

SECURITY COUNCIL WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION AND FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Reducing the risk of nuclear weapons is not possible without their total elimination. While the five states that possess nuclear weapons in accordance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons hold permanent status on the United Nations Security Council, the status quo of nuclear policy will remain difficult to change. However, two of the five permanent members have shown interest in adopting feminist foreign policy, a true enactment of which would be directly contradictory to the maintenance and development of nuclear weapons. Feminist foreign policy, then, offers an opportunity to approach disarmament dialogues in an innovative way with some of the most powerful nuclear possessing states.

Marissa Conway and Asha Herten-Crabb*



* Marissa Conway is the Co-Founder and UK Director of the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP). Asha Herten-Crabb is the Research and Policy Coordinator for CFFP UK.

Modern understandings of security tend to rely on the threat of violence as the key means to achieve or maintain peace. Nowhere is this more measurable than in nuclear policy.¹ Mitigating the risk of nuclear weapons is not possible without their total elimination, however, the status quo of nuclear policy is difficult to change, particularly as the five states which possess nuclear weapons in accordance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) also sit on the Security Council as the Permanent Members (P5).² This dynamic makes steps toward nuclear elimination difficult to secure. However, France and the UK, two of the P5, have shown interest in adopting feminist foreign policy (FFP).³

Feminist foreign policy is a policy framework to encourage gender, racial, and economic justice.⁴ It centers the process of policymaking on the experience of those affected by policy and in this way offers a new and unique opportunity to restructure the institution of foreign policy.⁵ Rather than rely on the threat of destruction as a means to maintain peace, FFP reorients how we understand and conduct security to undo global patterns of oppression and scrutinize structural violence.⁶ Activists and academics are in consensus that a feminist foreign policy framework calls for the elimination of nuclear weapons.⁷ FFP, then, offers an opportunity to approach

¹ Marissa Conway, "A Feminist Nuclear Policy," *Ploughshares Fund*, 3 April 2019, <https://www.ploughshares.org/issues-analysis/article/feminist-nuclear-policy>

² United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," 2019, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/text>; United Nations Security Council, "Current Members," 2019, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/current-members>

³ Jean-Yves Le Drian and Marlène Schiappa, "Feminist Foreign Policy," *France Diplomatie*, 8 March 2019, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/human-rights/events/article/feminist-foreign-policy-op-ed-by-jean-yves-le-drian-and-marlene-schiappa-08-03>; Kate Osamor, "A World for the Many Not the Few: The Labour Party's Vision for International Development," *The Labour Party*, 2018, https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/World_For_The_Many.pdf; Women's Equality Party (@WEP_UK), "This motion has passed - the Women's Equality Party has resolved to create a feminist foreign policy," 9 September 2018, 12:56 p.m. Tweet. https://twitter.com/WEP_UK/status/1038727838415953920

⁴ Jacqui True, "Why We Need A Feminist Foreign Policy To Stop War," *Open Democracy*, 20 April 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/why-we-need-feminist-foreign-policy-to-stop-war>; Rachel Vogelstein and Alexandra Bro, "Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy, Long May It Reign," *Foreign Policy*, 30 January 2019, <https://foreign-policy.com/2019/01/30/sweden-feminist-foreignpolicy>; Kristen P. Williams, "Feminism in Foreign Policy," *Oxford Research*, September 2017, <http://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-368>

⁵ Pramila Jayapal and Yifat Susskind, "Progressive Women Are Developing A Feminist Foreign Policy," *The Hill*, 9 May 2019, <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/442850-progressive-women-are-developing-a-feminist-foreign-policy>; The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, "Feminist Foreign Policy," 2019, <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/feminist-foreign-policy>

