Gender equality is a founding principle of the United Nations, enshrined as a universal human right, and a suite of legal frameworks—including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—mandate that countries implement policies to achieve parity. In a rapid global spread, between 1975 and 1998, more than one hundred countries created national institutional mechanisms on gender equality, ranging from stand-alone government ministries and national commissions to bureaus and departments within larger institutions.⁵ But these machineries were primarily directed at domestic issues rather than foreign policy and national security matters.

In recent years, however, a growing number of countries have begun to institutionalize gender equality and women's empowerment as a

foreign policy priority in the areas of diplomacy, defense, aid, and trade. Nations are adopting action plans, creating funds, appointing envoys, and setting aid targets to advance gender equality through development cooperation, training, and diplomatic activities. The most comprehensive effort is the “feminist foreign policy” first articulated by Sweden in 2014—a designation since adopted by Canada in 2017, France in 2019, and Mexico in 2020—which promises greater commitment to gender equality abroad in service of national security at home.⁶ Luxembourg and Spain have also committed to developing a feminist foreign policy, and Malaysia indicated it would pursue a feminist foreign policy in 2020.⁷ Definitions of what constitutes a feminist foreign policy differ, but the Swedish model focuses on three “Rs”—rights, representation, and resources for women and girls—and commits to “applying a systematic gender equality perspective throughout the whole foreign policy agenda.”⁸

The United States first articulated its focus on gender equality as a foreign policy priority during the Barack Obama administration, which saw the introduction of a suite of policies to advance the status of women and girls globally in the areas of economic growth, peace and security, and human rights. Legislation to codify the elevation of that issue has been pending since the 111th Congress (2009–11). In refining its own strategy, the United States has much to gain from analyzing the gender mainstreaming approaches pursued by other countries.

To strengthen prosperity and stability around the world, the U.S. government should launch a high-level White House council to elevate and coordinate efforts to advance the status of women and girls, issue a government-wide strategy to advance gender equality as a domestic and foreign policy priority, close the gender financing gap, and mainstream transparency and accountability into foreign policy initiatives. The United States should demonstrate genuine leadership, adopt strong policies, and provide sufficient resources that will not only improve the lives of women and girls but also strengthen the stability and prosperity of entire economies and nations. These steps will help the United States draw on the benefits of women’s empowerment globally and thereby promote international security and global growth.

CURRENT APPROACHES

To advance gender equality in foreign policy, governments have promulgated changes in leadership, policy, and resource allocation. These initiatives vary significantly in terms of where they are housed within governments, how they are measured, and the extent to which they are implemented.

LEADERSHIP

Many governments have institutionalized efforts to advance gender equality, including by establishing new mainstreaming roles, appointing women to high-level posts within the foreign policy and security arena, and making public commitments at the highest level to reinforce the agenda.

Ambassadors and Envoys for Gender Equality

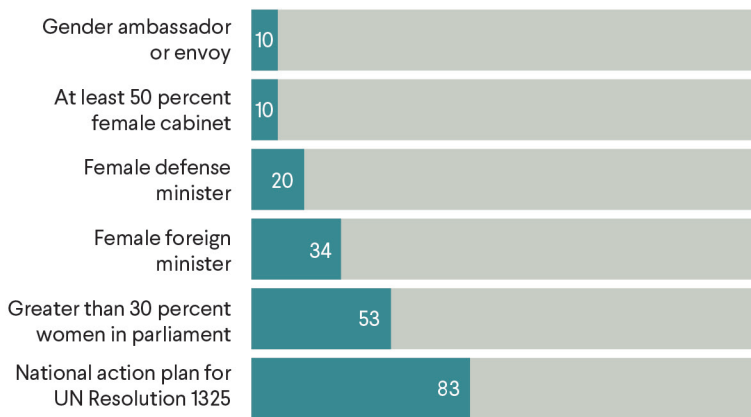
Over the past decade, several countries have established high-level positions to promote women's issues abroad or support the mainstreaming of gender equality throughout the foreign policy apparatus. In 2009, under the Obama administration, the United States became the first country in the world to create an ambassador-at-large position for global women's issues. Since then, ten countries have created similar roles in their ministries of foreign affairs.⁹

Senior Posts

In addition to creating designated positions to advance gender equality through foreign policy, many countries have also increased the

Figure 1. FEW COUNTRIES MEET BENCHMARKS FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Number of countries with women in leadership roles (out of 193)



Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in Politics*, 2019; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, *Member States*, 2019.

representation of women in high-level diplomatic, trade, and defense posts and cabinet ministries. In 2019, the proportion of women ministers worldwide reached an all-time high of 20.7 percent, including ten countries with 50 percent or more female cabinet ministers: Albania, Austria, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, France, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Spain, and Sweden.¹⁰ Although women remain overrepresented in domestic posts—including social affairs, health, family and youth, environment, education, and women's affairs—in early 2020, a record thirty-four countries had female foreign ministers, eighty-four had female ministers of trade, and twenty had female ministers of defense (see figure 1).¹¹ In many nations, the proportion of female ambassadors also rose: although women occupy only 15 percent of ambassadorial posts worldwide, many states have a much higher representation of women as top diplomats, including 44 percent of ambassadors in Finland, 41 percent in the Philippines, and 38 percent in Costa Rica.¹²

Public Commitments

Public commitments from senior leadership can reinforce the government's dedication to advancing gender equality and signal that doing so is the responsibility of both men and women throughout the foreign

policy apparatus. Gender equality initiatives driven by a foreign minister or a head of state can establish a shared agenda that helps shift culture; consider, for example, the pathbreaking Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative led by former Foreign Minister William Hague in the United Kingdom (UK) or the commitments to appoint a gender-balanced cabinet made by Prime Ministers Justin Trudeau of Canada and Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia.

POLICY

Some nations have enacted a range of policies to provide guidance, set targets, and increase accountability for their gender equality commitments, including gender equality strategies and national action plans on women, peace, and security. In addition, some governments have sought to integrate gender equality commitments into broader policy documents, such as trade agreements. These steps demonstrate opportunities to integrate a focus on gender equality in diplomatic, development, defense, economics, and trade apparatuses.

Diplomacy

Several countries have adopted explicit gender equality and women's empowerment strategies to guide their foreign policy. In 2012, the United States launched its first policy guidance on gender equality in national security and foreign policy under Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, promulgating a strategy to elevate the status of women in the work of the Department of State, including through programming, budget development, monitoring and evaluation, and management and training. In other countries, the foreign ministry leads an interagency strategy to advance gender equality. In 2016, Australia unveiled its Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, covering all foreign affairs and development assistance, with a focus on three priorities: women's leadership, economic empowerment, and ending violence against women and girls. That same year, Norway released an Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy with five priority areas: quality education, political participation, economic rights, elimination of violence, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Some foreign ministries also coordinated with other line ministries to develop government-wide strategies on a range of specific gender equality priorities, from economic empowerment to women's health.

One prominent example: eighty-three nations have developed national action plans (NAPs) on women, peace, and security, beginning with Denmark in 2005.¹³ These plans are informed by UN Security Council Resolution 1325—unanimously adopted in 2000 under the leadership of Namibia—which called for greater representation of women in peace and security processes and elevated women’s rights on the international security agenda. The plans incorporate commitments by their diplomatic, development, and defense apparatuses, and beyond to increase women’s participation in peace and security efforts and ensure their protection in conflict-affected contexts; across Europe and the Americas, foreign ministries are most likely to be the lead agencies tasked with implementation.¹⁴ Implementation remains a challenge, however: fewer than half of the nations with action plans have allocated a budget for execution.

Sweden: A Government-Wide Feminist Policy

In 2014, Sweden became the first country to adopt an explicitly feminist foreign policy. The policy covers three areas: foreign and security policy, development cooperation, and trade and promotion. The Swedish government also sees the mainstreaming of gender equality in foreign policy, rooted in a rights-based approach, as a tool to achieve other national and international objectives, including security and economic prosperity. The ambassador for gender equality and coordinator of feminist foreign policy is responsible for supporting this work throughout the ministry and leads a team to improve operational planning, policy development, skills development, communication, and representation. Each department and mission abroad also includes a focal point for the feminist foreign policy. This feminist approach applies not only to Sweden’s foreign policy abroad but also to the internal operations of the foreign ministry, including through directives to promote gender equality in recruitment and appointments within the Foreign Service, improve gender balance in coveted international posts, and prevent and respond to sexual harassment among staff. The

government funds select targeted initiatives, committing 200 million Swedish krona (SEK) to support the SheDecides initiative to advance women’s reproductive health and rights, and announcing 1 billion SEK to implement its 2018–22 global gender equality strategy.

