

## Paradigm Shift in the Discontinuation of the Feminist Approach in Sweden's Foreign Policy

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the paradigm shift in the discontinuation of the feminist approach within Sweden's foreign policy. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach and The findings indicate that although the Ulf Kristersson government removed the "feminist" label, it did not fully eliminate the institutionalized pro-gender commitments. Through the Neo-Feminist Pragmatism framework, the core principles of rights representation resources were reformulated into a more pragmatic and instrumental "inclusive security" approach, accompanied by reduced budget allocation and lower priority for gender-related programs such as Women, Peace and Security (WPS). The study concludes that this transformation reflects the tension between Nordic feminist normative idealism and the imperatives of geopolitical realpolitik. Gender equality values persist in adaptive and contextual forms, although they have partially lost their transformative power as the central framework of Swedish foreign policy.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The integration of a gender perspective into foreign policy, in its most explicit form known as Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), represents a significant innovation in 21st-century international diplomatic practice. FFP places three core principles rights, representation, and resources as the foundation of foreign policy-making. It seeks to redefine the traditional diplomatic agenda, which has long focused on hard power, into one that also emphasizes human security and gender justice (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016). Sweden became the first country to officially adopt FFP in 2014 under Foreign Minister Margot Wallström. Sweden's success subsequently inspired other countries, such as Canada, Chile, Spain and Mexico, to formulate similar policy variants (Thomson, 2023).

However, recent developments have posed serious challenges to the continuity of FFP. The government transition in Sweden at the end of 2022 and the decision by the Ulf Kristersson administration to abandon the feminist foreign policy label have sparked debates about the normative power of FFP and its resilience to domestic political changes (Townes, 2024). At the same time, Sweden's accession to NATO in March 2024 introduced new dynamics, including collective security priorities, alliance pressures and shifts in defense budget allocations that could redefine foreign policy priorities. These phenomena raise a critical question: Is FFP inherently fragile in the face of domestic political shifts and *realpolitik*, or can it be reformulated in a more pragmatic form without losing its pro-gender commitment (Wright, 2024; Thorhallsson, 2024)?

Since its introduction, the academic literature on FFP has developed rapidly across several thematic strands, including normative studies, policy implementation evaluations, domestic political analyses, comparative studies and the nexus between norms and security. Recent works after 2022 have also extensively discussed the post label era and the geopolitical challenges facing FFP. Nevertheless, while these studies demonstrate significant progress in understanding the adoption and implementation of FFP, they have not yet fully addressed the long-term dynamics of policy transformation amid political and security changes.

Based on the literature review above, there is a clear and important research gap. First, there is a lack of comprehensive longitudinal analyses examining the evolution of FFP from the initial adoption phase (2014) to the post-label period (2022–2025). Second, there remains a shortage of systematic conceptual models that integrate feminist idealism with the imperatives of *realpolitik* and security. Third, cross regional comparative studies particularly between Nordic countries and ASEAN are still very limited. Fourth, there is insufficient empirical evidence specifically investigating the impact of NATO accession on the gender agenda in the foreign policy of countries that previously adopted FFP.

In response to these gaps, this study offers two main contributions. First, it introduces the conceptual framework of Neo Feminist Pragmatism, which explains the transformation of policy from the normative identity of FFP to a more pragmatic form that still maintains a pro gender commitment. Second, it conducts an in-depth longitudinal analysis of the Swedish case (2014–2025),

combined with selected comparative studies between Nordic experiences and selected ASEAN countries. This combination of conceptual and empirical approaches is expected to provide an original contribution to the Feminist Foreign Policy literature.

This article examines the transformation process of Sweden's foreign policy from FFP (2014) to the post-label policy phase (2022–2025) in the context of NATO accession (2024) and domestic political changes. It analyzes how the principles of gender equality have been reformulated or marginalized in the practice of contemporary Swedish foreign policy.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

### *Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)*

According to Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond (2016), Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) is a systematic and explicit approach to foreign policy that integrates a gender perspective into all stages of policy formulation and implementation, based on three core pillars: *rights* (women's rights as human rights), *representation* (equal representation), and *resources* (equitable allocation of resources).

