

When Gendered Identities are National Identities: The Influence of Masculinity on American Foreign Policy

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***Abstract:** National identities are constructed through the process of ascribing a society's preferred attributes to the image of the state at large. In the United States, gender remains a prevailing construct that drives definitions of both individual and collective American identities. Societal preferences for masculinity frame a gendered depiction of the American identity, and subsequently shape foreign policy; as American political leaders design policies and champion rhetoric that serves to project masculinity to both allies and enemies abroad. The connection between foreign policy and masculinity, while often envisioned as "natural" or "intuitive" in traditional theories about international security and conflict, is in fact forged consciously, and in the case of the United States, predicated on gendered national identity preferences. Moreover, feminist analysis of past and present American foreign policy provides a deeper understanding of the true extent to which gendered identities have the ability to structure and define foreign policy discourse. This understanding is important, as all identities taken to extremes have the potential to be manipulated for political gain. Therefore, in the case of the United States, a comprehensive awareness of the interaction between national identity and foreign policy formation is imperative in order to maintain the ability to empirically evaluate foreign policy options.*

I. Introduction

National identities are formed through the same socialization processes that shape the personal identities of individuals. As the American public makes decisions on the individual level about their identity preferences and personal image, these incremental decisions are aggregated to form an overarching national identity. Gender is one of the most salient social constructs in the United States of America, and it greatly influences the way in which the American people define themselves as a collective group and determine their national identity preferences. Dr. Anthony D. Smith of the London School of Economics defines national identity as "a measure of common culture and civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas that bind the population together in their homeland."¹ In the United States, these ideas of common culture, understanding, and ideology are constructed based on masculine values and characteristics. The American construction of national identity based on masculinity greatly influences the image of the United States that Americans wish to project on the international stage, as well as the preferred American foreign policy solutions to issues of national security arising from external threats.

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¹ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Press, 1991), 11.

The role of masculinity in American foreign policy can be discerned by examining the rhetoric used by politicians to frame policy positions in addition to actual policy execution. Foreign policy rhetoric is often used as a tool for expressing the state's international objectives and providing justification for them.² Rhetoric, by nature, is emotionally charged and provides a rationale for national objectives by grounding them deep in personal concepts such as national identity and community values. Therefore, to assess the presence of masculinity in past and present American foreign policy concerns, there is value in examining the rhetoric used by political officials as forum that expresses the motivations of foreign policy, as well as the implementation of policy itself. Furthermore, the United States' choice to use masculinized national identities as a driving force in foreign policy is particularly apparent when past and present foreign policy decisions are contrasted with relevant feminist analyses of the same issue or event, which illustrate strong alternative policy perspectives. The emergence of masculinity in foreign policy rhetoric and action is most pronounced when the United States is involved in a conflict that poses a credible external threat to national security. The two most notable occurrences of this phenomenon are the Cold War and the period following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, including both the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq. In addition, the United States is currently experiencing a magnification of masculinity in American foreign policy under the Trump Administration. These three eras of United States foreign policy serve as ideal case studies that illustrate the pervasive nature of masculinity in American national identity and the resulting implications for foreign policy.

II. Constructing the National Gender

Before assessing the impacts of masculinity on American foreign policy, it is important to understand how gendered identities are formed, their defining attributes, and the policy implications when they are used on a national level. When individuals adopt certain traits and align themselves with various identity attributes, they are making implicit decisions about the way in which they wish to be represented and perceived. In the discipline of social psychology and gender studies, this phenomenon is known as gender-role preference, defined as "activities or traits that one would prefer to engage in or possess."³ Applying the principles of gender preferences on a national level, national identities are similarly influenced by the ideals that the American public holds about gender, and the specific gender traits that Americans prefer as part of their collective identity.

Foundational scholarship in the field of gender studies frequently uses Bem's Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), developed by Dr. Sandra Bem in 1974, to measure individual self-selection of gender attributes.⁴ The results of Bem's original study using the BSRI found twenty traits that were determined to be representative of masculinity because they were commonly selected as more desirable by men than by women. The masculine gender traits listed in this inventory include attributes such as assertive, dominant, forceful, aggressive, and strong.⁵ By contrast, the BSRI also found a list of attributes such as sensitivity, sympathy, compassion, understanding, and warmth to be more feminine because they were significantly more desirable as self-identifiers to women than to men.⁶ Societal conceptions

² Phillip Wander, "The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70, no. 4 (November 1984): 339.

³ Anne Constantinople, "Masculinity-Femininity: An Exception to a Famous Dictum?" *Feminism & Psychology* 15, no. 4 (November 2005): 385.

⁴ Kay M. Palan, Charles S. Areni, and Pamela Kiecker, "Reexamining Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Identity Scales," *Marketing Letters* 10, no. 4 (1999): 365. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40216548>.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 365.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 369.

about gender and its relationship to sex have certainly changed greatly since the development of the BSRI in 1974, and it is becoming ever more conventional to recognize “masculinity” as a concept distinct from the male sex, and “femininity” as a concept distinct from the female sex. Thus, traits of masculinity are not solely reserved for individuals of the male sex, and nor are the traits of femininity restricted to use solely by individuals of the female sex. However, the associations that the BSRI established between masculinity and traits of assertiveness, dominance, forcefulness, aggressiveness, and strength, and associations of femininity to traits of sympathy, compassion, understanding, and warmth, remain a valid analytical framework in the field of gender studies today.