Development

Development agencies similarly have committed to advancing gender equality, including twenty Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries that have adopted gender equality strategies within their development agencies.¹⁵ Canada and Ireland adopted gender equality policies for development cooperation as early as 1999 and 2004, respectively.¹⁶ The Japan International Cooperation Agency created gender mainstreaming guidelines in 2002 and formulated an agency-wide development strategy for gender equality in 2016.¹⁷ In 2017, under its Feminist International Assistance Policy, Canada pledged to place gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the center of its foreign aid, with the understanding that doing so “is the best way to build a more peaceful, more inclusive and more prosperous world.”¹⁸ In certain countries, those strategies are mandated by law, signaling a shared commitment by parliaments. For example, the UK’s International Development (Gender Equality) Act, which came into force in 2014, sets a legal requirement to give meaningful consideration to the effect of development or humanitarian assistance on gender equality.

Mexico: The Global South’s First Feminist Policy

In January 2020, Mexico became the first country in the Global South to launch a feminist foreign policy. The policy lays out an ambitious agenda, promising in its first year to develop trainings, workshops, and a feminist foreign policy manual, and by 2024 to achieve employment parity and equal pay across

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where, currently, only one of the eleven top positions is filled by a woman.¹⁹ Even before 2020, Mexico worked to advance gender equality in foreign policy, particularly through multilateral negotiations—such as its leadership at the UN Climate Change Conference and its efforts to integrate gender into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) trade discussions.²⁰ Mexico’s feminist foreign policy is guided by five principles: a gender perspective in foreign policy; parity within the foreign ministry; combating gender-based violence, including within the ministry; visible equality; and integrating feminism in all areas of the foreign ministry.²¹

Defense

Ministries of defense have critical responsibilities to advance women’s contributions to security and ensure their protection from violence; among the eighty-three NAPs on women, peace, and security worldwide, many include specific commitments for their militaries, police, and peacekeepers. For example, when the U.S. Congress enacted the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, it tasked the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security with increasing women’s participation in security efforts and their protection from conflict-related violence, and devising agency implementation plans. Both Global South countries and donor nations supportive of security sector reform have made public commitments to increase the participation of women in the security sector. Some initiatives focus on increased recruitment and retention of women in militaries, police, and peacekeeping forces: for example, the Canadian government, through its Elsie Initiative (established in 2017 to increase women’s meaningful participation in peace operations), partnered with the governments of Ghana and Zambia to develop new approaches to increase the deployment of female peacekeepers.²² Ministries of defense around the world are coordinating to exchange lessons: in 2017, Bangladesh, Canada, and the UK launched the Women, Peace, and Security Chiefs of Defense Network to support the network’s nearly fifty members’ efforts to increase opportunities for women in the security sector.²³

More countries are now using trade policy to advance gender equality. Since 1990, the number of trade agreements with gender-related provisions has steadily increased, and today seventy-four regional trade agreements reference gender.²⁴ Countries have reinforced their commitment on the multilateral stage: 124 World Trade Organization members and observers have endorsed the 2017 Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment, which seeks to remove the trade barriers women face and to foster their economic empowerment.

Some countries have taken a more ambitious approach, including a dedicated chapter on gender equality in trade agreements. The 2016 Chile-Uruguay Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was the first to have a stand-alone gender chapter, and Chile has subsequently included gender chapters in FTAs with Argentina, Canada, and in current negotiations with the European Union (EU). Canada incorporated a stand-alone chapter on gender in its trade agreement with Israel and with the EU through a trade and gender recommendation; in addition, Canada and Mexico sought to include greater attention to gender equality in the NAFTA renegotiation, ultimately with some success.²⁵ Yet despite those advances, the UN Conference on Trade and Development has cautioned that most existing gender chapters are not binding and do not fall under the authority of dispute-settlement mechanisms.

