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The Australian Foreign Policy White Paper, gender and conflict prevention: ties that don't bind

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ABSTRACT

After a 14-year gap, Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper advanced a 'comprehensive framework to advance Australia's security and prosperity in a contested and competitive world' (Australian Government 2017a, "2017 Foreign Policy White Paper." https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/., v). Focused on regional stability, partnerships and global cooperation, it identifies 'risks and opportunities' in an altered external environment. In this article, we argue that the neglect of gender and conflict prevention in the White Paper has implications for its stated aspirations with regard to peace and security. This is striking considering the attention that gender—particularly in the context of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda—has received in other policy areas and documents. Building on feminist security scholarship, conflict prevention approaches, and bringing in civil society voices, we argue that the White Paper contains a gendered, masculinist logic, separating domestic and international issues and paying insufficient attention to the structural and systemic causes of conflict. This article pursues a gender analysis in order to illuminate the gaps present in the White Paper and its limited vision of security and makes the case that conflict prevention from a gender perspective is key to sustainable peace, security and national interests.

Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper came after a gap of 14 years, so as a framework and vision for Australia's foreign policy, it was much anticipated. The last Foreign Policy White Paper, *Advancing the National Interest,* under the Howard Government in 2003, focused on 'change and continuity'. It notably preferenced bilateral over multilateral relations and affirmed the importance of the US relationship. The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper is somewhat different. Framed around 'threats and opportunities', it reflects an anxiety about challenges to multilateralism and the rules-based international order, China's rising power, US–China relations, and how this might impact security, employment and inequality (Australian Government 2017a, 25). The White Paper seeks to build a 'strong and resilient' Australia in a 'contested world'. Australia's security is a key element, with a focus on countering terrorism and violent extremism, border security,

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and guarding against 'foreign interference', which includes transnational organised crime and cybersecurity. Global cooperation is promoted, and security and prosperity are tied to regional partnerships in the Indo-Pacific.

While Foreign Policy White Papers may appear to address national interests externally, they also reflect the concerns of the domestic realm. A notable aspect of the White Paper has been the centrality of 'Australian values'. The White Paper can thus be seen in terms of Coral Bell's distinction between 'declaratory policy' and 'operational policy' (1989, 23–24). These types of policies signal 'the spoken intent' and the 'actual actions' of a government, respectively (Wesley 2014, 89). The White Paper can be read as a type of 'declaratory policy' that signals and projects values, interests and priorities. Its ambitions are not only designed to ensure domestic security and prosperity, they reflect Australia's actions internationally and its national identity. Foreign and domestic policy, it can thus be argued, are co-constituted (Kantola 2007; Weber 1998). Furthermore, this co-constitution between the domestic and external, and how Australia signals its interests, can be analysed through a gender lens. Feminists have long argued that the binary between domestic/international, like the public/private divide, is problematic (Peterson 1992; Tickner 1988, 1992), and that the domestic and external realm are co-constituted. A gendered approach can read the White Paper in more holistic terms that connects the domestic context with the forms of insecurity that affect national and international politics.

Seen from this perspective, the White Paper has a narrow definition of the national interest and a fragmented approach to national and global 'security'. While security is understood in terms of defence, border protection and economic security, the White Paper has a limited view of the underlying *structural* causes of insecurity and inequality, which are central to conflict prevention. Structural insecurity—not simply the absence of conflict—includes addressing economic, political and social inequalities, as well as militarism. Feminist approaches have long argued the necessity for systemic and structural change (Enloe 2016; Sjoberg and Via 2010; Tickner 1995). Structural prevention is concerned with the root causes of conflict, and systemic prevention focuses on the policies and actions that facilitate insecurity. Insights from feminist security studies and conflict prevention approaches offer a broader interpretation of 'security' and shed light on the gaps in the White Paper.

The article begins by first putting forward a feminist perspective on conflict prevention and gender, which we argue is a neglected part of the White Paper. Conflict prevention is important because it can help fulfil or reflect the declaratory goals of the White Paper, as well as operational policy in action. Here, the link between gender and conflict prevention is significant, and has been a major focus of efforts to enhance gender equality and bring a gender perspective to peace and conflict, as noted in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (Basu and Confortini 2017, 45). The White Paper, however, frames gender equality in association with development, isolating it from a whole-of-government approach and conflict prevention, which is one of the key pillars of the WPS agenda. Second, we critique how the White Paper imagines security and prioritises certain policies over others. Conflict prevention is a useful lens to examine the gendered assumptions that underscore 'hard' or 'masculinist' security priorities. Addressing the underlying causes of conflict helps to redirect priorities and mitigate the symptoms of violence and insecurity, with less reliance on 'hard' security options. We draw on the inconsistencies between Australia's approach to defence and development that can undermine conflict prevention.

