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*Feminist Foreign Policy in Theory and Practice* by Stephenie Foster and Susan Markham provides an easy-to-understand introduction to the concept of feminist foreign policy alongside examples of its adoption by a few countries in the past decade. Geared toward students and scholars in the fields of international relations, political science, and gender studies along with government officials and policymakers, the book explains what feminist foreign policy is, how it shifts paradigms related to national security, and why the United States should implement such a policy.

The book begins with a very brief history of human rights thought going back to the Magna Carta and mentioning the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women,* and similar texts along the way up to the United Nations’ Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The authors also introduce activists, particularly well-known American women’s rights and antislavery advocates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to sketch the beginnings of mainstream US feminism. They then follow a path of American feminist activism that leads to the #MeToo movement of the late 2010s. Putting human rights and women’s rights together, the first chapter also mentions international women’s rights organizations and conferences, particularly those connected with the United Nations. For scholars familiar with human rights and women’s rights history, particularly from an American and Western perspective, this first chapter provides very little new information, but it would be useful for those unfamiliar with this historical context.

The second chapter, “Feminist Foreign Policy Fundamentals,” dives into the concept of feminist foreign policy and is the most important chapter in the book. It adds much-needed definitions for “feminism” and “gender equality”—terms that vary in meaning from person to person and that can cause some policymakers to hesitate even to
consider implementing feminist foreign policy. Here, the authors clarify that in this text feminism refers to “the belief that sex and gender should not define a person’s role in society” (p. 28). Furthermore, gender equality “does not mean that women and men are the same,” but rather “that everyone should be free to develop their personal talents and abilities and make life choices without limitations set by rigid gender roles” (p. 28). Although both definitions would have been useful in the introduction, in this chapter, they begin the conversation on what feminist foreign policy is and does.

According to Foster and Markham, there are four main components of feminist foreign policy: 1) it promotes gender equality; 2) it broadens the definition of “security”; 3) it aims to diversify representation in foreign policy decision-making posts; and 4) it addresses historic geopolitical power imbalances. The authors argue that promoting gender equality provides both the goal and the means of creating more stable societies. Studies have shown that gender equality—providing more opportunities to women and girls—often spurs economic growth and decreases the likelihood of conflict. Going along with the promotion of gender equality, redefining security to include attention to food security, healthcare, education, civil society, and housing issues again creates more stable societies that are less likely to engage in military conflict. The authors provide examples of how these seemingly domestic issues relate to foreign policy and national security to convince skeptical readers. For example, they link the practice of paying a “bride price” in some societies with the possibility of increased extremist violence (p. 41). Because men in societies with few economic opportunities have difficulty paying such a price, they are more likely to stay single, to have fewer ties to the community, and to decide to join militant or criminal organizations, further destabilizing the nation. Thus, an issue such as bride price that would previously have been deemed a “women’s issue” with little import to national security debates becomes much more significant to foreign policy conversations.

The authors also explain how and why diverse representation aids in the conflict resolution process and what kinds of institutional adjustments feminist foreign policy advocates push for. They clarify that by diverse representation, they particularly promote feminist, and not simply women’s, voices being at the decision-making table. They also claim that feminist foreign policy pushes against two main assumptions of international relations experts: that military might is key and more important than attention to development or diplomacy in securing a nation, and that decisions should be based on “objective” geopolitical facts—that is, not based on nuanced analyses of the on-the-ground impact of such decisions to communities (p. 44). The authors counter that by adopting a feminist foreign policy, decision-makers pledge to consider the long-term consequences of their actions for the society in question, recognizing that social instability will likely lead to more conflict in the future. Thus, decision-makers should recognize that actions that will have long-term consequences in terms of educational opportunities, food security, or housing, for example, will likely lead to future conflict.

The next two chapters tackle feminist foreign policy in practice, with chapter 3 covering nations that have explicitly adopted a feminist foreign policy and chapter 4 describing the ways in which the United States has already moved in the direction of adopting a feminist foreign policy. The authors argue that although feminist foreign policy is not implemented in exactly the same way everywhere, some commonalities exist, including increased representation of women in foreign ministries, increased advocacy for gender equality, and increased dedication of resources to accomplish gender equality in development programs. In 2014, Sweden became the first nation to adopt a feminist foreign policy, and the authors spend the most time exploring its case. They also describe
the varying extents to which Norway, Canada, France, Luxembourg, Mexico, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, and Mongolia, among others, have adopted a feminist foreign policy.

Chapter 4, on the United States’ implementation of policies that could be seen as starting points to adopting a feminist foreign policy, provides a brief history of the United States’ role in the world since World War II, the role of women in the federal government, and US reactions to international pushes for women’s rights. This chapter begins the argument that the United States should implement a feminist foreign policy.

The last chapter in many ways simply combines the information from the previous two to argue that the United States, which has already moved in the direction of adopting a feminist foreign policy, should join the ranks of the nations outlined in chapter 3 that have already adopted a feminist foreign policy. While some structural changes, such as a commitment to increasing the representation of women in national security organizations and a reallocation of resources to prioritize programs geared toward promoting gender equality, would need to occur, the United States could implement a feminist foreign policy fairly easily, according to the authors.

For students, curious scholars unfamiliar with feminist foreign policy, and practitioners, the introductory nature of the text will provide just enough information and pertinent references for further reading, if they choose to learn more. For an academic who is familiar with the concept of feminist foreign policy, this book is unlikely to provide much new information, but I do not believe the authors wrote this book with that audience in mind. Instead, the book successfully introduces the concept of feminist foreign policy, its usefulness in promoting international stability, and its potential as a real-world policy framework for US officials.

Jessica Frazier is an associate professor at the University of Rhode Island in the History and Gender and Women’s Studies Departments. Her current book project, “Creating Transnational Feminist Networks, 1940-2000,” traces the genealogy of transnational feminist praxis in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries through collective biography. Her first book, Women’s Anti-war Diplomacy during the Viet Nam War Era (2017), was chosen as a 2017 Outstanding Academic Title by CHOICE magazine, and her research interests revolve around transnational feminism, social movements, intersectionality, and human rights.