In addition, some foreign ministries have prioritized gender equality in multilateral forums in order to mobilize global attention to and commitments for specific gender priorities. On women's economic empowerment, for example, the United States hosted the first Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting on Women and the Economy in 2011, culminating in the San Francisco Declaration to expand women's participation in APEC economies.²⁶ In 2014, under Australia's presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20) summit, nations committed to reduce the gender gap in labor force participation by 25 percent before 2025.²⁷

Nigeria: Feminist Foreign Policy at the Country Level

Although Sweden has long emphasized gender equality in its foreign policy efforts, the adoption of a feminist foreign policy

in 2014 changed its approach to diplomacy and development with bilateral partners. The Swedish minister of foreign affairs provided an action plan outlining how to prioritize gender equality in diplomatic relations and increased training, thereby integrating a feminist approach across every level of the diplomatic corps. In Nigeria, this feminist approach manifests in trade relations, communications, humanitarian aid, and metrics included in political reports to headquarters. The Swedish embassy collaborates with Swedish companies investing in Nigeria to highlight the Swedish domestic experience as a model for how women's economic inclusion drives growth. Sweden is one of the founding funders of the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund, established in 2017, and prioritizes “[ensuring] that all assistance promotes the protection, safety and dignity of affected people, and is provided equitably to women, girls, men and boys.”²⁸ Sweden is also the largest donor to the Joint Program on Accelerating Progress Toward the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women, a regional effort to promote women's economic empowerment.²⁹

RESOURCES

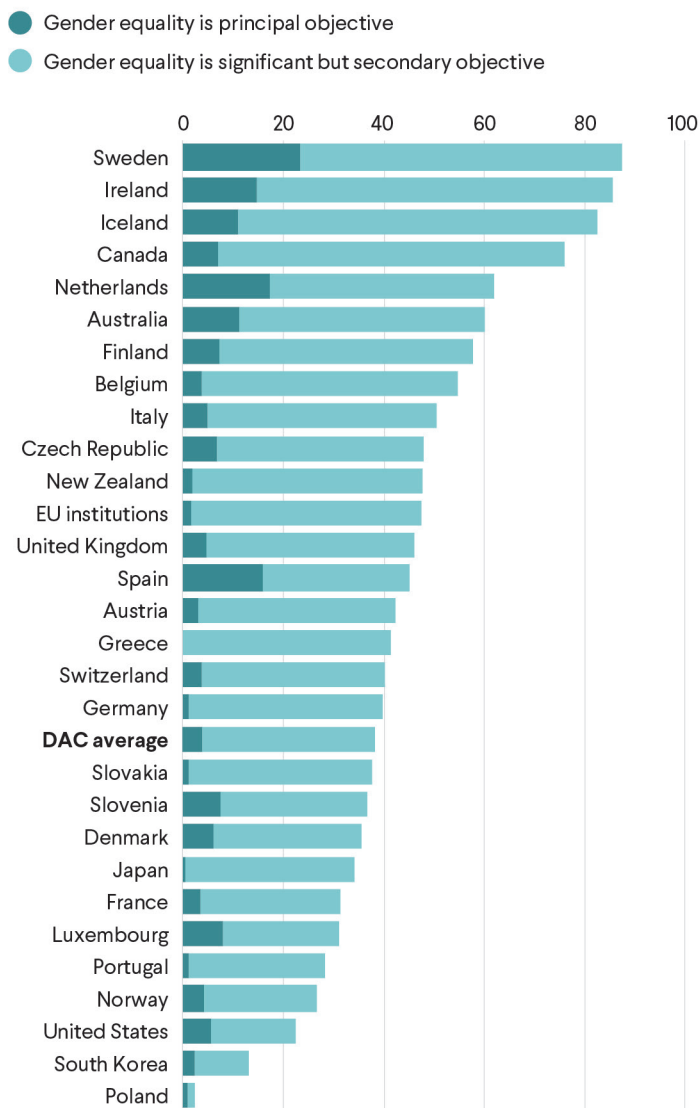
Many governments elevate gender equality to a foreign policy priority through their budgets by establishing stand-alone funds for women's rights programs and organizations, earmarking a percentage of foreign assistance funds to support programs that advance gender equality, or conducting a gender analysis process for all government funding.

Aid Targets

Many donor countries commit to aid targets to support gender equality, reserving a percentage of foreign assistance funds for this priority. The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) developed a set of minimum criteria for programs that have either a principal or a significant focus on gender equality; these criteria are frequently used as benchmarks for targeting gender equality investments (see figure 2). Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, for example, aims

Figure 2. GENDER EQUALITY IN DAC COUNTRIES' AID (2016–17)

Percentage of official development assistance focused on gender equality in bilateral allocable aid



Note: Hungary is excluded due to lack of data.