Thus, our focus is not simply the missing dimension of gender in the White Paper, but also how security is imagined and pursued through policy initiatives that enable conflict or fail to address the roots of conflict prevention.

Alongside other contributions in this special issue (see in particular Strating), we are attentive to what drives policy preferences and how they are prioritised in the White Paper. By focussing on conflict prevention and gender, we are able to gain a more connected insight into how structural conditions are important for sustainable peace and security; this requires considering the policy declarations and choices made at the domestic and international level, which can sometimes contradict the declaratory intent that is signalled in the White Paper. We conclude by arguing that the inclusion of gender needs to be systematically integrated more prominently across government policy in order to produce a coherent and holistic idea of security at the national and international level. Here, greater linkage with the WPS agenda can strengthen the focus on conflict prevention, and we consider this by examining the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and how Australia's Second National Action Plan (NAP)[1] on WPS may facilitate this.

Conflict prevention through a feminist lens

Recognition of the connection between gender, peace and security has gradually risen in national and international approaches to dealing with conflict and violence. The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on WPS recognised the gendered impacts of armed conflict and the critical role women play in making peace efforts sustainable. The eight UN Security Council resolutions that provide the policy framework for the WPS agenda 'represent the consolidation of decades of women's activism, leadership and advocacy regarding the importance of women's participation in peace and security governance and the protection of women's rights in conflict settings' (Kirby and Shepherd 2016; Mundkur and Shepherd 2018, 84; United Nations Security Council 2017). Collectively these resolutions call for the greater inclusion of women in peace processes and negotiations.

A foreign policy that aspires to promote peace and security increasingly recognises that gender equality is a crucial element. This is evident not only in the foreign policies of other nations, notably Sweden and Canada's emphasis on a 'feminist foreign policy' but is increasingly a part of a whole-of-government approach to mainstreaming gender equality. Australia has adopted gender equality as key part of its international profile and policy areas.[2] Julie Bishop, speaking as Foreign Minister in 2016, stated:

> … I cannot emphasise enough the critical connection between peace, security and gender equality. One of the best indicators of whether a country is peaceful and stable isn't its level of wealth, or ethnic profile or religious identity—I suggest it is how a nation treats women and girls … As I have argued many times as Foreign Minister—gender equality isn't just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. (Bishop 2016)

A prerequisite for achieving Australia's broader foreign policy goals on peace, and security and sustainable development is a focus on achieving gender equality and a gender-inclusive approach to international relations. The WPS agenda connects women's issues to national and international security (George 2019; Kapur and Rees 2019; Shepherd and True 2014). Thus, a foreign policy that aspires to promote peace, security and sustainable

development must link to and reflect the WPS agenda which provides a normative framework for foreign and security policies.

The WPS agenda has four pillars that centre on prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery (Kirby and Shepherd 2016). The prevention pillar focuses on prevention of conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls. It includes gendered early warning systems, involving diverse women in all forms of conflict prevention and disarmament, ending impunity for sexual and gender-based violence by increasing prosecutions for perpetrators, and challenging discriminatory gender norms, attitudes and behaviours that normalise violence as a way to resolve conflicts. The protection pillar focuses on ensuring that the rights of women and girls are protected and promoted in conflict-affected situations and humanitarian crisis, including protection from all forms of gender-based violence in general and sexual violence in particular. The specific protection needs of refugees and internally displaced women and girls is emphasised. The participation pillar aims to ensure women's equal participation and influence with men and the promotion of gender equality in peace and security decision-making processes at national, local and international levels. It includes the appointment of more women as negotiators, mediators, peacekeepers, police and humanitarian personnel in peacekeeping missions, as well as support for local women's peace initiatives. Finally, the relief and recovery pillar seeks to ensure that the specific relief needs of diverse women and girls are met in repatriation and resettlement, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes (DDR) and in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. This pillar reinforces women's capacities to act as agents in relief and recovery processes in conflict and post-conflict (SIDA 2015, 1–2).

The WPS pillars have also been widely adopted in national foreign policies and underscore NAPs, which 83 UN member states have adopted as of December 2019 to guide their implementation of the WPS agenda (https://www.peacewomen.org/member-states). While much attention has been paid to protection, representation and participation in discussions about a more gender-inclusive or gendered approach to security, prevention tends to garner less attention. In the toolkit developed by Caitlin Hamilton and Laura Shepherd (2019) on WPS NAPs, prevention is the least dominant pillar in 56 out of 130 NAPs, and is dominant in only 22.[3] Conflict prevention has 'become the poor little sister of the international normative Women, Peace, and Security framework' (Kapur and Rees 2019, 136) and the '"weakest P" in the 1325 Pod', neglected in favour of advancing protection and participation in the WPS agenda (Basu and Confortini 2017, 43; see also Basu and Shepherd 2017). Kapur and Rees (2019, 137) argue that conflict prevention has been neglected because the role of women in preventing conflict has been less developed by the UN, where the 'prevention space' has been dominated by sexual violence against women and girls in conflict. Women activists have not been heard, and there has been limited connection with academic and policymaking expertise on women and their role in preventing conflict.

