



A Response to the Australian Government's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper

Introduction

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), established in 1915, is an international, non-governmental organisation (NGO) with National Sections in every continent, an International Secretariat based in Geneva, and a New York office focused on the work of the United Nations (UN) where we have consultative status (category B). WILPF brings together women from around the world who are united in working for peace and security by non-violent means using existing international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace and security.

As WILPF's Australian Section we have a particular focus on three campaigns: Women Peace and Security, Human Rights, and Disarmament, and on the integration of critical issues across those campaigns as we work with colleagues in the Asia-Pacific region. Our response to the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper (hereafter named as FPWP) that follows is grounded on WILPF's principles.

The lack of a Strategic focus

It is a well-held belief that Australia's security and prosperity have been grounded in the post-war, US-led world order. This point is made emphatically, and more than once, in the FPWP with constant reference to the 'rules-based global order'. However, there is also the emerging recognition that the world today, to quote from the FPWP, is a 'contested world' (p. 21). The paper recognises that while globalisation and Asian economic growth have influenced Australian prosperity and security, and will continue to do so, changes such as technological advances, climate change, transnational issues and new global power balances lead to an uncertain outlook for us. The paper identifies China in particular as a rising power challenging US global dominance. So where does this all leave Australia, especially since China is our major trading partner? This is a critical context for the analysis and discussion of Australia's future options in the FPWP, but not a topic that is confronted head on.

It is thus disappointing for our organisation, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Australia (WILPF Australia), which sees the situation as both a challenge and an opportunity, to find the FPWP avoiding any framing or analysis that allows for a significant departure from what has been. The main theme seems to be one of keeping up our security alliance with the US on one hand while maintaining a strong economic link with China as our main trading partner, despite the likely difficulties in maintaining this balance. The paper also has extended commentary on what is the case in terms of trade relations, security ties with other states, in particular with reference to working with partner states in addition to the US and New Zealand in the Indo-Pacific – India, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia - with an emphasis on trade and military co-operation (pp. 41-42). None of this sets out a clear strategic focus offering a way forward.

A limited focus on security and defence; diplomacy and 'soft power'; and the Women Peace and Security Agenda

Moreover, in areas of particular interest to WILPF Australia - security and defence, diplomacy and 'soft power', and the Women Peace and Security Agenda - there are questionable claims and a limited focus.

Security and defence

In the pursuit of security, the FPWP refers to the build-up of defence arrangements that as laid out in the previous 2016 Defence White Paper increasingly involve 'interoperability' with the US military, a short step some would suggest to becoming a subset of the US armed forces. It seems we are being steered into a militarised view of national security that seems precisely designed to make the populace feel afraid, not secure, with the inevitable result that force is seen as the answer, not peacebuilding. Indeed, the whole paper reads more like a Defence White paper than a Foreign Policy one.

But as well there is talk of operating in:

'an interdependent world, [with] a system that promotes collective responses to problems that cannot be solved by countries acting by themselves best serves our interests. For example, we support cooperation to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction, ...' (p.7).

However, it is in Chapter 6 'Global Co-operation' that a section on 'Countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction' tells a different story by omission. While stating that Australia has a long-term interest in working towards the goal of a world without WMD especially focused on nuclear safety and security and supports efforts to contain proliferation by various means the paper elaborates as follows:

'We will continue to strengthen the Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons NPT, which is the cornerstone of the nuclear non proliferation regime, especially through the 2020 and 2025 NPT review cycles.... We must ensure the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty enters into force and achieves universal coverage. In an uncertain security environment, including North Korea's development of a nuclear and missile capability, the Government recognises that only the nuclear and conventional military capabilities of the United States offer effective deterrence against the possibility of nuclear threats against Australia (our italics) and other allies of the United States such as the republic of Korea and Japan. Without extended deterrence, more countries in the Indo-Pacific would need to reassess their security and defence capabilities' (p. 85).

What is omitted is any reference to the outstanding recent contribution to disarmament, the agreement at the United Nations on a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons that is based on humanitarian grounds. In July 2017, 122 member states voted for its implementation. The Treaty provides a different but very significant approach to the issue of nuclear disarmament that has been followed previously. Civil society including WILPF International worked with members of the UN General Assembly, as did ICAN (international Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) – a group founded in Melbourne. ICAN has been awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for their effort. So far Australia has not signed the Treaty and the government has not even congratulated ICAN on their Nobel peace prize.

The government is still of the view that the extended deterrence of the US nuclear umbrella is sufficient, and was actually involved in trying to upset the process at the UN to formulate a nuclear ban. This can only be called misguided as we move into a world where nuclear proliferation is more rather than less likely unless we stop it now.