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

to direct 15 percent of aid to programs with a primary focus on gender and to ensure that no fewer than 95 percent of its assistance programs have a principal or significant focus on gender. France's Third International Strategy for Gender Equality pledges to increase aid focused on gender equality from 30 to 50 percent by 2022.³⁰ The United Arab Emirates has gone furthest, announcing a "100% Women" policy, which aims to incorporate gender equality in all foreign aid projects by 2021.³¹ To assess performance, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade set a goal in 2016 that 80 percent of its aid investments "will effectively address gender issues in their implementation . . . regardless of their objectives."³²

Despite these targets, however, overall investment in aid projects that advance gender equality remains low. According to the OECD DAC, only 4 percent of bilateral aid by OECD nations in 2015–16 was dedicated to gender equality programming.³³ Countries often self-report programs as having a significant or principal focus on gender equality that in fact fall far short of the OECD minimum criteria for gender equality programming. One independent review of seventy-two projects accounting for \$6 billion in gender equality funding found that only two met OECD standards.³⁴ Women's rights organizations received an even smaller fraction of this aid: OECD reported that barely 0.5 percent of the funds allocated to gender equality went to local women's rights groups.

Gender Budgeting

Some countries adopt a gender budgeting process to ensure that women and girls benefit from equal resources in both foreign and domestic budgets. Gender budgeting, introduced in Australia in 1984, typically requires a gender analysis of needs or outcomes, which is then used to inform funding allocation. Today, at least eighty countries employ some form of gender budgeting, and twenty-three countries have a "prominent" gender budget initiative.³⁵ The structure and implementation of these programs varies significantly. India institutionalized gender budgeting in 2005, creating a federal institute within its Ministry of Finance to analyze how public expenditures affect women and requiring a gender budget statement alongside budgetary documents.³⁶ In Rwanda, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning is charged with leading gender budgeting efforts, and a Gender Monitoring Office evaluates budget outcomes, incorporating

input from civil society in its annual reports.³⁷ The Canadian Gender Budgeting Act, passed in 2018, mandates that governments apply a gender and diversity lens to policy and program decisions. Austria's constitution mandates that its states strive for equality in their budget management and that they consider gender at all budget levels at every stage of the process.³⁸

Canada: Feminist Foreign Policy and International Assistance

Canada, following Sweden, became the second country to explicitly refer to its gender equality efforts as “feminist,” announcing a Feminist International Assistance Policy in 2017 alongside a suite of gender equality initiatives, such as an inclusive approach to trade; a new National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; and the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations. Since then, the government has been vocal about gender equality issues on the multilateral stage, using its 2018 Group of Seven (G7) presidency to put gender equality on the head-of-state agenda for the first time, integrating gender equality in all areas of G7 work, and creating a G7 gender equality advisory council. Canada's feminist policy emphasizes the need for gender and intersectional analysis in addition to the inclusion of women. Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) has a long history in Canada, beginning with a government commitment to GBA+ as part of Canada's response to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In the 2000s, GBA+ was mainstreamed across central agencies, and in 2016 the government strengthened accountability metrics, including by requiring GBA+ memos in submissions to the Cabinet of Canada and the Treasury Board and mandating that all federal staff receive training.³⁹ Since 2018, the federal budget has used a gender lens across domestic and foreign priorities. The 2018 budget also established a new Centre for Gender, Diversity, and Inclusion Statistics to help the government monitor progress and hold itself accountable and created a Department for Women and Gender Equality.

Gender Equality Funds

Some countries have created separate funds for programs intended to further gender equality and women's rights. In 2008, for example, the Netherlands launched a \$77 million fund to support organizations advancing gender equality through the Millennium Development Goals. Since then, governments have committed more than \$1 billion through various stand-alone gender funding mechanisms.⁴⁰ In 2015, Australia established a \$55 million Gender Equality Fund to strengthen gender equality and women's economic empowerment in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴¹ In 2018, Canada made the single-largest government investment in women's rights organizations by contributing \$300 million to a new Equality Fund, a consortium of public- and private-sector donors aiming to mobilize \$1 billion in service of gender equality.⁴² France announced a 120-million-euro budget to support its feminist foreign policy, focusing primarily on feminist movements and civil society organizations, and its development agency is tasked with funding 700 million euros annually for gender equality projects.⁴³

Pooled Funds and Collective Initiatives

Other countries contribute resources to pooled funds in support of gender equality that are administered by multilateral organizations. Germany, Israel, Japan, and Spain are major donors to the UN Women Fund for Gender Equality, which has disbursed \$65 million to women-led civil society organizations. The governments of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden launched the SheDecides fund in 2017, mobilizing \$450 million to advance women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Other countries have redirected aid to gender projects through collective initiatives such as the 2X Challenge: Financing for Women, launched in 2018, which has mobilized close to \$2.5 billion from G7 countries and other institutions to support women's economic empowerment.