More broadly, conflict prevention has taken some time to gain global visibility since its earlier efforts at the Congress of Vienna in 1814 and the International Congress of Women at The Hague in 1915 (Costin 1982, 310). Conceptually it has taken on different guises; measures such as demilitarised zones and concepts such as 'preventive diplomacy', coined by Dag Hammarskjöld in 1960 in the context of the Cold War, aimed to keep regional conflicts localised to prevent spill over. In the 1990s, Boutros-Ghali reused the

concept of preventive diplomacy to place emphasis on diplomatic techniques to prevent violent conflict. Kofi Annan emphasised a 'culture of prevention' and regional bodies and NGOs took on conflict prevention in their remit (Melander and Pigache 2007, 9–10). Conflict prevention approaches cover short term (or direct) measures which include immediate responses aimed at preventing violent conflict, such as early warning systems, monitoring, and preventive diplomacy (Melander and Pigache 2007; Shoemaker 2002, 30; UN Women 2015, 195).

However, *containing* conflict alone has limitations and can fail to address how conflict is a gendered issue. Bringing a gender perspective into conflict prevention requires attention to the structural sources of instability that can produce violence and inequalities (Kapur and Rees 2019, 137). Gender norms and gender roles can produce unequal societies and fuel divisive community relations (Caprioli 2005; Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict 1997, 71–74; Shoemaker 2002). Patriarchal societies, for example, normalise violence and domination, where masculinity is linked to male privilege, ideas about strength, protection and power (Hooper 2012). While masculinity can take on multiple forms and is often associated with embodiment (Duriesmith 2016), a broader logic of *masculinism* also exists. Masculinism refers to frameworks that naturalise and maintain such hierarchies of gendered power. Nicholas and Agius define it as 'a logic, discourse, impulse, and moral voice that maintains and naturalises subtle and overt forms of domination' (2017, 5) which can be perpetuated by men and women, institutions and structures (2017, 10). A more directed focus on gender brings the dynamics of conflict prevention as a structural issue to the fore.

Feminist scholars and activists have long argued that the structural causes of violence at the global, national and sub-national levels contain a gendered dimension. Militarism, arms spending, and the political economy of defence and security, often enabled by a masculinist idea of order, statehood and violence, has implications not just for security but for ensuring peace, reconstruction and justice (Basu and Confortini 2017, 50; Forsberg and Olsson 2016; Rees and Chinkin 2016; Ruby 2014). In addition to structural conflict prevention, there is also a need to focus on systemic prevention, to address the global risk of conflict that transcends particular states and requires global partnerships or responses. Examples here include the illicit arms trade, environmental degradation, drug trafficking, and ensuring prosecution of war crimes and human rights violations through institutions such as the International Criminal Court (Melander and Pigache 2007, 12–14; Phillips 2020). Conflict prevention from a gender perspective thus requires revision of cultural, economic, social and political practices and relations, as well as consideration of how those practices are not simply discrete areas of activity but have deep connections to a range of violent practices that feature across the interpersonal, local, national and international levels.

It is these structural and systemic forms of conflict prevention, seen through a WPS lens, that we argue *should* be present in the White Paper. The WPS agenda is intended to speak across different policy sectors as part of a whole-of-government approach (Payne 2018, 14; Shepherd and True 2014). As an important aspirational document that should guide Australia's foreign policy interests over the coming years, the White Paper does not link clearly with the WPS agenda, nor is conflict prevention from a structural perspective given sufficient attention. This is despite the fact that Australia was a co-sponsor of key WPS resolutions: UNSCR 1820 in 2008, UNSCRs 1888 and 1889 in 2009,

and UNSCR 1960 in 2010. Further, Australia's first National Action Plan on WPS make a strong case for the need to 'accelerate and strengthen practical efforts to place women front and centre in the peace and security agenda' (Australian Government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017). As Sarah Boyd (2017) notes, even the 2016 Defence White Paper and DFAT's 2016 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy go further in issues of gender equality and detailing commitment to WPS and the National Action Plan[4] compared to the 2017 White Paper. The following sections unpick these elements, focussing on how a gender lens reveals silences and how it drives specific logics around security and foreign policy in the White Paper.

(Gendered) absences and silences in the White Paper

Before 2017, Australia had produced only two foreign policy White Papers, both under the Howard government: *In the National Interest* (1997) and *Advancing the National Interest* (2003). While not 'policy in action', White Papers are important documents for sketching the external environment and locating national interests. Former ASIO head David Irvine (2018) said:

> The value of a white paper lies in its public information function and its guidance to the policy-maker. It should analyse the foreign policy operating environment. It should identify the key trends and challenges facing Australia as it navigates to protect its security, its prosperity, the safety of its citizens and its values. It must therefore be accurate in its assessments and realistic about potential threats and opportunities.