Another definition is offered by Thomson (2023) and Zilla (2022), who view FFP as a state policy that defines its international interactions with the aim of disrupting patriarchal, colonial and racist power structures. It prioritizes peace, gender equality, and human rights through substantial budget allocations and institutional reforms. The concept of FFP was first officially introduced by Sweden in 2014 under Foreign Minister Margot Wallström. It evolved from the well established Nordic tradition of *state feminism* since the 1970s. Initially idealistic and normative in nature (FFP 1.0), it later developed into a more institutional approach emphasizing practical implementation (FFP 2.0). More recently, a pragmatic variant (FFP 3.0) has emerged that adapts to the demands of realpolitik (Bergman Rosamond, 2024).

Commonalities among the definitions lie in their commitment to gender equality and their challenge to traditional masculine diplomacy. The differences concern the degree of radicalism: some scholars emphasize deep structural transformation, while others adopt a more reformist and incremental approach. Postcolonial critics (Zilla, 2022) have also emerged, describing FFP as a form of imperial feminism that imposes Nordic values on the Global South. This study adopts the definition proposed by Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond (2016), which focuses on the three pillars of *rights representation resources*. This definition is selected because it is the most operational and measurable, making it highly suitable for analyzing the reformulation and marginalization of gender principles in Sweden. It effectively explains how these core principles can persist even after the formal feminist label is removed.

### *Paradigm Shift*

Kuhn (1970) defines a paradigm shift as a fundamental change in the basic assumptions, values and methodologies that dominate a scientific discipline, usually triggered by the accumulation of anomalies that the existing paradigm cannot explain. In foreign policy studies, McGwire (2002) describes it as a radical change in the way a state understands and responds to its international

environment. This concept originated in the philosophy of science by Thomas Kuhn and was later adopted in political science and international relations. Its development shows a shift from a revolutionary model (drastic change) toward more gradual and hybrid forms. In the context of FFP, paradigm shifts often occur when idealistic norms collide with national security demands and *realpolitik* (Thorhallsson, 2024). The common feature is the non linear nature of change and its broad impact on state identity, while differences lie in the scale and speed of transformation.

This study defines paradigm shift as the substantive transformation in both the normative framework and operational approach of Swedish foreign policy from an explicitly feminist orientation to a more pragmatic, security centered, and NATO adapted policy. This definition is chosen because it aligns closely with the empirical findings regarding the removal of the FFP label and the shift in priorities after 2022.

### ***Discontinuation of the Feminist Approach***

Towns (2024) defines discontinuation as the removal of a formal policy label without completely eliminating the established practices and institutions. Bergman Rosamond (2024) adds that discontinuation in the context of FFP is partial it involves the removal of feminist rhetoric while retaining certain substantive elements. This concept evolved from studies on *policy termination* (de Leon, 1983), which initially focused on the complete ending of programs, and later developed into analyses of normative continuity in the post label era. In Sweden's case, discontinuation is not synonymous with total abolition but represents a more subtle transformation.

This study defines the discontinuation of the feminist approach as the formal removal of the Feminist Foreign Policy label accompanied by reformulation and partial marginalization, rather than complete elimination. This definition is adopted because it best reflects the empirical reality of Sweden after the 2022 election and NATO accession.

### ***Policy Reformulation***

Nylund (2023) defines policy reformulation as the process of adapting the content, instruments and priorities of a policy in response to changes in domestic and international environments. Brännström and Gunneflo (2022) view it as an effort to balance normative values with strategic interests. This concept developed from the literature on policy adaptation and policy resilience. Initially technical in nature, it has evolved into a more political and normative approach, particularly in gender and security studies. This study defines policy reformulation as the paradigm shift from *rights representation resources* to *security stability strategy* through the lens of Neo-Feminist Pragmatism.

### ***Gendered Silencing***

Wright (2024) defines *gendered silencing* as the mechanism by which gender agendas, terminology, and priorities are gradually sidelined or removed from public discourse and policymaking when national security issues become dominant. Towns (2024) adds that this silencing can be both discursive and

institutional. This concept emerged from feminist security studies after 9/11 and has become increasingly relevant in the context of militarization and NATO. It has evolved from the broader idea of depoliticization into a specific analysis of how gender is “hidden” within security rhetoric. This study adopts Wright’s (2024) definition because it is highly consistent with the findings regarding changes in Swedish discourse after NATO accession.