Similarly, the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) housed at the World Bank is a collective of fourteen governments—Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States—that have together contributed \$354 million to date to fund projects supporting women entrepreneurs in the developing world.

CRITIQUES

As many governments have begun to prioritize gender equality across their diplomatic, development, defense, and trade efforts, skeptics argue that increasing the focus on women's rights and gender equality detracts from advancing other national interests abroad. Even those who believe gender equality is a worthwhile goal do not always agree that it should be institutionalized as a foreign policy priority.

This skepticism ignores evidence that gender equality not only is a human right worthy of protection but also advances a country's economic and security interests. Raising the status of women and girls has been shown to increase GDP, improve global health, combat radicalization and extremism, improve the chances of lasting peace, and strengthen democracy. In the face of global challenges such as poverty, insecurity, authoritarianism, and violent extremism, the talents and contributions of 50 percent of the population should not be overlooked.

Other critics argue that government policies to advance gender equality through foreign policy have not gone far enough. Even in countries that have made strong commitments on paper, attention to women's rights and gender equality frequently remains siloed in dedicated offices rather than integrated as a priority across departments. In addition, implementation remains a significant challenge, as government commitments toward gender equality are rarely accompanied by sufficient resources and metrics to ensure success and accountability.

Some feminist scholars and civil society leaders also argue that a true feminist foreign policy requires a transformation in international relations. Those critics maintain that feminist policies advanced by Canada, France, Sweden, and other governments do not do enough to reshape aid infrastructure, decrease militarism, address the root causes of inequality, or incorporate the lived experiences of women and

girls.⁴⁴ Others note that in order to avoid hypocrisy, a feminist foreign policy needs to address the status of women domestically, committing to equality both at home and abroad. Though few foreign policy efforts to advance gender equality meaningfully incorporate domestic agencies, a handful now do: Sweden's feminist foreign policy, for example, is part of a broader "feminist government" that aims to incorporate gender equality in policymaking "both nationally and internationally," and Canada's recent \$300 million funding commitment to the Equality Fund consortium in support of women's rights organizations abroad was accompanied by \$30 million in support of domestic women's rights organizations.

While comprehensive national efforts to advance gender equality in foreign policy are relatively recent, and therefore have not yet been fully evaluated, qualitative evidence suggests that government-wide initiatives to improve the status of women offer national security, development, and diplomatic benefits. As other governments take a systemic approach to elevating gender equality in foreign policy, the United States should not lag behind, as doing so overlooks a cost-effective investment that would boost U.S. foreign policy aims.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

To strengthen prosperity and stability and to reap the benefits of women's empowerment globally, the U.S. government should take a more systematic and well-resourced approach to promoting gender equality in foreign policy, incorporating lessons from strategies pursued by prior U.S. administrations as well as other nations around the world. The U.S. government should build upon its prior efforts by improving its internal infrastructure on gender equality, adapting to the U.S. context a range of innovative ideas piloted by other countries, and fully financing gender equality programs. In addition, the U.S. government should rigorously evaluate emerging efforts in this area to inform policies and investments in the United States and other nations.

LEADERSHIP

Over the past two decades, the United States enacted a series of internal reforms to better align U.S. government tools and personnel with its stated gender equality goals, including through the establishment of the world's first-ever ambassador-at-large position dedicated to global women's issues and the development of specific policies on women's health, economic empowerment, and involvement in peace and security efforts. These changes demonstrated the effectiveness of reform but also illustrated the need for a more comprehensive government-wide approach driven by leadership from the top, both in the White House and cabinet agencies.

The U.S. government should launch a high-level White House council to elevate and coordinate efforts to advance the status of women and girls, both at home and abroad. The president should launch a new U.S. Council on

Gender Equality, co-chaired by the heads of the National Security Council, the National Economic Council, and the Domestic Policy Council, and tasked to identify and implement domestic and foreign policy priorities. It should include high-level interagency officials who report directly to cabinet secretaries and submit annual progress reports to the president. This council would build on previous interagency efforts to advance women's issues, including the John F. Kennedy administration's Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, the Bill Clinton administration's President's Interagency Council on Women, and the Barack Obama administration's White House Council on Women and Girls. The council would draw on lessons from other cabinet-level interagency mechanisms, such as the National Science and Technology Council, and align with current efforts to advance women's rights, including the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. The council also should include an advisory committee of civil society leaders who can provide expertise and recommendations.