They are important declaratory signals (Bell 1989) of national identity and values, not only stating national priorities but forging a line of consistency to operational policies that are then enacted. Although they attract much public analysis when introduced, there is notably little scholarly work on the function and purpose of White Papers. To date, scholarly analysis has been dominated by male authors, with a heavy focus on China and Australia's strategic and national interests. The special issue on the White Paper in *Security Challenges* (2018) has one female author out of five and gender is only mentioned when citing the White Paper's statement of Australian values or not at all (the same is also the case in Bateman 2017; Bergin 2017; Lim and Ferguson 2018; McDougall 2018; Medcalf 2019; Reilly 2019). While they differ in scope and purpose across government departments, White Papers play an important signalling role for public and policy purposes, and as such should be considered important documents and merit greater academic analysis. For foreign policy, they set the vision that can inform foreign policy action and priorities.

According to its Terms of Reference (Department of Foreign Affairs 2017), the purpose of the White Paper is to 'provide a roadmap for advancing and protecting Australia's interests in a dynamic, complex and unpredictable international environment'. Its key areas of focus are centred on economic prosperity, navigating regional and global security risks, and to 'better utilise multilateral and regional structures to promote and protect Australia's interests and values'. Its broad theme is that of 'threats and opportunities' and assessing Australia's position in a changed external environment. Concerns about China's rise, the reliability of the US as a partner and challenges to the rules-based international order dominate the narrative.

Although security concerns seem to be located beyond Australia's borders, the White Paper is significantly shaped by the domestic realm and values. Australian values, for instance, are the object not only of defence but also guide Australia's approach to the external realm, such as considering the uncertainties that come with China's rise and the changing balance of power in the region (Australian Government. 2017b; Gyngell 2018, 10). Australian values are prominently linked to external relations:

> Australia's values are a critical component of the foundation upon which we build our international engagement. Our support for political, economic and religious freedoms, liberal democracy, the rule of law, racial and gender equality and mutual respect reflect who we are and how we approach the world. They underpin a strong, fair and cohesive society at home and are a source of influence for Australia internationally. (Australian Government 2017a, 2–3)

The White Paper's inclusion of Australian values could be attributed to the deliberative process that involved public consultations from December 2016 until May 2017. The White Paper Taskforce, headed by Richard Maude, convened 15 roundtable discussions and were involved in nine further events hosted by organisations, as well as over 60 one-on-one meetings with prominent Australians. Over 9200 submissions were received from NGOs, CSOs, think-tanks, academics, businesses, and individuals (Australian Government 2017b, 7–8).

Despite its centrality, in the call for submission in the public consultation, values only featured in relation to grounding Australian foreign policy 'in a clear-eyed assessment of our national interests' (Australian Government 2017b, 9). The remainder of the call was directed towards Australia's influence in the region and international organisations, economic opportunities, security challenges and pursuing national interests. Subsequently, Australian values were broadly interpreted: 'Most frequent were references to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, gender equality and "a fair go" for all.' It also translated into economic openness, 'essential to our future prosperity' (Australian Government 2017b, 15).

This emphasis means that the ideas garnered from the domestic realm towards shaping the White Paper were quite narrow in vision, according to think-tank analysts and civil society representatives (see Asia and the Pacific Policy Society Forum 2017; Boyd 2017). This becomes apparent in the resulting White Paper where gender and conflict prevention are disconnected from the overarching goals that constitute the White Paper's articulation of national interest and security. 'Gender' itself is mentioned 13 times in the White Paper, although not in any significant depth and not as a feature of a whole-of-government approach; it appears twice as part of Australian values (Australian Government 2017a, 2 & 11) and twice in relation to development (ibid, 88 & 89).

The most substantial mention is about 'gender equality', with a sole box dedicated to the issue. Gender equality is framed as important for stable and productive societies, with a concern for economic stability and prosperity. 'Empowerment' of women and girls is largely illustrated through development programmes or the promotion of women's business opportunities (ibid, 32, 90, 93 & 99; see also Harris Rimmer 2017) rather than trade and security under foreign policy. Australia's commitment to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is linked to development assistance in the Indo-Pacific region, but with an emphasis on private sector-led growth: 'We promote gender equality because eliminating gender disparities in the region would significantly

boost per capita incomes.' The White Paper states: 'Societies that protect human rights and gender equality are much more likely to be productive and stable' (Australian Government 2017a, 32; Bishop 2017). However, to achieve this, gender is seen as a variable that formulates a cost–benefit approach to the region in terms of impact and return on investment. Furthermore, the allocation of development assistance is guided by four 'tests': whether it is in the national interest; if funding will promote inclusive growth and reduce poverty; if Australia's contributions add value and leverage partner funding; and whether it deliver results and value for money (ibid, 90).