⁶ Zarina Khan, "Can A Feminist Foreign Policy Really Make A Difference?" *UNA-UK*, 12 December 2017, <https://www.una.org.uk/magazine/2017-2/can-feminist-foreign-policy-really-make-difference>; Kristina Lunz and Nina Bernarding, "Feminist Foreign Policy: Imperative For A More Secure and Just World," The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 18 February 2019, <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/journal/2019/2/16/feminist-foreign-policy-imperative-for-a-more-secure-and-just-world>; Lyric Thompson and Rachel Clement, "Defining Feminist Foreign Policy," International Center for Research on Women, 2019, <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Defining-Feminist-Foreign-Policy-Brief-revised.pdf>

⁷ Marissa Conway and Beatrice Fihn, "The Fate of the Earth Depends on Women," *The Nation*, 8 November 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/nuclear-prohibition-beatrice-fihn>

disarmament dialogues in a fresh way with some of the most powerful nuclear possessing states.

Resisting Nuclear Elimination

As nuclear technology developed, the NPT rightfully attempted to limit its spread. This resulted in granting custodianship to the five countries that had already tested their weaponry prior to January 1967: China, Russia, France, the UK, and the USA.⁸ When the treaty was fully implemented in 1970, all other nations were effectively prohibited from building and using nuclear weapons. 191 states signed the treaty, however, there are a few notable dissenting states. India and Pakistan refused to sign and pursued development of their own arsenal. North Korea withdrew from the treaty in 2003 and has tested its own weaponry, and lastly, Israel has ratified the treaty but is suspected of developing nuclear weapons nevertheless.⁹ Though important nuclear policies to be explored, this paper will focus on P5 nations.

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The NPT presents the curious contradiction of granting five states the right to possess nuclear weapons, while simultaneously denying this access to all others. Though the treaty ultimately calls for nuclear disarmament, this is yet to be realized. The P5 tends to treat the NPT not as an agreement to ultimately reduce their stockpiles but rather as a sanctification of their right to possess them. This has established a deep and inherent power imbalance between these states and all other nations. Not only do the P5 command the power for destruction such an arsenal entails, but they also enjoy the privilege of a permanent position on the Security Council, including veto power. It is understandable then, that attempts to eliminate nuclear weapons are met with resistance and any efforts made to reduce or eliminate nuclear stockpiles are bottlenecked by the P5.

In 2017, the United Nations hosted a conference to develop a legally binding treaty that would prohibit all involvement and activities with nuclear weapons.¹⁰

⁸ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,” 2019, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/text>

⁹ Arms Control Association, “Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance,” 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat>

¹⁰ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons,” 2019, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw>

The resulting Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, known as the Ban Treaty, was supported by 122 states in attendance, yet has not received backing from the P5. In October of 2018, they released a statement defending their decision not to back the Ban Treaty. While speaking favorably of the “pursuit of good faith negotiations on effective measures related to nuclear disarmament,”¹¹ they likewise also argue that the Ban Treaty undermines such efforts as outlined by the NPT. Ultimately, they warn that it will create deeper divisions within the “international non-proliferation and disarmament machinery, which could make further progress on disarmament even more difficult.”¹² However, this treaty marks a unique instance in which the international community united in support of a common disarmament interest.¹³ In fact, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) won the Nobel Peace Prize for its role in championing the Ban Treaty.¹⁴ For the P5 to suggest the treaty as divisive rather than unifying is an attempt to spin narratives in order to legitimize the nuclear status quo, which at the moment means maintaining or growing nuclear arsenals.

Currently, both Russia and the US are increasing their arsenal. Russia has recently unveiled a new generation of Russian weapons that are nuclear-capable, and is suspected of developing a cruise missile banned under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.¹⁵ The United States, under the Trump administration, has taken initial steps toward developing low-yield nuclear weapons deployable via submarines in response to Russian nuclear activity, and is attempting to match its varying grades of nuclear weapons to that of Russia’s.¹⁶ In January of this year, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office issued a report which projected US spending on nuclear weapons over the next decade to total nearly half a trillion USD, increasing the estimate from two years ago by 23 percent.¹⁷

¹¹ The Government of the United Kingdom, “P5 Joint Statement on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,” 24 October 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/p5-joint-statement-on-the-treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons>