All cabinet agencies should appoint a high-ranking, full-time official tasked with advancing gender equality who reports directly to the cabinet secretary. This official could occupy a new, stand-alone position, such as an ambassador or envoy for gender equality. Alternatively, cabinet secretaries could endow an existing deputy or undersecretary with responsibility for ensuring a focus on gender equality across the department, similar to the Swedish model, which assigns a gender mainstreaming coordinator in each line ministry.

Agencies should reform staff training and performance reviews to ensure that all personnel have the technical expertise needed to implement gender equality policies. Just as Canada mandates training on gender equality, all U.S. personnel in domestic and foreign policy departments should receive in-person training on gender-based analysis and implicit bias as part of the onboarding process. In addition, performance reviews should include metrics related to advancing gender equality policies.

To lead by example and improve the effectiveness of its operations, the U.S. government should commit to gender balance in staffing and strengthen internal personnel mechanisms. Following the example of countries from Canada to Colombia to Rwanda, the president should appoint a gender-balanced cabinet and mandate gender-balanced selection of political appointees. Human resources policies should include diversity and leadership targets and strategies to advance recruitment, promotion, and

retention of a diverse and gender-balanced staff in the foreign, military, and civil services.⁴⁵ The U.S. government should be a model employer, with policies to support working families, including through paid family medical leave, paid sick days, and remedial measures to promote anti-discrimination efforts and ensure equal pay. Reforms should address workplace harassment and abuse, implementing swift investigations and appropriate accountability mechanisms for sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence.

POLICY

Inspired by strong evidence that greater gender equality improves prosperity and security, a handful of nations have adopted ambitious government-wide strategies to elevate the status of women across their diplomatic, development, defense, economics, and trade apparatuses. The U.S. government similarly should pursue a government-wide strategy, knitting together piecemeal policies from previous U.S. administrations under one umbrella.

The U.S. president should issue a government-wide strategy to advance gender equality as a domestic and foreign policy priority, supported by agency implementation plans. Adapting recent Canadian and Swedish initiatives, the U.S. government should articulate a broad strategy for gender equality that covers both domestic and foreign policy. To integrate this strategy into the U.S. foreign policy apparatus, the U.S. government should also update existing policies, such as the National Security Strategy, to reflect the prioritization of gender equality as a domestic and global goal. To help the government track and deliver on its vision, the White House Council on Gender Equality should identify time-bound, measurable goals—both domestic and global—that are fully funded and assigned to particular government agencies. Metrics for prosperity and stability should include the status of women and girls—by, for example, defining economic health to include a level legal playing field for women, and defining security to include freedom from intimate partner violence and sexual assault. The intelligence community should increase its assessment of the threats posed by gender inequalities around the world—for example, by producing a National Intelligence Estimate on global gender disparities.

The U.S. Congress should adopt legislation to advance gender equality worldwide. Enacting legislation to enshrine gender equality as a

bipartisan priority would codify a whole-of-government commitment, thereby ensuring that a coordinated approach to this issue continues across administrations—as demonstrated by the 2017 Women, Peace, and Security Act.

RESOURCES

Efforts to advance gender equality risk becoming empty mandates without sufficient funding. The U.S. government should provide adequate resources to elevate the status of women through economic, development, diplomatic, and security efforts.

The U.S. government should ensure adequate gender equality financing by creating budgetary targets dedicated to advancing the status of women and girls. At a time of significant economic hardship, gender equality is a smart investment that not only improves the lives of women and girls but also advances stability, economic growth, good governance, food security, and community health. Efforts to recover from the health and economic ramifications of the coronavirus pandemic will be less effective if they exclude the specific needs and contributions of half the population. Following the example of countries such as Australia, France, and the Netherlands, the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation should target at least 20 percent of their budgets to advance the status of women and girls. Building on the approach of Canada's Equality Fund, overall U.S. foreign assistance funding should include at least \$500 million of direct support for local, women-led organizations, which are proven drivers of change. And as in Canada and Sweden, all U.S. foreign assistance programs should undergo gender analyses to ensure alignment with policies to advance gender equality. Furthermore, the U.S. government should eliminate aid contingencies that undermine women's rights and autonomy, including the Helms and Siljander amendments and the Mexico City Policy, which reduce access to critical health care.⁴⁶