Furthermore, given Australia's commitments to the SDGs, there is a missed opportunity to link gender equality (SGD5) and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG16) more explicitly to the White Paper's goals by joining up with Australia's commitment to WPS. Collectively the SDGs recognise that sustainable development is not possible without peace and peace is not possible without sustainable development. The UN Secretary-General's 2017 report on WPS details how the implementation of the WPS agenda contributes to the achievement of the SDGs, enhances the effectiveness of interventions and facilitates sustained peace and the prevention of conflict (UNSC s/2017/861). Thus, the White Paper could have viewed gender equality as essential not only to peace and development but as part of the broader vision of the WPS agenda and projection of values.

CSOs noted this connection during the consultation process. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to do an in-depth review of each of these submissions, an overview of key CSOs highlighted some key themes around the role of gender and conflict prevention in Australian foreign policy. These included the link between gender equality and conflict prevention explicitly (WILPF, ActionAid, Australian Civil Society Coalition on WPS, Australian Council for International Development, International Women's Development Agency, Oxfam, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA) and furthermore associated these issues with structural and systemic sources of insecurity, such as militarisation or poverty (Medical Association for Prevention of War, World Vision, International Conflict Group). Other CSOs explicitly linked Australian values to systemic changes in policy that they wished to see as part of the White Paper's vision of conflict prevention (Australian Council for International Development, CARE Australia). Some, such as the Overseas Development Institute (2017, 2), emphasised the 'hugely influential' role DFAT could play to improve gender equality through development assistance, not just in terms of meeting international standards set by the UN SDGs, the Beijing Platform for Action, and UNSCR 1325, but also in 'identifying and addressing the emerging structural challenges to women's economic empowerment', which include a range of issues such as decent work, changing global trade and investment patterns, and technological change, to name a few areas. In most cases, CSOs crafted their message to adhere to the language of the White Paper by referring to how a focus on gender, conflict prevention and structural issues affect national interests (see IWDA 2017a). Some were also explicit about the gaps between aid and military spending which undermines the stated objectives of the White Paper (Save the Children). These submissions point to a more joined-up approach to gender equality and conflict prevention, addressing the structural conditions that exacerbate inequality and violence, with a long-term view to sustainable peace and development, and societal security. In the following section, we consider the logics that drive a narrow vision of foreign policy, gender and conflict prevention.

A masculinist foreign policy?

Feminists have long argued that the state can be 'gendered' (Parashar, Tickner, and True 2018; Peterson 1992): it makes claims to 'protect' (Young 2003) its borders and citizens, it 'acts' in the world to secure its interests, and its security function is often read in and performed in terms of material strength and militarism. Its form of agency can be understood as masculinist—that is, it is undergirded by a logic that privileges dominance and structures social and power relations. Masculinism is concerned with how hierarchies are naturalised across a range of sectors, rather than merely embodied (Nicholas and Agius 2017). This masculinist voice and worldview shapes how the state sees itself and ultimately how foreign policy is formulated. Australia enacts this masculinist form of statehood in various and interconnected ways: its violent colonial history and continued settler-colonialism still inform relations with its Indigenous population; its national narrative and identity is that of a nation forged by battle and is tied up in a male-dominated notion of 'mateship'; and it 'protects' its borders and sovereignty militarily against so-called 'illegal boat arrivals' (Agius 2018). Performing statehood and statecraft in this way privileges certain modes, ideas and identities that are mired in masculine associations of strength, authority, and power at the neglect of other ways of performing the state.

Despite public consultation, the White Paper produced a narrow vision of security, conflict prevention and gender equality when it could have adopted a more holistic interpretation. Primarily conceived and drafted by DFAT, the White Paper's key architects included DFAT Secretary Frances Adamson and a Taskforce headed by Richard Maude. It also had the input of 113 ambassadors, high commissioners, and consul-generals who were recalled to shape the White Paper during a two-day Global Heads of Missions meeting with Julie Bishop, PM Malcolm Turnbull, Trade Minister Steven Ciobo and an ALP representative (Department of Foreign Affairs 2017; Sydney Morning Herald 2017). The final version would have been subject to cabinet approval (McDougall 2018, 280). This raises questions about elite processes and which groups determine the content and focus of the White Paper. In this context it is important to also consider who gets to author Australian foreign policy. The Lowy Institute's three-year study of women in international relations found that no women have been 'selected to lead any major Australian foreign policy, defence, intelligence or trade white paper, inquiry or independent review' and women are poorly represented in Australia's international relations sector:

> Australia's international relations sector has a gender problem. Whether the focus is Australia's diplomatic envoys, government departments with international functions, academia or think tanks, or the Australian Parliament, there is an acute shortage of senior women serving in the most important and strategic roles either in Australia or abroad. (Cave et al. 2019, 2)

