

Five Steps to a Feminist Foreign Policy

January 9, 2017

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The Chinese have a proverb: “May you live in interesting times.” This is also meant to be a curse. How true for 2016.

To the shock of many, a wave of populist backlash and economic fury led to Brexit in the U.K. and a campaign based on racism, xenophobia and fear has propelled Donald Trump to the White House. Meanwhile, we have witnessed millions of refugees seeking to escape horrific violence and oppression in their homelands and Syria has unraveled into a massacre of civilians while we watch, powerless, on social media and the world stands by without action. We indeed live in uncertain, insecure and tragic times.

Today, in the United States of America, we need a feminist foreign policy more than ever.

A “feminist foreign policy” is a framework for pursuing global peace and security that recognizes the impact of U.S. foreign policy on every person in the countries where we engage. This is not partisan and it is not political. As Margot Wallstrom, the Swedish Foreign Minister and architect of Sweden’s current foreign policy recently articulated:

[T]his will make America great again: if he [Trump] includes women and makes sure he works for gender equality. Without it, he will not be able to make America great again. It is smart policy. It is not just the right thing to do.

Yes, it should be done because it is right and it is smart. We’ve known it for a while.

The U.S. has already taken some important steps to put some of the principles of feminism into action, such as the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which recognizes – based on mounds of evidence from countries around the world — that “engagement and protection of women as agents of peace and stability will be central to the United States’ efforts to promote security, prevent, respond to and resolve conflict and rebuild societies.”

Feminist foreign policy can be and should be a goal for the United States of America. The next administration should build on what has been learned about the correlations between equality, participation and peace. These are the five steps they have to take in order to do it.

1. Ask how American actions will affect women, men, girls and boys around the world differently.

Feminist foreign policy includes both gender parity and gender sensitivity as two core policy objectives. Increasing the opportunities of women to serve in leadership roles is an essential step, yet it is only half of the equation. Gender sensitivity requires a deeper

examination of the impact of American actions on the ground and an avoidance of policies that perpetuate inequality.

2. Recognize that gender equality is central to American leadership.

Feminist foreign policy reflects an understanding that women's roles and rights are central to the challenges we face today. Women and children are the majority of those displaced by wars and disasters. Radical ideologies view women's rights as a threat and brutally target those who speak out. On the flipside, gender equality increases the effectiveness of peace and security strategies. According to the Global Study on 1325, when women are included, there is a 35 percent increase in the probability of a peace agreement lasting 15 years."

3. Uphold global women's rights principles.

Feminist foreign policy prioritizes the full implementation of international and national commitments to advance human rights—that includes gender equality. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 recognizes the importance of women and gender perspectives in peace and security. The U.S. is committed to integrating these principles throughout its policies. America can further demonstrate its leadership on human rights by ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

4. Engage in diplomacy with civil society. Listen to women activists around the world.

Feminist foreign policy embraces the first-hand knowledge of women on the frontlines of the struggle for peace and security. They are today's real superheroes, but they remain virtually invisible to the American foreign policy establishment. Global networks like the International Civil Society Action Network, World Pulse and the Women's Regional Network, should be consulted regularly.

5. Appoint leaders—men and women—who are champions of gender equality.

Feminist foreign policy includes men. Gender parity is important, but a feminist foreign policy also expands leadership opportunities for both women and men who actively support gender equality goals. At the heart of every feminist—man or woman—is the desire for equality and freedom. A feminist foreign policy strives for freedom from want and freedom from fear, for all people.