¹² The Government of the United Kingdom (24 October 2018)

¹³ Allison Pytlak, “The Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty,” Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, March 2018, https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Nuclear-Weapons-Ban-Treaty_English-web-FINAL.pdf

¹⁴ ICAN, “Nobel Peace Prize 2017,” 6 October 2017, <https://www.icanw.org/action/nobel-peace-prize-2017-2>

¹⁵ Anton Troianovski and Paul Sonne, “Russia Is Poised To Add A New Hypersonic Nuclear-Capable Glider To Its Arsenal,” *The Washington Post*, 26 December 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russia-is-poised-to-add-a-new-hypersonic-nuclear-warhead-to-its-arsenal/2018/12/26/e9b89374-0934-11e9-8942-0ef442e59094_story.html?utm_term=.72889d3de1ff; Congressional Research Service, “Russian Compliance With The Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty: Background And Issues For Congress,” 8 February 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R43832.pdf>

¹⁶ James N. Mattis, “Letter to Senator Mitch McConnell,” 6 March 2018, <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/4505370/Read-Mattis-letter-defending-the-new-low-yield.pdf>; Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Nuclear Posture Review,” *U.S. Department of Defense*, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/SpecialReports/2018NuclearPostureReview.aspx>

¹⁷ Congressional Budget Office, “Projected Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2019 to 2028,” 2019, <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files?file=2019-01/54914-NuclearForces.pdf>

Concerned by the nuclear strong-arming between the US and Russia, China likewise has slowly been expanding rather than reducing its arsenal.¹⁸ It is diversifying nuclear delivery systems to include submarines, land-based missiles, and strategic bombers, and even tested a mock launch of a nuclear weapon in January.¹⁹ Similarly, in February of this year, France executed a nuclear deterrent simulation strike.²⁰ Though France invests in nuclear modernization over expansion, the worrying move comes on the heels of the US and Russia withdrawing from the INF Treaty. Speaking of the simulation, French Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly said, “We Europeans cannot remain spectators of our own security.”²¹ For both France and China to respond in such a way to growing tensions between the US and Russia marks a shift in the state of allyship between nuclear possessors and is cause for concern that discord within the P5 will further push nuclear development over nuclear disarmament.

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Lastly, as an outlier to the four other P5 members, the UK has the smallest arsenal of the nuclear-possessing nations, and while hesitant to embrace the Ban Treaty, it still engages in active dialogues within Parliamentary structures about nuclear disarmament.²² Since 2010, it has decreased the number of available warheads on submarines and has committed to reducing its overall stockpile to less than 180 by the mid-2020s.²³

The current landscape of nuclear weapons within the P5 is complex, to say the least. The further these states turn inward in response to tumultuous political relationships and reject dialogue around disarmament, the further we risk destabilizing the idea of deterrence which is widely accepted to have thus far prevented a nuclear war. The

¹⁸ Tom O’Connor, “China’s Military Wants New Nuclear Weapons to Keep Up With The U.S. And Russia,” *Newsweek*, 30 January 2019, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-wants-new-nuclear-weapons-keep-us-russia-military-power-795401>

¹⁹ David Axe, “China Just Practiced Launching a Nuclear Weapon,” *The National Interest*, 24 January 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/china-just-practiced-launching-nuclear-weapon-42347>

²⁰ John Irish and Sophie Louet, “France Carries Out Rare Simulation of Nuclear Deterrent Strike,” *Reuters*, 5 February 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-nuclear/france-carries-out-rare-simulation-of-nuclear-deterrent-strike-idUSKCN1PU1MK>

²¹ John Irish and Sophie Louet (2019).

²² Maxwell Downman, “The United Kingdom’s Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Diplomacy,” *Basic*, 20 February 2019, <https://www.basicint.org/the-united-kingdoms-non-proliferation-and-disarmament-diplomacy>

²³ The Government of the United Kingdom, “The UK’s nuclear deterrent: what you need to know,” 19 February 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nuclear-deterrence-factsheet/uk-nuclear-deterrence-what-you-need-to-know>

current pursuit of a feminist foreign policy framework in the UK and France, then, presents an interesting angle to open new dialogues within P5 nations about not just nuclear elimination but diplomacy and power relations as a whole.