Connecting these traditional attributes and roles of masculinity and femininity to the development of American national identity, a study recently published in *Psychology of Women Quarterly* found that both male and female respondents identified men and masculine attributes to be “more American” than women and feminine attributes.⁷ Furthermore, 2017 survey results from the Pew Research Center report that more than half of Americans agree that society looks up to men who are “manly or masculine.”⁸ In addition, a larger percentage of Americans agreed that society looks down on women who are “womanly or feminine” than men who are “manly or masculine.”⁹ The survey also indicated evidence of how deeply gender preferences are ingrained and reinforced in American socialization processes by assessing the American public’s opinions about gender roles when raising children. While respondents overwhelmingly approved of encouraging girls to be like boys, they expressed significantly less approval of encouraging boys to be like girls.¹⁰ These opinions about gender in the United States reveal not only a connection between American national identity and masculinity, but also a prevailing societal subordination of feminine attributes and behaviors to masculine ones.

These gendered preferences that lay at the foundation of American national identity form the basis of the national image that the United States strives to convey through foreign policy. As a result, foreign policy platforms of national leaders are designed to portray the United States as a tough, often aggressive, global power. The role of masculinity in American foreign policy became extremely salient at the conclusion of World War II. In the aftermath of World War II, as the United States emerged as a global leader in democratic governance, military capabilities, and economic strength, the state began to seek a “fatherly role” in the world order.¹¹ In addition, the development of a large standing military in the United States following the conclusion of World War II created a national glorification of American “men at war,” further promoting an idealized image of American masculinity, particularly with regard to conflict.¹² Since this formative time in the history of American national identity, the United States has continued to forge deep connections between masculinity, national image, and militarization. As a result, when the United States is faced with credible external threats to national security or ideology, which illicit increased levels of nationalism from the American public, policy-makers rely on national identity constructs to form and justify

⁷ Laura Van Berkel, Ludwin E. Molina, and Sahana Mukherjee, “Gender Asymmetry in the Construction of American National Identity,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (September 2017): 352.

⁸ Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, and Renee Stepler, “Americans see society placing more of a premium on masculinity than on femininity,” Pew Research Center, December 5, 2017, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/12/05/americans-see-society-placing-more-of-a-premium-on-masculinity-than-on-femininity/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Claire Cain Miller, “Men and Women Say They’re More Different than Similar,” *The New York Times*, December 5, 2017, accessed February 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/05/upshot/men-women-gender-bias-poll.html>.

¹¹ Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), 213.

¹² Rebecca A. Adelman, “Sold(i)ering Masculinity.” *Men and Masculinities* 11, no. 3 (April 2009): 261.

foreign policies that project the desired masculine attributes of American identity to enemies and allies abroad.

III. Hegemonic Masculinity, World War II, and United States Foreign Policy

The use of masculinity during World War II bolstered the glorification of the United States military, contributed to the development of the American military industrial complex, and ultimately prompted the development of American hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is most succinctly defined by scholars R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt as “the currently most honored way of being a man, it require(s) all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it legitimate(s) the global subordination of women to men.”¹³ The distinctive feature of hegemonic masculinity that differentiates it from other forms of gender ordering is that actors demonstrating hegemonic masculinity also assert dominance over other forms of subordinated masculinities. It is important to recognize that hegemonic masculinity is reflected in state foreign policy not because state leaders are predominantly male, but rather because institutional, organizational, and societal frameworks that are designed to reflect social preference of masculinity.¹⁴ These practices of embedding culturally gendered notions in public institutions eventually results in a “common sense” ascription of masculinity to all things political, thereby setting a standard of hegemonic masculinity which is seldom questioned, and to which all policy is measured against. In the case of the United States, masculine national identity serves as the societal framework that validates the implicit associations between masculinity and foreign policy.

On an international level, states clearly demonstrate hegemonic masculinity when they engage in the processes of classifying or “othering” enemies perceived as threats to national security. Often when the United States is faced with an external security threat, the state impulsively embarks on a campaign to emasculate the enemy, or somehow mark the opposition’s masculinity as inferior to that of the American identity. During the Cold War, this tactic of hegemonic masculinity was used when the United States forged the association between communist sympathizers and homosexuality, in an attempt to make the enemy seem softer and less masculine.¹⁵ This need to ascribe an inferior gendered identity to the enemy was exhibited during the response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 through rhetoric that classified the terrorists as cowardly and deviant men, as well as the use of sexual humiliation to torture imprisoned terrorist suspects.¹⁶ The persistent use of gender ordering and sexuality to define state enemies as lesser or to position them in opposition to the American identity is a definitive indication of the United States’ use of hegemonic masculinity in foreign policy.

Additionally, hegemonic masculinity is particularly salient to analysis of United States foreign policy because it can trigger policy responses that are characterized by hyper-masculinity. Ashis Nandy is thought to be the first scholar to clearly define the concept of and circumstances that give rise to “hyper-masculinity” in her study of colonialism. Nandy describes hyper-masculinity as, “reactionary masculinity that arises when agents of hegemonic masculinity feel threatened or undermined, thereby needing to inflate, exaggerate, or otherwise distort their traditional masculinity.”¹⁷ Hyper-masculinity is most evident in the rhetoric that cloaks United States foreign policy initiatives as a mechanism of justifying and gaining public support for foreign policy initiatives. The two most recent instances of this

¹³ R.W Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6, December 2005, 832, DOI: 10.1177/0891243205278639.

¹⁴ Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict*, 213.

¹⁵ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012): 170.

¹⁶ Laura Shepherd, “Veiled references,” 26.

¹⁷ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: The Psychology of Colonialism*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

phenomenon include the Cold War era of American foreign policy and the post-9/11 response to global terrorism.¹⁸ Therefore, American foreign policy during these time periods serve as ideal case studies from which to assess the prevailing nature of masculinity in the foreign policy initiatives of the United States government, as well as the complementary gendered public rhetoric that accompanied these initiatives.