The U.S. government should lead an effort to strengthen the global architecture for gender equality financing around the world. The government should provide seed funding for a new gender equality partnership, modeled after the U.S. co-founded Open Government Partnership, to bolster the multilateral architecture in support of women's rights and catalyze additional financing for gender equality from governments,

multilateral organizations, the private sector, and civil society institutions—a proposal outlined by the Center for Global Development.⁴⁷

ACCOUNTABILITY

For far too long—in the United States and around the world—rhetoric on the importance of gender equality has not been matched by political or financial commitments. Stronger transparency frameworks are needed to track progress and hold leaders accountable. To promote accountability, the U.S. government should regularly publish public reports on its efforts to advance the status of women.

The U.S. government should publish public, annual progress reports on government efforts to implement gender equality policies. The White House Council on Gender Equality should ensure that the U.S. government reports progress toward time-bound and measurable goals, and the reporting process should include a mechanism for civil society input.

The United States should join 189 other nations in ratifying CEDAW. This step would oblige the U.S. government to submit a report every four years to the CEDAW committee—comprised of independent experts on women’s rights from around the world—detailing measures taken to advance gender equality. The independent experts would identify gaps and recommend steps for the U.S. government to improve its efforts to eliminate discrimination against women.

The United States should ensure that a new global gender equality partnership includes accountability requirements. As with the Open Government Partnership, the U.S. government and other governments participating in a gender equality partnership should submit annual progress reports on gender equality initiatives, subject to oversight by independent experts.⁴⁸ Where relevant, this oversight mechanism could work in partnership with like-minded institutions; for example, the partnership could collaborate with the UN Security Council to oversee NAP implementation. This would enable the global partnership to monitor each partner’s efforts and would facilitate an exchange of lessons on effective approaches to promoting gender equality.

The U.S. government should disclose funding levels for its domestic and global efforts to advance gender equality. The government should track resources dedicated to gender equality through its funding

dashboard—USAspending.gov. In addition, the government should join like-minded nations in encouraging reform of the OECD DAC global development assistance tracker to improve accuracy, as well as the launch of an independent mechanism to track country spending on gender equality.

The U.S. Congress should exercise regular oversight of U.S. commitments to advance gender equality. As a first step, the U.S. Congress should create a commission—drawing lessons from the 9/11, Carlucci, and HELP commissions—to review the effectiveness of U.S. government efforts to promote gender equality at home and abroad and make recommendations for improvement.

RESEARCH

The U.S. government should ensure rigorous data collection and evaluation of new strategies and funding commitments in support of gender equality. The lack of systematic monitoring of existing gender equality efforts in the United States and globally undermines the possibility of improving and adapting gender equality programs and policies. Through transparency mechanisms, regular reporting, and new research, the United States can identify efficient and effective gender equality policy designs and implementations.

The U.S. government should offer social science research grants to fund basic research evaluating gender equality policies. The Departments of State and of Defense and the U.S. Agency for International Development should invest in university-based analyses of U.S.-funded efforts to promote gender equality to identify and encourage adoption of best practices. A grant program modeled after the Defense Department's Minerva Research Initiative should similarly dedicate at least \$20 million per year.

The U.S. government should call for reporting on the representation of women across decision-making bodies. To track global data, the U.S. government should help fund data collection on the number of women represented in senior posts and in politics, including as cabinet members, ambassadors, local legislative officials, mayors, and candidates for local and national office.

CONCLUSION

Unlocking the potential of half the population is not just a moral obligation—it is an economic and security imperative. At a time when resources are limited, investing in women and girls is a proven way to bolster good governance, economic growth, community health, and stability. To achieve these goals, the U.S. government should strengthen its commitment to gender equality through leadership, policy, and resources, including by issuing a government-wide strategy that institutionalizes gender equality as a domestic and foreign policy priority; creating a high-level council to coordinate agency efforts; and adopting a budgetary target to close the gender financing gap. These steps will help the United States draw on the benefits of women’s empowerment to fortify national security, make more efficient use of foreign aid, and support democracy and long-term stability around the world.

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