### *Neo Feminist Pragmatism*

Neo Feminist Pragmatism is an analytical framework that explains how feminist values in foreign policy do not disappear but are adapted into more contextual, instrumental and strategic forms to remain relevant amid realpolitik (developed from Nylund, 2023 and Brännström & Gunneflo, 2022). This framework emerged as a response to criticisms that FFP was overly idealistic. It combines elements of pragmatism with feminist commitments, emphasizing compromises that do not sacrifice the essence of gender equality. This study proposes and employs Neo Feminist Pragmatism as the main theoretical framework because it effectively bridges feminist idealism with post NATO security demands, while explaining both continuity and change in Sweden’s foreign policy.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serving as the primary method to examine the dynamics of transformation in Sweden’s foreign policy from the Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) of 2014 to the post-label phase in 2025. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of the formation, negotiation, and transformation of gender meanings in foreign policy, both in textual form and in diplomatic practice.

The data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from official documents of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Utrikesdepartementet), reports from international organizations such as CONCORD Sweden and UN Women Nordic Office, as well as in-depth interviews with diplomats and activists. Secondary data were drawn from scholarly articles, reports by international research institutions and credible media coverage.

Data analysis was conducted through the three stages proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display, and data verification. Data reduction involved selecting key data and organizing them systematically. Data display was achieved by presenting the results of the analysis in the form of matrices, graphs, or conceptual networks. Verification was carried out by identifying patterns, themes, relationships and cross-period comparisons. The analysis followed Fairclough’s (1992) three dimensional model: textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice. Textual analysis examines linguistic structures and gender narratives; discursive practice investigates the production and consumption of policy texts; and social practice explores the socio-political context that shapes the formation of discourse.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Process of Transforming Sweden's Foreign Policy from FFP (2014) to the Post-Label Policy (2022–2025)*

Foreign policy is not merely a diplomatic instrument but also a reflection of domestic dynamics, global norms and shifts in geopolitical power. Sweden, widely recognized as a normative leader in gender equality issues, offers a compelling case study of how feminist principles can be adopted, implemented and subsequently reformulated amid external and internal pressures. In 2014, Sweden became the first country in the world to explicitly adopt a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), an approach that integrates a gender perspective across the entire spectrum of foreign policy, from development assistance to international security (Nordics.info, 2020). This FFP was not merely a rhetorical label but a comprehensive policy framework aimed at addressing structural gender inequalities as a prerequisite for global peace and justice.

The adoption of FFP in 2014 represented the culmination of Sweden's long standing tradition of *state feminism*, which has been a cornerstone of domestic policy since the 1970s. Through the foundational document *Handbook: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy* (2018), the government operationalized FFP around three core pillars: *rights*, *representation* and *resources*. Implementation began with concrete institutional reforms, including the establishment of a dedicated gender mainstreaming unit in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, substantial budget allocations and increased gender related activities in embassies.

However, the trajectory of Sweden's FFP underwent a dramatic transformation following the 2022 general election, when the new government led by Ulf Kristersson removed the feminist label from foreign policy while retaining some of its substantive elements (BBC, 2022). This process was accelerated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which prompted Sweden to abandon its tradition of non alignment and join NATO in March 2024 (Chatham House, 2024). Combined with domestic political changes including a coalition with the Sweden Democrats (SD), a right-wing populist party with an anti immigration and conservative agenda this accession has raised a critical question: how have the principles of gender equality been reformulated or even marginalized in contemporary Swedish foreign policy?

This discussion focuses on two main aspects. First, the process of transforming Sweden's foreign policy from FFP in 2014 to the post label phase (2022–2025), encompassing historical analysis, implementation and the driving factors of change. Second, in the context of NATO accession in 2024 and domestic political shifts, how the principles of gender equality have undergone reformulation (such as integration into a broader security framework) or marginalization (such as reduced priority and funding). This approach is detailed and straightforward, drawing on critical evidence based analysis from primary and secondary sources, including government documents, think tank reports and academic studies. Overall, the central argument is that this transformation reflects the tension between Sweden's progressive domestic norms and an increasingly masculinized geopolitical reality, in which gender issues are often sidelined by national security priorities (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamond, 2024). These dynamics can be explained through the Neo Feminist

Pragmatism framework, which views policy reformulation not as the elimination of feminist values but as a strategic adaptation to remain relevant amid realpolitik.