IV. Alternative Perspectives: Feminist Foreign Policies and International Relations Theory

The development of hegemonic masculinity in American national identity and political culture has cultivated a precedent for assuming that matters of foreign policy necessitate masculine approaches and policy prescriptions. However, the assumption that there is an implicit association between foreign policy and masculinity fails to consider other perspectives on issues such as security, negotiation, and conflict that do not fall within the framework of traditional masculinity and has the potential to create foreign policy blind spots. While masculine attributes and themes are valuable in motivating and implementing foreign policy, the masculine perspective is only representative of one school of thought. As an alternative analytical framework, feminist foreign policy and security studies scholarship recognized the role that gender plays in relationships between states and the foreign policy choices that states make. By doing so, feminist theories in these fields raise questions about why certain issues are privileged over others in a state's foreign policy decision-making framework and seek to challenge these norms.

Author and political science theorist Ann Tickner is credited as one of the founding authors of feminist international relations theory, which has paved the way for feminist scholarship in other areas including foreign policy and security studies. In her groundbreaking 1992 book *Gender in International Relations*, Tickner notes that international relations is one of the last fields of social science to embrace gender analysis, and claims that "the reason for this is not that the field is gender neutral, meaning that the introduction of gender is irrelevant... but that it is so thoroughly masculinized that the workings of these hierarchical gender relations are hidden."¹⁹ Since the foundational work of Tickner, feminist foreign policy and feminist security studies have grown exponentially and continued to become increasingly diverse. Today, feminist perspectives on foreign policy and international relations include alternative frameworks for conceptualizing state relationships, methods of achieving state security, embracing the inclusion of feminine experiences of war and conflict, and analyses that advocate the importance of women in state-building and sustainable development. Each of these perspectives have applications to both past and present foreign policy case studies.

Valuable insight on the role of gendered national identities in foreign policy can be gained by contrasting traditional "masculinist" approaches to foreign policy concerns with feminist analysis of the same issue. In order to better comprehend the embodiment of masculinity in American foreign policy, this paper provides alternative feminist interpretations of three case studies of American foreign policy. The purpose of these comparisons is not to argue that one analytical lens is inherently better than the other, but rather to recognize the relationship between masculine and feminine foreign policy and to highlight their complementary nature. By drawing these connections, this analysis illustrates how American foreign policy decision is often unbalanced in favor of masculine frameworks,

¹⁸ Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict*, 89.

¹⁹ Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), 8-9.

due to the need for policymakers to appease the masculine-centric national identity preferences of the American population. Therefore, it is important to consider feminist perspectives on state security and foreign policy in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the extent to which masculinity has acted as a mobilizing, justifying, and legitimizing force in American foreign policy.

V. United States Foreign Policy Case Studies

Setting Precedent: Masculinity and the Cold War

Although masculinity has had a pervasive role throughout the history of United States' national identity, it became extremely pronounced as a foreign policy motivator during the Cold War. In the era of the Cold War, the United States faced the ideological threat of the rise of communism in the Soviet Union, which was thought to be an oppressive form of government that stood in opposition to traditional American values of freedom, capitalism, and democracy. This opposition caused Americans to pull inwards, exacerbating the importance of masculine attributes and ideals such as strength, resolve, and dominance in defining their collective national identity. As a result, the ideological threat was characterized as the antithesis of American identity; in this case, communism and communist sympathizers were emasculated. Furthermore, the emasculation of Soviet opposition and reaffirmation of a tough American masculinity was reinforced by the rhetoric and foreign policy initiatives of Cold War political leaders such as presidents John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. Thus, the Cold War is a landmark case in the development of masculinity as a foreign policy motivator, as it established a political environment where the legitimacy of leadership was determined by gendered polarities of strength and weakness.²⁰

Societal opposition to communism during the Cold War era produced gendered political polarization. During the early years of the Cold War, President John F. Kennedy stressed the importance of presenting a tough, masculine persona on the international stage; and maintained that a decline in rugged American masculinity at home would effectuate a decline in American military capability abroad.²¹ As the Cold War wore on, an obsession with masculine toughness in foreign policy discourse emerged, which also rendered anything perceived soft or feminine as a threat to national security. However, communism in the era of the Cold War was associated with more than simply "softness." It was also associated with homosexuality, which was, at the time, an identity that was the antithesis of masculinity. During the 1950s and 1960s, mass media and literature in the United States developed an almost cautionary tale of "failed men" who turned into communists and homosexuals; "soft, spineless dupes of a foreign power who were incapable of standing up for themselves."²² This example of gender-ordering illustrates how the American public often defines and constructs its collective national identity in opposition to external threats; gravitating towards the masculinization of the United States and the emasculation of its opponents. Furthermore, the use of gender and sexuality to characterize the threat of communist ideology during the Cold War is a clear example to the United States demonstrating hegemonic masculinity by engaging in cross-sectional gender ordering.

This gendered narrative of communism vs. democracy during the Cold War also greatly impacted the foreign policies pursued by the American government. To prevent the spread of communist ideology, American political leaders at the time believed they needed to

²⁰ Robert R. Dean, "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1998, 31.

²¹ *Ibid*, 30.

²² Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 170.

project the strength and resolve of the United States through mechanisms of foreign policy, and demonstrate the impenetrable nature of American national identity. One of the most compelling cases to use as a study of masculinity and American foreign policy during the Cold War era is the Vietnam War. Historian Christian Appy claims that, “U.S. policy in Vietnam was driven by men, who were intensely concerned about demonstrating their own – and the nation’s – toughness.”²³ While the Vietnam War became increasingly difficult to swallow, with images of scorched villages and dying Vietnamese civilians becoming commonplace, American policymakers became more and more dependent on the idea of maintaining strength to justify a war in which American lives were being lost for little evidence of military gain.²⁴ Moreover, the Vietnam War became a proxy for the United States to reaffirm its fatherly role that it sought to adopt after the conclusion of World War II.²⁵ As a result, leaders of American foreign policy during the Vietnam War felt compelled to maintain and increase the United States’ military action in Vietnam, for fear of appearing to have failed in their desired role as the global father-figure. This masculine-centric justification for military involvement in Vietnam was effective in prolonging the Vietnam War, as it embodied principles that were tightly bound to American sense of self and collective identity.

For the duration of the Cold War, the conflict was presented to the American public within an oppositional framework. This opposition was highlighted in President Ronald Reagan’s famous 1983 “Evil Empire” speech, in which he implored Americans to resist the temptation to “label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire... and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.”²⁶ Rather, the American public was urged to accede to a framework of moral absolutism that strictly aligned Soviet Union as the malicious opposite of virtuous American interests. This villain-hero narrative promotes zero-sum solutions and is a hallmark of masculine American foreign policy, particularly during the era of the Cold War. However, in the diverse field of international relations theory, oppositional frameworks are not the only approach to international conflict. Renowned feminist international relations author Laura Sjoberg explains that “traditional” masculine approaches to conflict adopt an oppositional, or “dyadic” approach.²⁷ Dyadic analysis and approaches focus on characteristics that states bring to an interaction and estimate the likelihood of conflict based on these independent features.²⁸ This framework of analysis particularly salient in research surrounding the causes of war is a primary foundation of the democratic peace theory.²⁹ Alternatively, Sjoberg offers a feminist approach to international conflict that views state interaction through a relational, rather than oppositional, frame of analysis.³⁰ Relational analysis in international relations is deemed to be feminist because it gives weight to the “emotional connectedness and social interdependence” of states in the international system; principles which are borrowed from the field of gender studies.³¹ Rather than focusing on the

²³ Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity* (New York, NY: Penguin Books), 78.

²⁴ Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*, 78.

²⁵ Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict*, 213.

²⁶ Reagan Foundation, “Evil Empire Speech by President Ronald Reagan – Address to the National Association of Evangelicals on March 8, 1983,” 30:05, April 3, 2009, accessed April 3, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcSm-KAEFFA>.

²⁷ Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict*, 106.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 109.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 106.

³⁰ Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict*, 106.

³¹ *Ibid*, 108.

individual traits that states bring to an interaction, relational theories center on the shared interests that facilitate state interaction.

While an oppositional framework was the prevailing model for United States foreign policy during the Cold War, relational approaches to conflict and conflict prevention during this period were not entirely absent. However, when relational policies were pursued, they were typically cloaked in masculine policy rhetoric with the intent of maintaining a firm oppositional image. One of the most definitive moments of the Cold War that serves as an example of relational (feminist) policy cloaked in oppositional (masculine) rhetoric, is the Cuban Missile Crisis. During the tense, thirteen-day stretch that encompassed the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, President Kennedy was encouraged by many key policy advisers to take a hard-lining oppositional response by launching air-strikes in Cuba or initiating an invasion.³² However, President Kennedy's response reflected principles of relational foreign policy. Historian Christian Appy asserts, "the crisis was resolved not by bluster or bravado, but by patience, flexibility, and a willingness on both sides to negotiate and compromise."³³ Publicly, the solution to the crisis was that Premier Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union would remove nuclear weapons from Cuba, in exchange for a public statement by President Kennedy that the United States would not invade Cuba. Secretly, without a public announcement, Kennedy also agreed to remove nuclear weapons from Turkey as part of the resolution to the crisis.³⁴ The private nature of the latter part of this diplomatic solution was designed so that the Kennedy administration could sell the story to the American public that Kennedy had "strong-armed" Khrushchev until he agreed to back down. In private, President Kennedy added more vulgar flare in recounting the story; when talking about his interactions with Khrushchev, Kennedy said, "I cut his balls off."³⁵ Despite Kennedy's tactical use of relational foreign policy to navigate one of the most critical negotiations in the history of the United States; the public narrative was that his manliness had saved the day.

The Cold War serves as a foundational example of masculinity in American foreign policy because the emergence of the United States as the victor of the Cold War validated the use of masculine foreign policy prescriptions and rhetoric to defeat an external threat. One of the products of the Cold War that exemplifies the emergence of persistent masculinity for the future of American foreign policy was the rise of the military industrial complex in the United States and the development of the national security state.³⁶ Military servicemen and women became the embodiment of resolution, strength and toughness, demonstrating the value of using the presence of a large military as a system of defense. Since the Cold War era, references to the American military and soldiers have been incorporated into the fabric of everyday American lives, with the intention of serving as a constant reminder of America's dominance and masculinity. In some ways, the size of the military during the Cold War is held as the gold standard for American investment in the military. During the 2016 presidential election campaign, Donald Trump cited the size of the American navy, air force, and active-duty servicemen in 1991 at the end of the Cold War as a standard to which the American military should be rebuilt to meet.³⁷ As the role of masculinity in American foreign policy has developed over time, the Cold War foreign policy principles such as the

³² Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*, 78.

³³ *Ibid*, 77.

³⁴ Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*, 77.

³⁵ Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*, 78

³⁶ Walter L. Hixon, *The Myth of American Diplomacy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2008): 167.

³⁷ "Transcript: Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Speech," *The New York Times*, April 27, 2016, accessed December 12, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/us/politics/transcript-trump-foreign-policy.html?_r=0.

emasculatation of enemies, establishing a never-back-down mentality and the importance of a large, stand as tools of projecting strength have been reoccurring themes.

