



Analysing the Scope of Feminist Foreign Policy in India: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

This paper investigates the ideological foundations and real-world applications of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), which is increasingly embraced as a multidimensional tool for promoting gender justice in global relations. Emerging as both a theoretical and policy-oriented framework, FFP challenges traditional notions of diplomacy that often prioritize military alliances and economic interests over human rights and inclusion. Guided by the “3Rs” model – Rights, Representation, and Resources (Swedish Government, 2018; Oxford Research Encyclopedia, 2019), laying a blueprint for integrating gender into diplomacy, defense, trade and development (Aggestam & True, 2020). The model emphasizes equitable participation of women and marginalized communities in foreign policymaking, thereby attempting to shift the focus from state-centric to people-centric governance. The study interrogates the extent to which this policy paradigm addresses root causes of inequality and violence, while also criticising its susceptibility to instrumentalization by states with conflicting domestic or geopolitical agendas (Thompson & Clement, 2019; SWP Berlin, 2021). While some governments have made substantial investments in multilateralism and inclusive diplomacy, the gap between normative ambition and material policy outcomes remains evident. In many cases, feminist rhetoric coexists with militarized borders or regressive social policies at home, raising questions about coherence and accountability. Recognizing the gap between ambition and delivery, it proposes that the next generation of feminist policy must adopt feminist-informed foresight, integrating long-term, participatory, and decolonial approaches (Jöster-Morisse, 2025). This anticipatory method allows for imagining alternative futures shaped by care ethics, intersectionality, and sustained peacebuilding. By focusing on inclusivity, transparency, and structural transformation, FFP has the potential to not only redefine diplomatic priorities but also foster more equitable global systems rooted in justice rather than power.

Keywords: Feminist Foreign Policy, Gender Justice, 3Rs Framework, Feminist-Informed Foresight, Intersectionality.

Introduction

Feminist foreign policy refers to a political structure that prefers gender equality and women's rights in the creation and execution of a country's foreign relationships, diplomacy, trade, defense and development policy.

This policy framework traces its origin way back in Sweden (2014) under Foreign Minister Margot Wallström (Margot Wallström, 2014) who pioneered the formal adoption of a policy based on Rights of women and girls, Representation in decision-making and Resources for gender equality. It was inherent in liberal feminism, intersections and post-colonial feminist theory that criticizes male-oriented international relationships.

Many countries have groundbreaking feminist foreign policy (FFP), which integrates equity into international relationships. After Sweden, Canada on LGBTQ+ rights and inclusive development in 2017 with Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). France adopted FFP in 2019, and focused gender equality in diplomacy with a Francophone focus. Mexico Use of FFP in 2020, highlighting multilateralism and gender budget, became the first global South Nation. In 2023, Germany launched its policy, in which women's roles were combined with climate diplomacy in peace and security. Each country brings different preferences of regional and political reference size. (Toni Haastруп, 2022).

However, India has not formally adopted a feminist foreign policy (FFP), but elements of gender inclusion exist within its international business. Gender is mainly evaluated in areas such as development aid, peace (Permanent Mission of India to the UN, 2007) and selective women's centric diplomacy. The initiative of India's soft diplomacy, such as International Solar Alliance and Yoga diplomacy, promotes inclusive leadership, but lacks a clear feminist structure



Core Pillars

The most important pillars of the feminist foreign policy (FFP) are usually about three main principles: rights, representation and resources. In 2014, introduced by Sweden, this '3R' structure emphasizes the protection of women's rights, ensures the allocation of resources to equal participation of women in decision-making processes and resources against equality. Many FFPs also include intersectionality, and admit how overlapping identity (e.g. race, class, sexuality) forms women's experiences. These columns are designed to address structural inequalities in the global rule, peace and development. (Toni Haastrup, 2022)

Challenges in the Application of the Policy

The core for implementation of a feminist foreign policy in Indian requires structural and institutional changes. It entails analysing the current social and political milieu and providing recommendations for the Indian context. (Tapakshi Magan, 2022)