Sweden's feminist foreign policy emerged from a strong tradition of state feminism, in which gender equality has been a cornerstone of domestic policy since the 1970s. In October 2014, Foreign Minister Margot Wallström announced FFP as a holistic approach that placed women's rights and gender equality at the center of Swedish diplomacy (Nordics.info, 2020). The foundational document, *Handbook: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy* (2018), defined FFP as a systematic effort to change power structures that discriminate against women and marginalized groups, underpinned by three core principles: (1) women's rights as human rights, (2) equal representation of women and (3) full participation of women without discrimination (Government of Sweden, n.d.a). Implementation of FFP began with institutional reforms. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Utrikesdepartementet*) established a dedicated unit for gender mainstreaming that integrated gender analysis into budgeting, project evaluation and diplomatic training. For example, Swedish development assistance, which reached 1% of GDP, allocated 85% to gender sensitive projects in 2018 (Government of Sweden, n.d.b). In multilateral forums, Sweden led initiatives such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), contributing more than SEK 500 million to WPS programs between 2014 and 2022 (Government of Sweden, 2025). Quantitatively, the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA) report showed a 40% increase in gender related activities at Swedish embassies after FFP, including anti gender based violence campaigns in Africa and the Middle East (Anxo et al., 2023).

FFP also enriched Swedish diplomacy with a normative dimension. In 2017, Sweden co-sponsored the FFP Declaration with Canada and France, influencing more than 20 countries to adopt similar variants (Openaid, n.d.). However, early criticism emerged from a postcolonial perspective, accusing FFP of being a form of imperial feminism that imposed Nordic norms on Global South countries without considering local contexts (Expert Group to Implement the Information on the EU Gender Equality Strategy, 2023). Nevertheless, FFP strengthened Sweden's image as a moral superpower, increasing its influence in forums such as the European Union and the United Nations.

During the eight years of Social Democratic governance under Stefan Löfven, FFP evolved into a primary instrument of foreign policy. In 2015, Sweden integrated FFP into its National Security Strategy, which emphasized that true security requires a gender perspective to prevent conflict (Nordics.info, 2020). Concrete examples include support for Syrian refugee women through UNHCR programs, with Sweden contributing SEK 1.2 billion to gender-responsive initiatives between 2016 and 2019. In trade, FFP promoted gender clauses in the free trade agreement with Vietnam (2020), ensuring that 30% of contracts were allocated to women entrepreneurs (Anxo et al., 2023).

Measurable achievements included an increase in women's representation in diplomatic positions: by 2021, 52% of Swedish embassy staff were women, compared to 45% in 2014 (Government of Sweden, n.d.b). Globally, FFP

contributed to the adoption of WPS by more than 80 countries, with Sweden leading in national reporting to the United Nations. However, internal challenges arose: FFP budgets often competed with other priorities, such as humanitarian aid, leading to uneven implementation across embassies (Openaid, n.d.).

The year 2022 marked a significant shift in the direction of Swedish foreign policy. The new right of center coalition government took steps to remove the feminist label from foreign policy. According to Towns (2024), this decision was not merely symbolic but reflected a shift in bureaucratic values and a policy orientation that increasingly prioritized security and strategic economic interests. Wright (2024) noted the phenomenon known as *gendered silencing*, namely the gradual removal of gender terminology and priorities from public discourse. Although pro gender policy practices persisted in some sectors, such as humanitarian aid and development cooperation, they were no longer the central moral framework. In the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs report (2023), the term feminist was no longer used and was replaced by terms such as human centered diplomacy and inclusive cooperation. This transformation demonstrates the pragmatization of feminist values in response to domestic political changes, in line with the Neo Feminist Pragmatism concept and Fairclough's (1992) notion of discursive restructuring.