Overall, the success of the United States in navigating Cold War foreign policy established a standard for how “tough” future foreign policy decisions should appear in order for them to be desirable and consistent with the idealized American image. Gendered tactics that were used during the Cold War, such as emasculatation of the enemy and moral absolutism, as well as rhetoric that boasted the use of strong-arm diplomacy became normalized in American foreign policy following their use in the Cold War era. In addition, the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis reveals that even when the United States’ foreign policy decisions may have been guided by principles of feminist theory, they are cloaked in masculine rhetoric by American political leaders and media outlets in accordance with gendered national identity preferences. Masculinized foreign policy tactics and rhetoric similar to that employed by the United States during the Cold War reappear in the United States’ response to 9/11 and in the era of President Trump’s America First Foreign Policy.

Maintaining the Image: Masculinity and the Response to 9/11

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on the United States evoked a resurgence of American nationalism, the magnitude of which had not been felt since the Cold War. The response of the United States to 9/11 demonstrated the hyper-masculinity that lies at the foundation of American national identity and ultimately shapes foreign policy. In this case, the threat to national security and ideology took the form of transnational terrorism, which had the demonstrated ability to extend to the American homeland. The rhetoric and foreign policy prescriptions employed by President George W. Bush in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks reveal the pervasive nature of masculinity in American foreign policy. In President Bush’s first public address following the attacks, he stated, “Make no mistake: the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts.”³⁸ This visceral response to the attacks immediately indicated the willingness of the United States government to embark on an unwavering mission of retribution.³⁹ Furthermore, the foreign policy agenda pursued by the Bush administration framed the invasion of Afghanistan, and subsequently Iraq, to the American public as a “noble cause” and a “war between good and evil” in which the United States “stands strong on the side of good,” thus grounding foreign policy decisions in masculine ideals such as courage and nobility that are deeply embedded in the American national identity and psyche.⁴⁰ Similar to the case of the Cold War, the rhetoric surrounding the policy responses to 9/11 sought to establish a clear, dyadic view of the enemy and the United States, by defining the terrorists as everything opposite of the United States. In addition, by “othering” the enemy, the United States government intended to emasculate the terrorists; by characterizing their identity as an abnormal and deviant form of masculinity.⁴¹ This reflexive use of gender ordering to justify and gain public support for military action is an example of the United States exercising hegemonic masculinity to bolster foreign policy choices when the state is faced with an external threat to national security.

³⁸ Kevin Coe, “Masculinity as a Political Strategy: George W. Bush, the “War on Terrorism,” and an Echoing Press.” *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 29, no. 1 (January 2007): 32.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Laura Shepherd, “Veiled references: Constructions of gender in the Bush administration discourse on the attacks of Afghanistan post-9/11,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no.1 (March 2006): 19-41;

Kevin Coe, “Masculinity as a Political Strategy,” 35.

⁴¹ Laura Shepherd, “Veiled references,” 26.

In addition to the way in which American political leaders used gender ideals to frame foreign policy decisions to the public and during the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the execution of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq was also driven by masculinity. The tactics that were employed by the United States military during the “War on Terrorism,” such as measures of psychological warfare and extreme interrogation methods, proved the desire of the United States to use force and aggression as foreign policy tools to regain an image of strength and dominance. Methods of psychological warfare employed by the United States included dropping leaflets over Afghanistan, some of which included phrases such as, “Our goals will be achieved, if not willingly, then by overwhelming force” or alternatively displayed male American firemen raising an American flag at Ground Zero, with the caption “Freedom Endures.”⁴² Although these leaflets served little tactical purpose in the war, they were used as tools to convey the resolve, strength, and dominance of American foreign policy, and to reignite the masculinity at the core of American national identity.

In addition to rhetoric espoused by political elites and the execution of foreign policy, media outlets also serve as a primary forum for communicating ideas about national identity and policy.⁴³ One of the most famously masculinized cases of media sensationalism during the years following 9/11 was the capture and subsequent rescue of Private Jessica Lynch in 2003 during the war in Iraq. Although the Iraq War was not a direct product of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it was a part of the broader “War on Terror,” led by the United States military, which was developed as an American foreign policy framework by President George W. Bush after the attacks of September 11th, 2001.⁴⁴ While Private Jessica Lynch was deployed in Iraq in 2003, her unit was ambushed, and she was captured as a prisoner of war. A dramatic and highly gendered rescue mission executed by U.S. Army Special Forces ensued and was broadcast widely to the American public.⁴⁵

The imagery used to portray Jessica Lynch during the rescue and upon her return to the United States serves as an excellent case study in the examination of the masculinization of the American military and national imperative to validate masculine ideals during times of war. The footage and the corresponding media commentary represented Jessica Lynch as a “damsel in distress,” saved by a masculine rescue crew in the midst of war. Several American media outlets, such as CNN, heavily criticized the release of the footage of Lynch’s rescue, claiming that it was fictionalized wartime propaganda.⁴⁶ Despite being portrayed as a damsel during the immediate release of the rescue footage, the public narrative of Jessica Lynch changed dramatically once she was back in the United States. Upon return, Lynch was commonly referred to as a “female Rambo,” a portrayal that masculinized her experience by equivocating her to the “hyper-masculinist, all-American, patriotic, hard-guy” that is encapsulated by the Rambo character.⁴⁷ Jessica Lynch, despite being a woman serving in combat, served as a mechanism to reinforce American masculinity in the execution of post-9/11 foreign policy, rather than the embodiment of the intersection of femininity and war. The case of Jessica Lynch serves as a microcosm of the larger gendered narrative of the United States’ response to 9/11 and reveals a critical facets of feminist international relations theory; that femininity and female experiences of conflict are typically only represented in conflict as a tool for validating masculine action.