Diplomacy, 'soft power', and the role of women

Regarding 'soft power', the FPWP states the basis of Australia's approach to world affairs is our values:

'All government policies, including our foreign policy, must give expression to, and be formed on the basis of, the values of our community. Australia does not define its national identity by race or religion, but by shared values, including political, economic and religious freedom, liberal democracy, the rule of law, racial and gender equality and mutual respect. ...Australia's development assistance program similarly reflects our values while supporting our interests. Our investment in the stability and resilience of developing countries works to improve our own security and prosperity' (p.11).

These values are deemed of particular significance in looking at the operation of 'soft power' in the Indo-Pacific region. The FPWP sees the long-term goal of peacefully maintaining the fundamental principles on which the Indo-Pacific's prosperity and cooperative relations are based as very important (p.37). This involves, the paper states, maintaining open markets, upholding the rights of small states and the resolution of disputes peaceably, among other such measures (p.38) but still relying on the engagement of the US and that of China in strengthening regional order.

'Australia's development assistance program, currently 3. billion a year with 90 per cent of our bilateral and regional funds focused on the Indo-Pacific supports our partners in their efforts to become more stable, prosperous and resilient' (p. 18).

Given the volatility in this newly 'contested world' where the power balance between the US and China is shifting, the focus on our alliance with the US, which stands out in the FPWP, is short-sighted. Australia needs to be developing more practical processes and relationships that will place us in a safe and secure position in our region. So it is an omission of the FPWP to completely ignore the role that women can, and should, be playing in peace processes. The time has come to move from purely military might and military responses to conflict, to a broader view of what peace and security is. A key message from the UN Global Study on the 15th Anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security was that the normalisation of violence at the local, national and international levels must cease and that networks of women peacebuilders and peacemakers must be expanded and supported to come to the fore if we are to act with conviction to prevent wars through dialogue and discussion.

Women Peace and Security

We were pleased to see the attention paid to gender equality in the FPWP in the sections on international and economic development. The Ministerial Foreword to DFAT's Women Peace and Security: DFAT's implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Australia (2015) states that Australia 'has been a strong and consistent advocate for women, peace and security. This agenda was a priority during Australia's term on the UN Security Council and beyond.' The 2017 open debate in the UN Security Council on Women, Peace and Security (in which Australia participated) demonstrated that the women, peace and security agenda is no longer considered simply as a thematic issue but an essential pillar of global affairs.

However, the 2017 FPWP makes no mention of either the women, peace and security agenda or the first Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP). **This means that by confining gender equality to international development, the opportunity has been missed to shift gender equality and women, peace and security from an exclusively international development issue, important as that is, to a strategic foreign policy issue.**

We know from a range of statistics that women are largely excluded from processes and forums where decisions are made regarding approaches to national security and peace. This applies in Australia just as in conflict-affected countries. Women's voices should be heard in all decision making processes that lead to policy decisions on national security, in all its forms, so that all sources of preventing and resolving violent conflict are included – not only military or armed police action. All forms of peacebuilding should be included to ensure we have a genuinely inclusive and peaceful society that can influence other nations to pursue a less militarised approach to peace and security in the world.

In 2017, the Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women Peace and Security conducted a series of Community Engagement Roundtables across all capital cities in Australia to discuss what peace and security means in practice to women from diverse backgrounds across Australia. The Roundtables formed the basis for discussions at the later Policy Dialogue with Government officials with portfolio responsibilities relating to the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Four key themes emerged from the Roundtable discussions:

- Respect for human rights and gender equality
- Acknowledging the diversity of women's voices around peace and security
- Marginalisation and women's voice; and
- Freedom and 'humanising' security

The Roundtable participants identified a broad range of ideas, activities and strategies for promoting peace and security. Most notable of these was an emphasis on the need for a dual focus, i.e.:

- A domestic program built around addressing inequality;
- 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.

Participants were clear that this required bold actions: 'business as usual' will not achieve the deep structural change required for sustainable peace and security.

The subsequent Civil Society-Government Policy Dialogue therefore focused on:

- What are the critical understandings of peace and security in Australia in the current global context?
- How the approach to women, peace and security as discussed, links to broader Australian discussions on conflict and peace processes; and
- What are the implications for both domestic and foreign policy?

Current Australian government policies and practices, both domestic and foreign, lean towards increasingly militaristic approaches to dealing with threats. WILPF Australia would like to see the development and implementation of policies and practices that emphasise peacebuilding over militarism and, crucially, ensure the participation of women in all such processes. This means looking at conflict prevention through different eyes including increasing the focus on disarmament and recognising the role of women in disarmament efforts. It is disappointing that so little attention has been paid to these aspects in the 2017 FPWP.

Australia is in the process of developing its second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. This provides the opportunity for policy makers to adopt a gendered lens in elucidating Australia's approach to security, peacebuilding and confliction prevention, especially in our own region. We have missed this opportunity in the current White Paper. WILPF Australia hopes the second National Action Plan will not.