The September 2022 election served as the catalyst for this transformation. The narrow victory of the right of center bloc (176 seats versus 173) brought Ulf Kristersson to the position of prime minister, supported by a coalition of Moderates, Christian Democrats and Liberals that relied on external support from the SD a right-wing populist party with anti feminist rhetoric (The Guardian, 2022). On 18 October 2022, the new Foreign Minister Tobias Billström announced the removal of the feminist label, arguing that the label had become more important than its content and that it hindered diplomacy with conservative countries (BBC, 2022). This marked the end of the explicit FFP era, although Billström affirmed a commitment to gender equality as a core value. The removal was not a complete reversal but a reformulation. The Government Policy Statement (2023) retained gender mainstreaming but prioritized national security amid the war in Ukraine (Billström, 2024). The driving factors included: (1) domestic pressure from the SD, which opposed feminist ideology as a form of woke politics; (2) the need for geopolitical adaptation, in which FFP was seen as incompatible with military alliances; and (3) international criticism that the feminist label hindered relations with countries such as Saudi Arabia (Bergman Rosamond, 2024). The Human Rights Watch report (2022) described this as a normative setback, noting that removing the label risked reducing accountability (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

In 2023, the Kristersson government released the *Foreign Policy Strategy for Sweden*, which emphasized national interests over norms, with gender listed as one of six priorities (alongside democracy and human rights, among others) (Government of Sweden, 2024). Support for WPS continued, with SEK 300 million allocated to gender-sensitive programs in Ukraine in 2024, but this represented only 15% of total foreign aid, down from 25% during the FFP era (Government of Sweden, 2025). At the United Nations, Sweden continued to lead

gender-related resolutions but in a more neutral tone, avoiding feminist terminology.

By 2025, amid post pandemic recovery and NATO-Russia tensions, Swedish policy shifted toward inclusive security, in which gender was integrated into military exercises but no longer served as the primary analytical lens (Modern Diplomacy, 2025). The EBA study (2023) concluded that although gender related activities increased in absolute terms, their proportion had declined by 20% since 2022, signaling a transformation from revolution to incrementalism (Anxo et al., 2023). Overall, the 2022–2025 period reflects pragmatic adaptation, in which FFP evolved into a gender neutral foreign policy to maintain Sweden’s credibility in an increasingly polarized global arena a process consistent with the concepts of policy resilience and strategic mainstreaming in the policy adaptation literature, as well as the Neo Feminist Pragmatism framework proposed in this study. This development illustrates a gradual process in which external security pressures and domestic political shifts transformed FFP from a transformative normative agenda into a more defensive and adaptive policy orientation.

### ***Reformulation and Marginalization of Gender Equality Principles in the Context of NATO Accession (2024) and Domestic Political Changes***

Sweden’s accession to NATO in 2024 became a decisive turning point in Swedish foreign policy. Joining a military alliance that is traditionally masculinized and militaristic created new challenges for the application of gender equality principles. In this context, feminist discourse faced significant pressure (Hurley, 2024; Rosengren, 2025). Hurley (2024) shows that integrating the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda into NATO structures does not automatically guarantee the sustainability of feminist principles. Although NATO has a Committee on Gender Perspectives and inclusion policies, the approach adopted is largely instrumental, viewing women primarily as strategic assets rather than sovereign political subjects. In this context, Sweden’s gender equality agenda was reformulated into an inclusive security issue that aligned with collective defense priorities.

The post accession Government Policy Statement emphasized Sweden’s new security identity, focusing on collective defense and Baltic Nordic solidarity (Government of Sweden, 2024). However, this process accelerated the marginalization of gender principles. Studies in *International Affairs* (2024) describe this as *gendered silencing*, in which FFP was considered incompatible with NATO’s masculine norms, such as the deterrence doctrine that focuses on conventional military power (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamond, 2024). This *gendered silencing* phenomenon further strengthens Wright’s (2024) argument that when security issues become dominant, the gender agenda tends to be sidelined in public discourse and policy priorities. Specifically, NATO accession forced a reformulation of WPS. NATO adopted its WPS policy in 2018, which emphasizes gender responsive leadership to strengthen gender expertise among alliance leaders (True & Wiener, 2025). As a new member, Sweden contributed by providing gender training for NATO forces in Lithuania (2024), but this was limited to operational aspects, such as integrating women into combat units,

rather than structural transformation (Walfridsson, 2023). Feminist analysis shows that NATO's masculine protector image depoliticizes gender issues, transforming them from structural rights into tactical add-ons (Dahlström, 2025).