⁴² Ibid, 30-31.

⁴³ Monteserrat Guibernau, “Anthony D. Smith on nations and national identity: a critical assessment,” *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. ½ (2004): 125.

⁴⁴ Christian Spielvogel, ““You Know Where I Stand”: Moral Framing of the War on Terrorism and the Iraq War in the 2004 Presidential Campaign,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 8, no. 4: 549.

⁴⁵ Véronique Pin-Fat and Maria Stern, “The Scripting of Private Jessica Lynch: Biopolitics, Gender, and the “Feminization” of the U.S. Military,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 30, no. 1 (2005): 27.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 28.

Feminist analysis of foreign policy decision-making during the invasion of Afghanistan highlights the frequent use of women as justifications of war, and as a self-validating measure. In the response to 9/11, Afghan women were identified by American leaders as victims of the Taliban regime, and thus gave the United States opportunity to play the role of the hero, liberating these poor women from the violence and oppression facing them in their homeland. The invasion of Afghanistan was about retribution and the elimination of foreign threats to the American homeland, but the United States needed a cause that would give the military action nobility and chivalry, and Afghan women quickly filled that void. In November 2001, First Lady Laura Bush framed the “War on Terrorism” as a battle for human rights, stating:

The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women... Afghan women know, through hard experience, what the rest of the world is discovering: The brutal oppression of women is the central goal of terrorists. Long before the current war began, the Taliban and its terrorist allies were making the lives of children and women in Afghanistan miserable.⁴⁸

The emphasis of Afghan women as the victim of the Taliban regime, reaffirmed an image of the United States as the masculine protector, framing the invasion as an almost romanticized rescue mission of, “our men, setting out to rescue their women, from their men.”⁴⁹ The way that United States authorities used Afghan women as justification for military action during the invasion of Afghanistan demonstrates the use of femininity and female experiences to solidify masculine ideals of American national identity and validate masculine action in foreign policy.

Additionally, the invasion of Afghanistan and the experience of Afghan women provides interesting insight into feminist foreign policy options for state-building that were not adopted. Feminist foreign policies also advocate for the inclusion of women in economic and political spheres, their representation in state-building to foster peace and sustainable development in communities worldwide; and particularly in the case of re-building weak states. The landmark Resolution 1325 adopted by the United Nations Security Council explicitly advocated for the “increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Bonn Agreement (Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions) included language specifying that decisions regarding appointments to the Interim Administration in Afghanistan should include a “significant number of women.”⁵¹ However, only 2 women out of 30 total representatives were included in the interim administration.⁵² Similarly, state-building efforts following the invasion of Iraq saw only three women appointed to the post-Saddam Hussein interim council.⁵³

⁴⁸ Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War*, 139.

⁴⁹ Jan Jindy Pettman, “Feminist International Relations After 9/11,” *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2004), 89.

⁵⁰ “Resolution 1325 (2000),” United Nations Security Council, October 31, 2000, accessed April 3, 2018, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf>.

⁵¹ “Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions,” United Nations Security Council, December 5, 2001, 6, accessed April 3, 2018, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/AF_011205_AgreementProvisionalArrangementsinAfghanistan%28en%29.pdf.

⁵² Jan Jindy Pettman, “Feminist International Relations After 9/11,” 89.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Traditional masculinist perspectives on state-building generally assume the inclusion of women in government and state-building to be a peripheral concern; something to attempt or strive for after foundations of peace and concrete democratic institutions have taken hold. By contrast, feminist analyses argue that the representation of all members of society, including women and ethnic or racial minorities, is one of the most essential aspects of democratic participation, and that without this, constructed democratic institutions are unlikely to survive. In the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, feminist analyses connect the lack of success in building stable foundations for democracy to the disingenuous effort of the international community to include women in government and peace-building efforts.⁵⁴ While feminist concerns, including the experience of Afghan women, were a theme during the United States' response to 9/11 and the beginning of the "War on Terror," the lacking effort to include women in subsequent state-building and democratization processes show that in this case, femininity was used to validate the masculine philosophy that drove American military action by giving it a sense of chivalry and nobility, rather than as a tool to better understand the role of women in conflict and peace.

Interpreting the Present: Masculinity and the Era of Trump

The previous examination of the intertwined nature of masculinity and American foreign policy responses to crises of security and ideology can provide a lens through which to examine the current foreign policy developments under the Trump Administration. Although the threats that face the United States today are far less eminent and centralized than during the Cold War era and the years immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, masculinity has nonetheless played a prominent role in the discourse of the 2016 election and the foreign policy preferences of the American people. During the 2016 election campaign, then presidential candidate Donald Trump presented solutions to these foreign policy issues that were based on the glorification of masculine attributes, and through the use of rhetoric, painted an image for the American people of the United States as a stronger, tougher, more dominant actor on the world stage. Although the 2016 presidential election proved to be exceedingly controversial, Donald Trump was able to use the ideals of masculinity that resonate within American national identity to rally enough public support to win the presidency. Trump's use of bombastic masculinity to guide his campaign style and policy platforms provides a unique case study because it demonstrates how these tactics can be used successfully to gain public support during a highly contested election, and how they will shape the development of his foreign policy while in office.

