

## **Trust the Women as I Have Done: An American's Reflections on Australia and WPS**

Valerie M. Hudson

The Fulbright Commission sent me on the adventure of a lifetime earlier this year, allowing me to spend almost six months based at ANU in Canberra, as well as providing the opportunity to travel and meet other scholars in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Hobart, and Perth. Touring Parliament House with my family one day, I happened upon the impressively tall banner of anthropomorphised Australia gently admonishing the UK to grant women suffrage as the colony had already done; "Trust the Women, Mother, As I Have Done". I think I cleaned the gift shop out of keychains of this banner that I later passed out to all my friends upon return to the United States.

In thinking about the theme of this special issue, it seems to me that Australia is playing a similar role today, for in recent years Australia's leadership has once more emerged with regard to women, specifically with reference to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda catalysed by UNSCR 1325 in 2000. What I found during my time in Australia was a vibrant effort at realising the WPS vision, not only by an energised network of scholars (many of whom are authors in this special issue), but also within the Australian national government. For example, I was privileged to attend the first stand-up of a Gender Advisors training course by the ADF [Australian Defence Force], which course is meant to be a regional resource for the promulgation of UNSCR 1325 in military operations. I was also privileged to attend discussions on the updating of Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, which task appeared to be taken very seriously by those inside and outside government.

As an American, I could only look on with envy during my time in Australia. In the United States, the current administration appears to be wholly unconcerned with WPS, whether on purpose or through ignorance is hard to discern. Catherine Russell, Ambassador for Global Women's Issues—only our second such ambassador, mind you—resigned in December 2016 and has yet to be replaced. The Office of Global Women's Issues [OGWI] was originally slated by the present administration to have its budget completely zero'd out; while its current level of funding has now been restored after an outcry, OGWI will no longer report to the Secretary of State, but rather will

report to an Undersecretary. The only bright spot is that our Congress passed the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017 that mandates a quadrennial Women, Peace, and Security Strategy be produced by the government, with follow-up reports to Congress every two years.

We in the United States are back to making the case that the WPS agenda is good for national security; we are back to square one. And we are going to need your help, including your admonishments to our country that this is the right course of action. For example, the Australians have led out in introducing WPS objectives and trained gender advisors to the Talisman Sabre bilateral military exercises with the United States. Without Australian leadership, I do not believe it would have happened. The Americans were not prepared to lead on this front. During this period in which the US government appears indifferent and uninterested in WPS, insistence by a close ally such as Australia can make all the difference. Australia can help light the way.

And this isn't just the *right* thing to do—to include half the world in defining and ensuring national and international security—it's absolutely the *smart, realistic* thing to do. My own research has helped to demonstrate that no matter what facet of security you are interested in, whether that be food security, demographic security, peace and stability, economic prosperity, health, quality of governance, the empowerment of women strengthens your hand.<sup>1</sup> The first template for conflict or peace, exploitation or cooperation, democracy or autocracy, inequality or equal access is the template each society builds with respect to the relationship between the two halves of humankind, male and female. That founding template sets the horizon of possibility for national security. Pursuing the WPS agenda is thus the height of Realism in foreign and security policy.

Not only does the empowerment of women help in all ways to stabilise nations, but also putting on 'gender lenses' permits a much more advanced situational awareness that can aid security policymakers. Allow me to provide one small example. This past summer, my co-author Hilary Matfess and I published an article on the linkage between rising brideprices and the outbreak of rebellion and terrorism in several case studies, such as Nigeria and South Sudan.<sup>2</sup> Brideprice is the cost the groom's family must pay to the bride's family for receipt of the bride. A deeply embedded custom in many countries, brideprice operates as a flat and inflationary tax on all young men

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<sup>1</sup> Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli and Chad Emmett, *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, 'Clan Governance and State Stability: The Relationship Between Female Subordination and Political Order', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 109, no. 3 (August 2015), pp. 535-55.

<sup>2</sup> Valerie M. Hudson and Hilary Matfess, 'In Plain Sight: The Neglected Linkage Between Brideprice and Violent Conflict', *International Security*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Summer 2017), pp. 7-40, doi:10.1162/ISEC\_a\_00289.

in the society, easing the way for terrorist and rebel groups to recruit young men when an inflationary bubble ensues, as it often does. After that article's publication, I received this communication from a State Department officer who had been working Kabul:

[Your article] brought back to mind a conversation I had with one of my Afghan colleagues a few years ago when I was stationed in Kabul. He was exasperated by the insanely high, and ever rising costs, of weddings in Afghanistan. I really didn't understand what the big deal was. He wanted the government to intervene and thought we in the Embassy should get involved in the conversation. At that time, we, the ever so enlightened American political officers, viewed it through the lens of cultural pressures to put on a good party, as a poverty issue, or discussed it in the terms of women's rights and social issues and cultural norms. We never linked it to national security implications and for me, this research provides the vocabulary necessary. You rightly point out the importance of taking the emotion and moralizing out of it and counting it as an important variable that has a place in the policy conversation. I got a bit exasperated with his insistence on it being a serious issue and showed him research about how many Americans go into extreme debt to have the 'dream wedding' making the argument of who are we as foreigners to tell people how to spend their money – I was certainly moralizing.

This is the difference WPS can make. You can 'see' aspects of security you never noticed before, and once you have that sight, then security policy also looks like a much different enterprise than when you were in the dark. As an American, I doubt my country's current ability to understand the important of WPS. Frankly, at this point in time I look to Australia to hold aloft the torch, which makes this special issue so very welcome. Thank you, Australia, for once again being the voice that advises, "Trust the women as I have done".

*Valerie M. Hudson is the George H.W. Bush Chair at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University.*