The issue is not only about inclusion, but what counts as important for foreign policy. The priorities of the White Paper, therefore, take on a deeper significance when examined through a gendered and masculinist lens. Conflict prevention is only mentioned twice in the White Paper in relation to UN coordination and the need to address conflict prevention *internationally* (Australian Government 2017a, 81 & 82, our emphasis) and is not linked to gender. Conflict is largely understood as something that occurs outside of the state, not within Australia (Australian Government 2017a, 43–46), making Australia's commitment to conflict prevention outward looking rather than relevant to domestic

policy. In a globalised age of movement of people, transnational conflict and the spread of ideologies, trade and greater interconnectedness between the local and the global, conflict is not something restricted to borders. Conflict has a wider meaning and can include everyday economic, cultural, and societal insecurity, blurring the boundaries between domestic and international. Conflict prevention in an age of globalisation is not simply concerned with external conflicts beyond our borders, but must also be attentive to conflict within our borders that can make Australian society insecure or contribute to insecurity outside of Australia. Thus, gender inequality and insecurity has bearing for international security both domestically and internationally.

The White Paper prioritises protecting borders, preserving the rules-based order, and defending national interests against risks and security threats. Examining the focus of the White Paper, we see that 'threat' is mentioned 69 times in the document: threats to 'our way of life', to regional security, international rules, the nation, borders and economy. 'Opportunity' is overwhelmingly mentioned in relation to *economic* opportunity. These risks and threats come in the form of other potentially problematic actors (state and non-state) and can be met with both hard and soft policy tools (building up defences as well as forging soft power initiatives). While a foreign policy White Paper may be expected to be externally focused, as established above, Australian values are deployed to make the case that certain policy pursuits are not only in the national interest but have direct bearing on the domestic realm, in terms of security and prosperity: 'Domestic and foreign policies interact extensively in a globalised world' (Australian Government 2017a, 108).

The White Paper's approach to security does little to address the underlying conditions that drive inequality and violence in the international system, which undermines some of its stated ambitions. The desire to become a top 10 exporter of arms is part of the government's vision of Australia's international standing and how it prioritises economic innovation (Department of Defence 2018). Yet this ambition, coached as a benefit for the economy and Australian businesses, can undermine conflict prevention at the structural and systemic level. It furthermore undermines Australia's stated commitment to peace and security in the White Paper and relies on a masculinist logic that continues systemic violence (Cohn 1987).

Read in conjunction with wider cuts to Australia's aid budget, the White Paper also illustrates the problem of grand statements of strategy and security that are decoupled from related policy areas. As Lambert, Ridge, and Lamb (2018) observe: 'By 2021, for every dollar we spend on aid, we will spend $11 on defence'. In a letter to the Prime Minister in response to the Defence Export Strategy the Australian Civil Society Coalition on WPS has also argued that: 'Increasing investment in and the availability of arms is in direct contradiction to Australia's commitment in the Foreign Policy White Paper to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.' The letter goes on to point to the incongruity of investments in recovery and stabilisation efforts in conflict-affected countries alongside the promotion of a 'militarised approach to the resolution of conflict, underwritten by increasing export of arms' (Australian WPS Coalition 2018b). Australia has also been criticised for secretly exporting arms to countries accused of human rights abuses and war crimes (Doherty and Knaus 2020). Spending on defence has increased as development assistance has been declining, drawing connections with economic impact outside our borders. Non-concessional loans to Pacific countries, for example, will increase debt,

which has a gendered impact as 'the cost of debt is disproportionately borne by women' through privatisation and loss of public services (Dundas et al. 2019). Failure to transform structural inequalities through these type of transactional aid policies can further entrench inequality, insecurity and conflict that can pose a threat to Australia's foreign policy interests (CARE Australia 2017, 7). The White Paper does little to address these underlying tensions and intersections.

Beyond the White Paper, Australia's security ambitions in the region signal further disconnect with the goals of WPS. Nicole George's (2019) analysis of Australia's so-called 'Pacific Pivot' should be read in conjunction with the broader security goals presented in the White Paper. George suggests that Australia's efforts do not extend to talking to Pacific communities about what security means to them in relation to its 'Pacific Pivot'. This is notable when it comes to climate change in the White Paper, which 'rings hollow' in relation to the failure of domestic policies to meet international obligations (Wong 2017) and Australia's deafness to the impact of climate change in the Pacific. Moreover, the persistence of intercommunal violence and militarism in Fiji, Guam and US militarisation, as well as Australia's planned naval installations on Manus in PNG reveal power relations that fail to cohere with a gendered approach to conflict prevention. This inattentiveness to context harms sustainable and lasting efforts for real conflict prevention in the region, which not only affects regional security relations but also have significant impact on women on the ground and for Australia's foreign policy interests broadly.