A New Ethical Agenda: Feminist Foreign Policy

Feminist foreign policy first arrived on the political scene when Sweden adopted it as official state policy in 2014. Its areas of policy focus are named as the “three R’s”: women’s Rights, backed with Resources and supporting increased female Representation, which has been implemented in an effort to integrate gender equality throughout its foreign policy.²⁴ Other states soon followed in adopting explicitly feminist policies or feminist foreign policy: Canada, the UK’s Labour Party and the Women’s Equality Party, and France have used Sweden’s FFP as a template. Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), adopted in 2017, likewise calls for a gendered consideration of how international aid is spent.²⁵ The UK’s Labour Party developed a feminist development policy within their 2018 international aid plan to develop mechanisms to support gender equality throughout the Department for International Development.²⁶ Both the UK’s Women’s Equality Party and France have committed to developing FFP, however, there are yet to further detail about what this will entail.²⁷

Alongside state development of FFP agendas, scholars and activists have initiated research and projects to further develop both the theory and practice of feminist foreign policy. There is large consensus that while an FFP agenda includes supporting gender equality initiatives, the overall framework of FFP calls for nothing short of a complete and systemic overhaul of foreign policy to expel patriarchal values and center justice, cooperation, and marginalized voices in its processes.²⁸ Should the UK and France fully adopt FFP, integrating these principles will be key to seeing a successful feminist foreign policy realized.

Analyzing nuclear policy through an FFP lens then, though important, is not simply about encouraging greater female representation in nuclear policy. It inquires into how we broadly understand security as a threat-based system and questions the very

²⁴ Government Offices of Sweden, “Feminist foreign policy,” 2019, <https://www.government.se/government-policy/feminist-foreign-policy>

²⁵ Government of Canada, “Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy,” 2019, https://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng

²⁶ Kate Osamor (2018).

²⁷ Jean-Yves Le Drian and Marlène Schiappa (2019); Women’s Equality Party (@WEP_UK), “This motion has passed - the Women’s Equality Party has resolved to create a feminist foreign policy,” 9 September 2018, 12:56 p.m. Tweet. https://twitter.com/WEP_UK/status/1038727838415953920

²⁸ The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (2019).

justifications for maintaining such destructive force as the “only” way to maintain peace. FFP explores how the power is maintained with nuclear weapons possession and how this shapes inequalities within global hierarchies. Ultimately, FFP calls for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. It is interesting, then, as nuclear possessors and members of the P5, that France and the UK are expressing interest in feminist foreign policy. While it is yet unclear as to what these policies will include, FFP provides a uniquely potent path toward amplifying alternative conversations and feminist perspectives on nuclear policy in the very heart of the nuclear elimination resistance.

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Applying Feminist Foreign Policy to Nuclear Weapons

Feminist foreign policy is a means to achieve equality through a broad agenda which focuses on rebalancing inequitable power hierarchies. There are few places such that a hierarchy is more prolific than in the nuclear field; nuclear policy is a breeding ground for patriarchal values. Gendered ideas about who and what makes “good” policy means that the field continues to be lead by elite men and alternative perspectives and voices are often silenced.²⁹ This commonly manifests in national security and nuclear policies which insist on the threat of violence and destruction as a means to achieve peace.