Trump's use of masculinity to gain public support during the 2016 election is most clearly demonstrated by his assertive campaign promises and persona. Prior to the election, almost 70% of Trump supporters believed that the United States had become "too soft and feminine."⁵⁵ This sentiment indicated a preference amongst the American public for a leader that would project a tougher, more masculine image at home and abroad. As a presidential candidate, Donald Trump tapped into this desire for increased masculinity by designing his personal image as well as his foreign policy platforms on the premise of masculinity. Trump's comprehensive speech on foreign policy on April 27th, 2016 outlined an isolationist, individualistic vision for the future of American foreign policy. This speech emphasized a Trump's intent for a tougher approach to multilateral agreements and organizations such as

⁵⁴ Jan Jindy Pettman, "Feminist International Relations After 9/11, 90.

⁵⁵ Daniel Cox and Robert Jones, "Two-thirds of Trump Supporters Say the Nation Needs a Leader Willing to Break the Rules," PRRI, April 7, 2016, <https://www.prri.org/research/prri-atlantic-poll-republican-democratic-primary-trump-supporters/>.

NAFTA and NATO, describing these treaties as “false globalism” and supported increasing military investment and troop counts.⁵⁶ Lobbying for these policies highlighted the masculinity of Trump’s foreign policy proposals because they valued independence over collective action, resolve over compassion, and the use of force over diplomacy. By doing so, Trump claimed that these policies would “make America strong again,” and thus “make America respected again”, signaling the re-masculinization of America that would accompany a Trump presidency.⁵⁷

During the 2016 election campaign, Trump’s vice-presidential running mate Mike Pence also used rhetoric to build a masculine image of what American foreign policy would look like under a Trump Presidency. This masculine rhetoric was used most prominently in the 2016 Vice Presidential Debate, in which Pence repeatedly used masculine attributes to describe the foreign policy positions of the would-be Trump Administration. During the debate, Pence referenced the need to approach foreign policy issues in Russia and Syria with “strong, broad-shouldered American leadership.”⁵⁸ The use of adjectives such as “strong” would generally constitute the masculinization of a policy position, however Pence extends this effect by personifying American foreign policy with a reference to “broad-shoulders.” This descriptor effectively associates the idea of American leadership with the body image of a powerful, athletic man with a physically dominating stature, thus signaling the masculinity embedded in foreign policy platforms of the Trump/Pence campaign. Furthermore, Pence promoted the idea of American masculinity in foreign policy with reference to the American military, claiming that the United States had experienced a great decline in naval power and number of standing troops, and reassuring the public that Donald Trump would “rebuild our military and project American strength to the world.”⁵⁹ These campaign promises were a verbal display of the intended masculine virtues of future American foreign policy under the Trump Administration.

The use of hyperbolic masculinity is also evident in the development of Trump’s foreign policy agenda while he has been in office. The Trump Administration’s America First Foreign Policy confirms and validates the values of masculinity that shape American national identity. The official description of the America First Foreign Policy that is publicly available to the American people first begins by establishing the primary goal of achieving “peace through strength.”⁶⁰ The articulation of this goal already demonstrates the masculinization of American foreign policy. Peace, a concept generally associated with feminine attributes, such as compassion, sensitivity, and understanding, is immediately stripped of its feminine connotation in Trump’s America First Foreign Policy by its association with strength; implying the necessity of using masculine means to meet feminine ends. The America First Foreign Policy agenda then continues by proposing the use of American military action to “defeat and destroy” terrorist organizations through “aggressive joint and coalition military operations.”⁶¹ In this section of the agenda, the use of the words destroy and aggressive imply dominance and further remove the policy from any feminine association with its overarching

⁵⁶ “Transcript: Donald Trump’s Foreign Policy Speech,” *The New York Times*, April 27, 2016, accessed December 12, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/us/politics/transcript-trump-foreign-policy.html?_r=0.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Fact Check: Vice Presidential Debate,” National Public Radio, October 4, 2016, accessed December 12, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2016/10/04/496452797/fact-check-vice-presidential-debate-with-tim-kaine-and-mike-pence>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ “America First Foreign Policy,” The White House, accessed December 12, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/america-first-foreign-policy>.

⁶¹ “America First Foreign Policy,” The White House, accessed December 12, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/america-first-foreign-policy>.

goal, peace. Furthermore, the policy also reconfirms President Trump's commitment to expanding the American armed forces, with the rationale being that, "he knows that our military dominance must be unquestioned."⁶² While Trump's foreign policy agenda began with the goal of peace, it uses hyperbolic masculinity to negate any feminine connotations with this objective, and instead colors it in with masculine attributes of aggression, dominance, and the use of force. The official language of America First policy demonstrates the pervasive and persistent use of masculinity as a guiding principle of American foreign policy under the Trump Administration.

The hyper-masculinity communicated by the Trump Administration's foreign policy agenda is particularly interesting when contrasted with recent foreign policy initiatives of other developed nations, several of which have incorporated gender equality and feminism as a central focus. Feminist foreign policies are ones which actively promote the global health, economic empowerment, and political inclusion of women as a means of achieving international peace and stability. Feminist foreign policy perspectives that advocate for women's rights and participation are premised on the theory that issues of human security are tantamount to issues of state security; and that the prosperity of women plays a vital role in mitigating human security concerns.⁶³ These theories acknowledge the importance of human development in the creation of stable societies and recognize that women's educational attainment and participation in the labor force is associated with faster economic growth, reductions in child mortality, and better opportunities for children.⁶⁴ Furthermore, support for the inclusion of women in state-building processes is grounded in the evidence that when women are included in peace negotiations; agreements receive greater public consensus, resolutions are more likely to be implemented, and post-conflict states have improved prospects for maintaining peace and achieving sustainable development.⁶⁵

Recently, feminist foreign policies have been developed and implemented by countries such as Australia, Norway, Sweden, and Canada.⁶⁶ These countries have taken action to enshrine the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in their own foreign policy initiatives by designing foreign policies that support gender equality and the inclusion of women in peace-building, governance, and sustainable economic development across the world.⁶⁷ A specific example of this brand of feminist foreign policy in action is Canada's innovative Feminist International Assistance Policy, which identifies gender equality and the empowerment of women as a priority in peace building, the reduction of poverty, and global stability.⁶⁸ The initiatives of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy include commitments to providing sexual health and reproductive education and services to women in developing countries, promoting access to safe educational institutions that are inclusive of

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Nicole Detraz, *International Security and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 8, 132, 150.