Furthermore, as Phillips (2020) articulates, policy prescriptions and forms of intervention often see a distinction between the global and the local. When talking about including the voices and experiences of 'the local', we must also be attentive to how this might obscure aspects of violence that have an international context or connection. The local is co-constituted with the international—for example, 'listening' to women on the ground[5] will be meaningless if states still prioritise military spending in their budgets or are subject to international rules and institutions that ensure not only 'intervention' but continue to exploit or deny transformation. The White Paper may be 'clear eyed' about national interests but these are short-term and contradictory if the connection with domestic policy and structural insecurity is excluded. The WPS coalition also strongly advocated for investing in early intervention efforts to prevent conflict; embracing the firsthand knowledge of women on the frontlines of the struggle for peace and security; resourcing and expanding the leadership of women in peace building and conflict mediation; and supporting the inclusion of strong measures to protect refugee and migrant women and girls in the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration. An integrated gender perspective in foreign policy is the key to sustainable peace (Australian Coalition on WPS 2017a; ActionAid 2017).

Structural conflict prevention efforts are also contradicted by Australia's asylum policies. A focus on sovereign border protection not only prioritises a militarised and outsourced approach to managing migration but produces impacts that undermine its stated commitments to a rules-based order and international norms. Despite its desire for a rules-based international order, Australia, in the name of 'national security', sees fit to contravene and reinterpret long-standing international norms around asylum. Australia has been consistently condemned by the UN and other international organisations for its treatment of irregular asylum seekers. Offshore processing furthermore outsources

asylum to countries such as Cambodia and Nauru, extending a form of colonial power that 'enables' authoritarian governments, contradicting democracy promotion (see Strating, this issue). These examples demonstrate that the way Australia acts at the domestic and regional level has bearing for its wider foreign policy ambitions. The link between what underscores security and the actions that can undermine security are obscured when the White Paper focuses on policy outcomes that are designed to 'produce' security yet simply perpetuate the structures that are the sources of insecurity in the first place. Addressing this requires a more ambitious vision than is presented in the White Paper; but this also requires systemic change and redressing structural inequalities. When the goals of the White Paper are wedded to formulas of prosperity, growth and security that are read in narrow terms, it not only excludes options but blinds us to the processes and logics that lie behind such visions.

Looking forward

Narrow visions of foreign policy that are focused on external projections of the 'national interest' obscure a range of important structural and interconnected tensions that work to undermine peace and security. In light of the advent of a 'feminist foreign policy', the retreat into rationalist ideas of what constitutes international relations should no longer be the limit our foreign policy ambitions or imaginations. While we do indeed face a more unsettled world where post-war institutions and norms are challenged, settling for a narrow definition of the national interest does little to deal with the significant challenges we face both as a nation and as part of the international community, such as migration, climate change, ongoing war and economic uncertainty. At the time of writing this paper, an opportunity presents itself in the form of Australia's Second National Action Plan on WPS, which is currently being drafted. As Allen (2020) points out, Australia's second NAP should adopt a holistic approach to national security that better links its foreign, defence, aid, and domestic policies and puts conflict prevention, and the promotion of gender equality and women's rights at the centre of all peace and security considerations. This could enable the translation of international commitments on WPS into national policies and programmes and promote an understanding that the security of states is deeply connected with the security of individuals (women, men, girls, boys and all gendered identities). Moreover, an intersectional and intergenerational understanding of security is required to go beyond narrow ideas of physical and military security to include environmental, social, economic, political, and civil.

During 2017, national civil society roundtables held by the Australian Civil Society Coalition on WPS demonstrated the dissonance between how diverse women conceptualise peace and security and how the White Paper frames these very same issues (Australian WPS Coalition 2018a). The White Paper frames peace and security largely in terms of 'international rules' at the regional and international level. Peace and security are mostly connected to the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region (Australian Government 2017a, 3–4 and 37–38) and the UN (1, 24 and 82). These roundtables produced more complex understandings of peace and security that related to structural concerns. Attended by over 200 women both affiliated and unaffiliated to organisations these roundtables aimed to articulate what everyday peace and security meant to women from diverse backgrounds living in Australia and our region, and what decisions and actions were

required to promote peace and security in Australia and internationally in Australia's second NAP. These discussions further blurred the binaries between foreign policy and the domestic realm, recognising a continuum of inequality and violence that should be addressed. Examples included how concepts such as 'freedom from' (homelessness, statelessness, violence, discrimination) and 'freedom to' (access justice, have autonomy, speak and protest) relate directly to peace and security. The roundtables also drew attention to the disconnect between women's daily experiences of violence and the focus of political discourse in Australia on domestic terrorism, violent extremism and border security. Framed in terms of threats to security, the political discourse reflects an apparent lack of commitment to addressing fundamental human security, and what makes women and girls from diverse backgrounds feel unsafe; i.e. the everyday occurrences of gender-based violence and discrimination that impact women's safety, dignity and mobility. As Susan Harris-Rimmer noted in the public consultation process, there is a clear connection between foreign and domestic policy: 'it is the stuff of everyday life' (cited in Australian Government 2017b, 16).