Post FFP policy reformulation shows a paradigm shift from *rights representation resources* to *security stability strategy*. This shift reflects the adoption of the Neo Feminist Pragmatism approach, in which gender equality values are not entirely eliminated but adapted to align with national security and geopolitical interests (Nylund, 2023). This reformulation occurred gradually: first through the removal of the label, then through changes in official rhetoric, and finally through reductions in budget proportions and policy priorities.

Critical discourse analysis of Sweden's 2024 annual reports shows that terms such as gender equality continue to appear but are placed within a security context. For example, in the document *Sweden's Defence and Security Outlook 2024*, gender equality is described as a factor supporting defense effectiveness rather than as a normative goal. This indicates that gender is now treated instrumentally to support state agendas rather than as a universal moral principle.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) of policy documents and statements by senior Swedish officials reveals two main patterns: first, the phenomenon of *gendered silencing*, in which feminist terminology is gradually removed from official communications; and second, *strategic mainstreaming*, namely efforts to maintain gender equality values in a new, more pragmatic format. Towns (2024) and Wright (2024) describe this process as a compromise between values and interests. CDA of Foreign Minister Tobias Billström's 2023 speech indicates significant changes in diction. The term feminist diplomacy was replaced by responsible diplomacy and gender equality by equal participation. These changes demonstrate an ideological repositioning that downgrades feminist values from a moral identity to a policy strategy. Fairclough (1992) refers to this phenomenon as *discursive restructuring*, in which the structure of public meaning changes in response to the context of power a finding that strengthens the application of critical discourse analysis in this study.

The transformation of Swedish foreign policy has important implications for global diplomacy. First, it demonstrates that feminist norms in diplomacy can be dynamic and adaptive, depending on domestic political contexts and geopolitical pressures. Second, the Swedish experience serves as an important case study for other countries seeking to balance equality values with strategic interests. According to Walfridsson (2023), the removal of the FFP label is not the end of feminist politics but an evolution toward value based pragmatic diplomacy.

In the Nordic context, countries such as Norway and Finland have maintained a gender approach in their foreign policies even without an explicit label. This shows that the institutionalization of feminist values is more important than rhetorical symbolism. The study by Brännström and Gunneflo (2022) affirms that the success of gender based policy implementation lies in structural integration rather than mere political declarations.

In practice, Sweden's defense budget surged 33% to SEK 131 billion in 2025, with only 5% allocated to gender programs, compared to 12% in 2021 (Vilde,

2025). For example, the Ukraine training mission (2024) emphasized military assistance, with gender elements such as the prevention of sexual violence reduced to optional modules. This reflects reformulation in which gender principles are integrated into the NATO framework but marginalized by anti-Russia priorities (Widen, 2024). Domestic changes after 2022 exacerbated this marginalization. The Kristersson-SD coalition relied on SD support, which in 2022 promised to reduce gender ideology in schools and public policy (The Guardian, 2022). This was reflected in the reduction of funding for gender equality in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: from SEK 1.5 billion (2021) to SEK 1.1 billion (2024) (Government of Sweden, n.d.b). Billström's rhetoric, such as his 2023 Riksdag speech, emphasized realism over feminist idealism, implicitly marginalizing gender as a soft issue.

Reformulation is evident in the *Action Plan for LGBTIQ Rights* (2025), which maintains domestic commitments but limits their foreign application to specific cases, such as support for women in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover (Government of Sweden, 2025). However, marginalization is more pronounced in migration policy: new policies restrict asylum for women victims of violence on border security grounds, contradicting the previous FFP era (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The *International Affairs* study (2024) concludes that this represents a normative reversal, in which gender is reduced to a selective diplomatic tool rather than a universal principle (Bergman Rosamond, 2024). From the perspective of international relations theory, this aligns with Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) concept of norm cascade, in which Sweden's gender norms have experienced decay due to conservative domestic pressures and external geopolitical forces. A similar pattern is observed in the Nordic region, particularly in Finland, where NATO accession in 2023 also reduced the focus on gender (Modern Diplomacy, 2025).