Viewing nuclear policy through an FFP lens decenters the individual human as subject. As is currently, the weapons themselves serve as subject. They are heavily phallicized and used to symbolize masculinity and dominance. The consequences of a nuclear detonation are passed over in favor of narratives that emphasize a protector/protected relationship between possessors and non-possessors in order to continue the justification of the P5’s custodianship. The protectors are rational and responsible, while those in need of protection, from themselves or others, are the opposite. In this way, nuclear weapons have grown to represent a specific kind of accepted international order, fueled by hegemonic masculinity and ideas about who should be “allowed” to access power.³⁰

²⁹ Carol Cohn, “Sex and Death in The Rational World Of Defense Intellectuals,” *The University Of Chicago Press Journals*, 1987, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/494362>

³⁰ Marissa Conway, “A Feminist Analysis of Nuclear Weapons: Part 1 - Hegemonic Masculinity,” *The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy*, 30 December 2017, <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/journal/2016/12/30/a-feminist-analysis-of-nuclear-weapons-part-1-hegemonic-masculinity>

In order to reorient how we understand the subjectivity of nuclear policy, a feminist foreign policy framework first asks that marginalized voices across the spectrum are centered in policy initiatives. At the state level, this means taking seriously the concerns of non-possessor nations and the Global South, and at a local level, it means prioritizing the input of indigenous people, people of color, and women, to name a few. FFP requires broad collaboration when making policy decisions in order to source the best possible solutions to any given problem and ensure the default is not a status quo agenda set by an elite few.³¹ It requires that all policy outputs are judged by their impact on the everyday lived experience of local populations rather than abstract and deeply politicized strategic benefits.³²

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Implementing such shifts would radically alter how nuclear policy is conducted. The majority of nations, those who are often ignored in nuclear policy negotiations by the P5, are in favor of abiding by the regulations outlined by the Ban Treaty. This includes prohibiting the development, testing, production, acquisition, possession, stockpiling, or use of nuclear weapons. Implementing a feminist foreign policy within P5 countries would mean taking these state’s interests into account, inevitably calling into question the right of the P5 to possess these weapons. As the UK and France begin to adopt their own FFP frameworks, it is critical that these states understand what this truly calls for.

Recommendations

There are several key policy recommendations to be made when considering nuclear weapons within an FFP framework. The first is the necessity for policy coherence for any true feminist approach to foreign policy, both at the UN and country level. Looking to implement feminist values in foreign policy while maintaining the power and permanency of the P5 is at odds with what an FFP agenda asks for. While the theoretical foundation of this framework is quickly growing under academics and activists, states too must pay attention to the underlying values feminism brings

³¹ Kristina Lunz and Nina Bernarding, (2019).

³² Carol Cohn and Sara Ruddick, “A Feminist Ethical Perspective on Weapons of Mass Destruction,” *Consortium on Gender, Security, and Human Rights*, 2003, https://genderandsecurity.org/sites/default/files/carol_cohn_and_sara_ruddick_working_paper_104.pdf

to policy initiatives. P5 states that are considering the adoption of feminist foreign policy must understand that such a framework is impossible to execute in its entirety without a commitment to at minimum reducing its nuclear arsenal. Any FFP that results in the maintenance or development of nuclear arsenals is a policy failure and co-optation of feminism to uphold patriarchal and violent structures.

Short of complete disarmament, the UN Security Council must implement mechanisms for greater checks and balances to contend with and support a multipolar world. Such a mechanism would remove any permanent membership on the Security Council and instead give states equal voices in decision making and resolution development. It would also prioritize consultations with civil society in recognition that those in positions of political leadership are often elite and do not represent the concerns of the average citizen.

Finally, all nuclear possessing states must reduce their budgets for nuclear weapons and redirect the funds toward areas which we know to have the biggest impact on lasting peace: equal representation in leadership, access to education for all women, and reducing gender-based violence.³³

While the hegemony of the P5 is maintained by both UN Security Council rules and possession of weapons of mass destruction, achieving positive peace will remain an impossible goal. Feminist foreign policy offers a human-centered approach that seeks to rectify the disconnect between masculinized and militarized state action and human consequences that inevitably follow. Feminist foreign policy provides a new lens through which to reimagine the UN Security Council: a UN Council for peace, equality, and cooperation where power is shared not coveted.

³³ Catalina Crespo-Sancho, "Can Gender Equality Prevent Violent Conflict?," *World Bank*, 28 March 2018, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/can-gender-equality-prevent-violent-conflict>