In terms of what women wanted to see in Australia's approach to promoting sustainable peace and security, internationally the call was for a 'a peace-based foreign policy grounded in principles of ensuring gender equality, promoting peace and stability, focusing on preventing conflict and reflective of our international human rights commitments' (Australian Civil Society Coalition on WPS 2017b, 10; IWDA 2017b). The roundtables proposed four key elements for developing a peace and security framework for Australia: a rights-based human security approach to peace and security policy; recognising the links between domestic policies and international commitments to WPS[6]; the inclusion of civil society voices, particularly diverse women's voices, framing what peace and security mean; and a collaborative approach to peace and security policymaking and implementation that recognises that no one actor alone can achieve collective impact (Australian Civil Society Coalition on WPS 2017b, 15). These recommendations decentre a masculinist approach that connects peace and security narrowly in the context of the 'national interest' rather than addressing the root causes of structural and systemic insecurity.

We have highlighted the disconnect in the White Paper between its aspirations to promote peace and security and vital missing links to the WPS agenda and other international commitments like the Sustainable Development Goals. The WPS agenda reflects the need to better integrate and include diverse women's lived experiences of insecurity so we can transcend the artificial divide between what makes us secure at a basic human level and state security. It is a gendered redefinition of what peace and security means across many domains—personal, community, national, regional and international. To achieve its aspirations of promoting regional and international peace, security and stability, Australia will need, in practice, to refocus its efforts on building 'a nexus between gender equality, conflict and development' (UN Women 2015, 31). This will require linking conflict prevention to demilitarisation, addressing human insecurity, and the fulfilment of human rights, as well as revisioning how we write foreign policy and think around its masculinist parameters.

While the White Paper is a necessary declaratory policy that will guide foreign policy through a diverse set of challenges for the next decade, its shortcomings reveal a limited view of what peace and security mean beyond narrow national interests. While the public consultation provided an opportunity to hear wider views, its scope and vision ultimately

resulted in a narrow vision in the White Paper. A gendered approach to peace and security means transforming structures contributing to violence, militarisation, and armament by focusing on human rights, human security, and peace, at the national, regional and global levels. Women want more than just a seat at the table; they want equal opportunity to reframe what peace and security means. As Trojanowska observes in the context of the NAP, the input of different voices, especially those within advocacy networks and civil society, need to be taken on, because at present they have 'translated into only a reductionist framework for action, which in itself does not support transformative implementation' (2019, 32). Listening to these voices challenges a singular view of peace and security, centred on absence of violence and protection of national interests (and borders) that has dominated international relations. These voices create the ties that bind Australia's foreign policy to its international commitments to sustainable peace and the WPS agenda.

Notes

1. To implement UN Security Council resolutions on WPS, member states were encouraged to develop NAPs. Australia's first NAP was released in 2012 and the second NAP is currently being drafted.
2. One example is Australia's 2016 Defence White Paper, which, while limited in terms of making gender a consistent focus, mentions the participation of women in defence and defence leadership positions, drawing on one pillar of the WPS agenda (Australian Government 2016).
3. The evolving database of NAPs covers 91 countries, some with more than one NAP. At the time of writing, of these 91 countries, 9 NAPs were unavailable (for Cyprus, Bulgaria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Latvia, Malta, Sri Lanka, South African and Uruguay). NAPs from Nepal and Namibia were listed but were yet to be analysed. The database did not include the 2019 NAPs from Lebanon and Bangladesh. The database methodology also counts 'prevention' in terms of its appearance in the NAP document, so further examination would be needed to determine if prevention is related specifically to 'conflict' or other categories, such as sexual and gender-based violence.
4. Trojanowska (2019) takes a more critical view of implementation of WPS across different government departments, arguing that the Defence White Paper was also a 'missed opportunity' to connect the international and national implementation of the NAP and suffered important gaps.
5. These examples also suggest that Australia's actions 'direct' foreign policy reality both domestically and in the region. As feminist scholars have pointed out, diverse voices can be subsumed by dominant voices both within feminist scholarship and activism. (D'Costa and Lee-Koo 2013). See also Parpart and Parashar (2018) on complex questions of silence, voice and agency which speak to and challenge these points.
6. This is especially important in light of critiques that suggest the inclusion of Indigenous women's voices was a neglected aspect of the first NAP and that WPS should also be a domestic issue (Dunn 2014; Basu and Shepherd 2017; Mundkur, Agius, and Ceccon 2018).

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Disclosure statement

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