The Ukraine case study illustrates these dynamics. Between 2022 and 2023, Sweden contributed SEK 2 billion to gender responsive reconstruction, including reproductive health clinics. However, after NATO accession, priorities shifted to military aid (SEK 15 billion in 2024), with gender mentioned only in secondary reports (Government of Sweden, 2024). In the Middle East, support for Palestinian women was reduced by 25% in 2025 amid Western alliance pressures (Government of Sweden, 2024). Critical analysis shows that this marginalization is not a total retreat but a hybridization: gender is reformulated as inclusive security to align with NATO but loses much of its transformative power (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamond, 2024). The impact includes a decline in Sweden's influence in global gender forums, with criticism from UN Women that the loss of the label weakens accountability (Government of Sweden, 2025).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The transformation of Sweden's foreign policy from the Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) adopted in 2014 to the post-label phase (2022–2025) illustrates a complex interplay between normative idealism and the demands of realpolitik pragmatism. Following the 2022 general election, the Ulf Kristersson government officially eliminated the feminist label, replacing it with more neutral terms such

as human-centered diplomacy and inclusive cooperation. This process was significantly accelerated by Sweden's accession to NATO in March 2024, which introduced collective security priorities, the deterrence doctrine, and a markedly masculinized shift in defense budgeting. Nevertheless, the findings of this study demonstrate that the removal of the label did not entirely eliminate the institutionalized pro-gender commitments. The principles of gender equality have persisted, although they have been reformulated into a more instrumental and adaptive approach.

Specifically, the 2022–2025 period is marked by a significant decline in the proportion of gender-related budgets: allocation for Women, Peace and Security (WPS) programs fell from 25% to only 15% of total foreign aid, while funding for gender equality in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decreased from SEK 1.5 billion (2021) to SEK 1.1 billion (2024). In the defense budget, the share allocated to gender programs shrank from 12% in 2021 to only 5% in 2025, even though the overall defense budget increased by 33% to SEK 131 billion. Critical discourse analysis further reveals a strengthening of the gendered silencing phenomenon, in which feminist terminology has been gradually removed from official documents and public statements by officials and gender components in the Ukraine training mission have been reduced to optional modules.

Through the Neo-Feminist Pragmatism framework proposed in this study, it can be concluded that Sweden has not completely abandoned feminism. Instead, it has transformed feminist principles into a contextual and adaptive diplomatic instrument. This paradigm shift does not represent a total retreat but rather a policy hybridization: gender has been reformulated as inclusive security to align with NATO norms, although it has lost part of its transformative power as the primary analytical lens for foreign policy. These longitudinal findings address a key gap in the FFP literature namely, the scarcity of analyses linking the initial adoption phase (2014) with the post label and post NATO era and the limited development of conceptual models that integrate feminist idealism with the imperatives of *realpolitik*.

On a broader level, the Swedish case offers important lessons for other Nordic countries (Norway and Finland) and for states that have adopted variants of FFP. It demonstrates that gender equality values can endure through structural institutionalization even after the formal label is removed. This study affirms that the resilience of feminist norms in diplomacy depends not on rhetoric but on the strength of institutional mechanisms and the capacity to adapt to geopolitical pressures and domestic political changes.

### ***Recommendations***

1. Establishment of a Gender Focal Point at Sweden's NATO Headquarters. Create a dedicated Gender Advisor unit within Sweden's permanent delegation to NATO in Brussels to ensure that the gender perspective remains integrated into alliance operational planning, particularly in the Baltic region. Justification: This recommendation is based on the finding that NATO accession in 2024 accelerated gendered silencing and limited WPS integration to operational aspects only (such as integrating women into combat units) without structural transformation (Walfridsson, 2023; Hurley, 2024). Such a

unit is essential to prevent further marginalization and to ensure gender is not merely a tactical add-on.