⁶⁴ U.N. Women, "Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment," 2017, accessed April 2, 2018, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>.

⁶⁵ U.N. Women, "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, and Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325," United Nations, 2015, 41, accessed April 2, 2018, http://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf.

⁶⁶ Kristen P. Williams, "Feminism in Foreign Policy," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, September 2017, 2, accessed April 3, 2018, <http://politics.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-368?print=pdf>.

⁶⁷ "Resolution 1325 (2000)," United Nations Security Council, October 31, 2000, accessed April 3, 2018, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy," Government of Canada, 2017, accessed April 3, 2018, http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng.

girls, and advocating for the inclusion of women in post-conflict state-building.⁶⁹ By contrast, at the end of 2017, President Trump released the 2018 National Security Strategy of the United States, including a section on foreign policy entitled “Peace Through Strength,” which does not contain any references to women, gender equality, peace building, or human security.⁷⁰ Instead, the foreign policy directives outlined in the “Peace Through Strength” platform emphasized increasing the military presence of the United States around the globe, modernizing and expanding the United States’ nuclear weapons programs, and continuing the use of economic sanctions to safeguard American interests.⁷¹

The absence of policies directed towards improving the security or inclusion of women in the Trump Administration’s foreign policy is not necessarily evidence of sexist policy-making, but rather reflective of a traditionally gendered hierarchy in international security studies that considers issues of state security as separate from, and more important than, issues of human security. The traditional “masculinist” approach to security studies, typically establishes a firm divide between issues of state security and human security; with the former viewed as “high politics,” and the latter as “low politics.”⁷² As a result, this perspective has a tendency to dismiss issues of human security, such as forced migration, human trafficking, sexual violence, and poverty (which often impact women and children disproportionately) as unfortunate consequences of the overarching and consuming quest for state security.⁷³ Thus, traditional masculinist foreign policy tends to devalue the centrality of human security to achieving state security, choosing to view human security concerns as merely humanitarian issues that need not be included foundations of foreign policy or national security. Alternatively, feminist security studies theories often view the security of individuals within a state as a function of achieving state security at large.⁷⁴

VI. Conclusions

Masculinity has been a founding principle of American national identity, as it is one of the defining attributes of collective American culture and politics. During the Cold War, masculinity was used to reinforce the virtue of traditional American values, and it characterized the opposition, in this case communism, as everything that was un-American, and thus “un-masculine.” Similarly, the rhetoric and policies that the United States pursued following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 served to emasculate America’s enemy by emphasizing the virtues of American military troops and first responders and using the protection of females as a justification military action. Using these case studies as an informative background reveals its driving influence in foreign policy as well as its importance to the American public. Turning to the era of Trump, it is evident that the desire for masculinity amongst the American public played a role in the outcome of one of the most controversial

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “National Security Strategy of the United States,” The United States Government, December 2017, 25, accessed April 3, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> page.

⁷¹ Ibid, 25-34

⁷² Megan MacKenzie, “Female soldier and the reconstruction of women in post-conflict Sierra Leone,” in *Gender and International Security: Feminist Perspectives* edited by Laura Sjoberg (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010).

⁷³ Gillian Youngs, “Feminist International Relations: A Contradiction in Terms? Or: Why Women and Gender Are Essential to Understanding the World ‘We’ Live in,” *International Affairs* 80, no. 1, 2004, 83; Edward Newman, *Critical Human Security Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 73.

⁷⁴ Jan Jindy Pettman, “Feminist International Relations After 9/11, 91; Gillian Youngs, “Feminist International Relations: A Contradiction in Terms...” 75.

elections in the history of the United States and determined the trajectory of American foreign policy.

The purpose of this analysis is not to offer a normative evaluation of the role of masculinity in American national identity or foreign policy. Rather, this analysis is intended to illuminate a discussion about how foreign policy decisions are formed, how national identity is projected, and how these understandings can be used to explain current foreign policy debates. On the international stage, the American public desires a country that appears tough, unwavering, dominant, and, at times, aggressive. These preferences subsequently play a role in the decisions of political representatives, as they opt for foreign policy actions that reflect the public's desire for masculinity. Furthermore, feminist analysis provides a useful tool for understanding the extent that gender influences policy discourse, and how policy can be designed to reflect a gendered national identity.

The 2016 presidential election serves as an example for how politicians can use the personal and emotional connection that Americans have with masculinity as part of their national identity to amass public support. However, taken to the extreme, national identities, much like any other form of identity, have the potential to be manipulated for political gain. To avoid such manipulation, it is important for people to understand the way that their national identities relate to their policy preferences. In the United States, the danger of the relationship between masculinity and national identity is that an implicit connection between masculine and "better" exists in the minds of the American people. Masculine attributes and experiences are so central to American national identity, that they are often idealized when used as guiding principles of American foreign policy, whether they are truly in the interest of the United States or not. A comprehensive understanding of the masculinity as a component of American national identity allows for a more empirical, rather than emotional evaluation of foreign policy.

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