1. **Limited Representation in Diplomacy and Policy Making:** The women MPs constitute only 14% in the 18th Lok Sabha currently. (PRS Legislative Research, 2024) While women in Indian Foreign Service (IFS) comprise only 37.8% as of 2022, with minimal to no representation in top posts. (Kaul, 2023) This restricts the representation of affected women being part of decision-making and negotiation processes.
2. **Patriarchal Institutional Cultures:** The deep-rooted patriarchy hinders the inclusion of women in effective decision making. The success of FFP significantly depends upon the deconstruction of established dominant power structures, inclusion of marginalised communities and diversity of opinions. (Kiran, 2023)
3. **Focus on Traditional Form of Security:** The policies and promises at national and international levels towards gender sensitivity remain superficial without any actual implementation because of a focus on national sovereignty and conventional forms of security. The proponents of this argument believe it is done to prevent international interference in the internal affairs of a country in order to protect women's rights, as happened in Afghanistan. (Irene M. Santiago, 2023)
4. **Lack of National Action Plan for India:** India has not yet ratified UNSCR 1325 resolution, which is a significant step towards incorporating gender inclusivity concerns in peace and security governance. (Natasha, 2023) This resolution provides for mandatory implementation of National Action Plan. This plan shows a country's dedication to integrating gender into peace and security concerns. Likewise, despite having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, India has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol, which permits individuals to directly contact the CEDAW committee in the event that the national systems do not adhere to the agreement's tenets. (Chopra, 2022) This means there is a lack of structured framework and clear strategy for implementation of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in India.

Approach to Conflict and Peace Building

Feminist foreign policy offers an innovative alternative to traditional ideas about conflict and peace. Rather than focusing solely on military power or state security, it emphasizes human security, aiming to ensure the safety of individuals—especially women—who are often most vulnerable due to systemic exposure to violence, poverty, and oppression. This approach defines peace not merely as the absence of war but as the presence of justice and equality in which human rights are fully upheld (Thompson, 2021).

- **Inclusivity in Peace Processes:** Inclusivity is a key pillar of feminist foreign policy. According to this approach, sustainable peace cannot be achieved without the full and active participation of women at every stage of the peace process, including conflict resolution, negotiation, and post-war reconstruction. Research has shown that when women are involved in peacebuilding, the outcomes tend to be more stable and enduring (Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Suilleabhain, Thania Paffenholz, 2015). Women often emphasise education, healthcare, and justice—critical components of long-term peace (Agstam & Tro, 2020). Their contributions help shape peace agreements that serve the broader needs of communities, rather than the interests of elite groups.



- **Rejecting Violence in Diplomacy:** Another core element of feminist foreign policy is its rejection of violence as a tool of diplomacy. Instead of investing heavily in military defence, this policy promotes peaceful strategies such as dialogue, education, and international development. Sweden's feminist foreign policy, for instance, focuses on reducing global inequality and advancing women's rights through international cooperation and support ([Swedish Government Offices, 2019](#)). By addressing the structural roots of conflict, such as poverty and gender-based discrimination, this approach works to prevent violence before it erupts.
- **A Broader Vision of Peace:** Ultimately, feminist foreign policy redefines peace not simply as the end of armed conflict, but as an active commitment to justice, equality, and the dignity of all people ([Cynthia Enloe, 2014](#)). This reimagining of foreign policy reflects a more inclusive, equitable, and human-centred framework for achieving lasting peace.

Case Study

- **Sweden:** Sweden pioneered Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) by being one of the first countries to take such initiative in 2014. The policy aims at systematic integration of gender perspective in their foreign policy agenda ([Nylund, Sandra & Elin, 2022](#)). Further, the government also declared itself a feminist government in 2014. The Swedish foreign ministry embedded the FFP across all its departments, and established internal structures like gender focal points in each department to support the rollout of the FFP in a successful way ([Ekatherina, 2021](#)). Sweden also propagated its feminist ideas through online platforms like Twitter and communications through its websites like #feministforeignpolicy, which became a key hashtag. The strategic use of such digital diplomacy helped shape the domestic policy and create a global discourse on the underrepresentation of women's biographies ([Annika Bergman & Elsa, 2022](#)). This policy created an institutional shift in Sweden's foreign policy. The increased participation in proliferation of peace and conflict prevention through the Security Council and promotion of gender equality across EU trade agreements were among the significant steps taken by the Swedish government in furtherance of this policy ([OECD, 2021](#)). These steps resulted in an increase in the participation of women in dialogues and discourses on peace and security in the Security Council and European Council ([OECD, 2021](#)). Swedish feminist policy is an important example of how government policy intervention can help in the promotion of feminist ideals in foreign policy and create a global impact. Although Sweden formally revoked its feminist foreign policy in 2022, it continues to uphold its commitments under the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. The adoption of the 2024–2028 National Action Plan reflects Sweden's ongoing role as a signatory to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, signaling its sustained engagement in gender-responsive peacebuilding and diplomacy ([Peace Women, 2025](#)).