2. Revitalization of Gender Training for Diplomats and Military Personnel. Mandate annual training on UNSCR 1325 and Gender in Operations for all Swedish Armed Forces personnel and embassy staff. Certification should be provided by the Swedish Defence University (Försvarshögskolan) with specialized modules on sexual violence in conflict. Justification: Research findings show that after NATO accession, gender elements in the Ukraine training mission were reduced to optional modules, while the defense budget surged 33% to SEK 131 billion with only 5% allocated to gender programs (Vilde, 2025). Compulsory training is necessary to maintain institutional commitment and prevent the erosion of gender principles' transformative power.
3. Enhancing Gender Budget Transparency through OpenAid 2.0. Upgrade the OpenAid.se platform with an interactive dashboard that displays: the proportion of foreign aid that is gender-marked (according to OECD DAC criteria) and annual comparisons (2014–2025). Filters by country and theme (WPS, SRHR, women's economic empowerment). Justification: The study documented a sharp decline in gender allocations for instance, WPS support dropped from 25% to 15% of total foreign aid and gender equality funding in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs fell from SEK 1.5 billion (2021) to SEK 1.1 billion (2024) (Government of Sweden, 2025; Anxo et al., 2023). Greater transparency will improve accountability and counteract gendered silencing in budgeting processes.
4. Formation of a Multipartisan Coalition for Gender Equality in Foreign Policy. Establish a Cross-Party Parliamentary Group on Gender Equality in Foreign Policy involving members of the Riksdag from the Social Democrats, Moderates and Left Party to prevent the future politicization of gender issues. Justification: Domestic political changes after the 2022 election, including the coalition with the Sweden Democrats (SD) and its anti feminist rhetoric, have intensified the marginalization and depoliticization of the gender agenda (The Guardian, 2022; Bergman Rosamond, 2024). A multipartisan group is required to safeguard the institutionalization of feminist values against political fluctuations and to ensure policy continuity across governments. members of the Riksdag from the Social Democrats, Moderates, and Left Party to prevent future politicization of gender issues.

## FURTHER STUDY

Based on the findings of this study, several important directions for future research are proposed to deepen the understanding of the dynamics of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) in the post label and post-military alliance era. The following recommendations aim to address the remaining gaps identified in this research:

1. **Broader Cross Country Comparative Studies.** This study has only conducted a limited comparison between Sweden and other Nordic countries. Future research should compare Sweden's experience with

countries that still maintain the FFP label (such as Canada, Spain, or Chile) as well as ASEAN countries that adopt the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda without an explicit feminist label. Such studies would be valuable for testing the applicability and robustness of the Neo Feminist Pragmatism framework across different political and cultural contexts.

2. **Longer-Term Longitudinal Analysis Post-NATO.** This research covers the period up to 2025. Future studies are encouraged to conduct longer longitudinal analyses (for example, until 2028–2030) to determine whether the reformulation of gender policy in Sweden is permanent or merely a temporary response to short term security threats. This would help assess whether *gendered silencing* is deepening or whether there is a possibility of re-institutionalization of gender norms.
3. **Outcome-Based Research on Actual Gender Impacts.** This study has focused primarily on policy processes (rhetoric, budget and discourse). Subsequent research should measure the substantive impact of this paradigm shift on the real conditions of women in recipient countries, particularly in conflict affected areas such as Ukraine, Afghanistan and the Middle East. A mixed methods approach combining quantitative gender indicators and qualitative interviews with beneficiaries would be highly beneficial.
4. **Further Development and Application of the Neo-Feminist Pragmatism Framework.** Since this study proposes the Neo Feminist Pragmatism framework, future research should test its validity in other countries facing similar pressures (such as Finland after NATO accession or Eastern European states). Scholars could also refine and expand this framework by incorporating additional variables, such as the influence of media, non-state actors and generational dynamics.
5. **Deeper Intersectional and Postcolonial Analysis.** While this study touches on postcolonial critiques of FFP, future research should examine more thoroughly how Sweden's policy reformulation affects marginalized groups of women (migrant women, Muslim women, or LGBTQ+ women in the Global South) and whether the post-NATO inclusive security approach actually weakens intersectional perspectives.
6. **Studies on Bureaucratic and Institutional Actors.** Future research could explore the role of career bureaucrats and gender units within the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in preserving the gender agenda despite the removal of the FFP label. Ethnographic or organizational studies would be particularly relevant to understand the mechanisms of institutional resilience.

These recommended future studies will not only enrich the Feminist Foreign Policy literature but also provide practical contributions for countries seeking to balance normative commitments with national security demands in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

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