Limitations of the Policy

While the policy vision is to be transformative, the approach faces a range of practical, structural and conceptual limitations. It becomes difficult to define feminist foreign policy at a global level, which results in conceptual ambiguity and inconsistent application. Most countries widely adopt the '3 Rs' of the policy.

The discrepancy between rhetoric and practice is a major critique. Countries may employ feminist branding in their foreign policy while still supporting authoritarian governments, exporting weapons, or enforcing restrictive immigration laws that run counter to the fundamental tenets of FFP. Gender commitments are frequently superseded by state interests, placing feminist agendas beneath strategic, financial, or security objectives. As a result, foreign policy becomes business as usual, with gender equality taking a backseat.

In an effort to address the underlying causes of violence and give priority to peacebuilding, feminist foreign policy frequently encourages demilitarisation and conflict prevention. They are constrained, nevertheless, in war scenarios where military action or strict security measures would be necessary. The realities of war, massacres, and hard power politics may be too much for the gender-sensitive viewpoint to handle, which begs the question of how well FFP holds up in practical situations and the necessity of crisis management. ([Assad & Tausendfreund, 2022](#))

Feminist foreign policy offers a valuable framework for advancing gender equality and upending conventional wisdom in international relations. Still, it has significant drawbacks in terms of definition, application, intersectionality, and opposition from dominant state interests and global politics. More clarity, sincere dedication, strong accountability, and an inclusive, intersectional strategy that closes the gap between ambition and reality are all necessary to address these constraints.



Conclusion

Feminist foreign policy has revolutionised state approaches to diplomacy, development, security, and humanitarian aid by integrating a gender perspective. France's strategy (2025-2030) exemplifies this shift with concrete initiatives: defending sexual and reproductive rights, supporting feminist organisations, addressing gender-based violence, promoting girls' education, enhancing women's economic independence, and fostering their participation in public decision-making. These priorities now influence diplomatic missions, foreign aid distribution, and humanitarian efforts. ([France's International Strategy for Feminist Diplomacy \(...\), 2025](#))

- **Future Feminist Foreign Policy Integration:** As explored in Clara Jöster-Morisse's paper on feminist-informed foresight, thinking about the future of FFP requires policy tools and an imaginative, anticipatory lens that challenges current paradigms. Feminist foresight involves integrating long-range thinking with feminist ethics—such as care, cooperation, and justice—into statecraft. This opens up space for re-imagining diplomatic priorities beyond crisis response and national interest, centring instead on the lived realities of marginalised communities around the globe. Jöster-Morisse argues that future FFPs must not just aim to mainstream gender but reframe the intent and operation of foreign policy itself. ([Jöster-Morisse, 2025](#)) At the same time, critiques of FFP, such as those presented in the International Studies Review article on governance feminism, urge a closer look at whether FFP risks becoming another form of soft power or symbolic governance. By embedding feminist language into state policy without challenging the inherent contradictions of military spending, border regimes, or selective humanitarianism, states may promote a superficial version of feminism. This perspective calls for a more radical and accountable version of FFP that champions rights abroad and interrogates colonial legacies and domestic inequalities within FFP-promoting states. ([Bell & Wegner, 2025](#)) Research from UN Women and the Heinrich Böll Foundation further adds a participatory and practitioner-oriented dimension. The importance of engaging feminist civil society actors, particularly from the Global South, is crucial to the legitimacy and sustainability of FFP. These organisations often bring grounded, context-specific knowledge that challenges top-down, donor-driven approaches to gender equality. Future policies must not only reflect feminist values in rhetoric but also allocate resources and institutional power toward grassroots leadership, inclusive policy design, and robust accountability mechanisms. ([Janebová, 2025](#)) By incorporating participatory processes, FFP has also driven institutional change within ministries and agencies. Civil society, including feminist groups, the private sector, research organisations, and international bodies, actively contributes to policy development and implementation. This inclusive approach ensures that underrepresented voices, particularly from the Global South and marginalised communities, shape policy discussions, focusing on intersectionality, the care economy, and anti-racism efforts.



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