



## Institut RIDEAU Institute

On International Affairs / Sur les affaires internationales

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### **One key word to help evaluate Canada's Foreign Policy under the Justin Trudeau Liberals**

**– by Peggy Mason, RI President for a panel presentation at the**

**[NPSIA, iAffairs and Canadian Foreign Policy Journal Conference](#) on 11 October, 2019.**

My word is “feminist - as in feminist foreign policy – where the [Women, peace and security agenda](#) - including a new Ambassador with a half decent mandate – comes to mind. Here the implementation glass is certainly half full with a government record that includes financial support for women's participation in peacebuilding (Mali) and in peace processes. (Although in the case of Syria, it was one-sided and therefore partisan support because we focused only on the participation of women in the ranks of the moderate opposition and not in the Assad government side, a reflection of the weakness of Canada's overall diplomacy in relation to Syria.

The Women, peace and security agenda also included strong and innovative support for increasing the number of women, and the importance of their work, in UN peacekeeping but this was in the context of an overall personnel contribution from Canada for UN peacekeeping that, after the substantive but unconscionably short Mali mission contribution, is now at its lowest level ever.

So a half-full glass as I said, at least to this point.

But feminist also brings to mind the feminist aid policy where I am told by experts I trust (since development is not my area) that the new feminist analytical framework is dead on BUT it came with no new money. Recall it was announced the day before the new 2017 defence budget with its whopping 70% increase over 10 years (not a word of which was mentioned in the 2015 election campaign).

So that makes me ask: what is the point of all those high-profile women in the Cabinet if they cannot even fight for new money for the feminist aid budget when the defence budget is receiving a gargantuan increase?

And finally, the glass turns from half-full to almost completely empty (or maybe even a negative amount of water, if that is possible) when I think of a particular cartoon in the context of the media revelation that, while the Harper government had negotiated and signed the then \$15 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia, it was the then Liberal FM Stéphane Dion (no doubt on orders from the PMO) who, in April of 2016, had approved more than 70% of the permits for the

export of the upgraded LAVs to Saudi Arabia despite its vile human rights record. The written departmental rationale was that they would help Saudi Arabia in its “stabilizing role” in Yemen.

We found all this out because former Bloc MP, and now McGill Law Professor Daniel Turp, had launched a court case to try and stop the exports on the basis that they contravened the then human rights guidelines for Canadian military exports;

Anyway, back to the cartoon which came out against the backdrop of the Prime Minister’s refusal to suspend Canadian LAV exports despite revelations about Saudi internal repression of women, of the Shia minority – and well of just about anyone who spoke out- and despite accusations by the UN of war crimes being committed against Yemeni civilians by the Saudi-led coalition in its conduct of the war

The cartoon showed Justin Trudeau with two belts of ammunition crisscrossing his chest, a jaunty smile on his face and the caption: **I’m a feminist arms dealer.”**”

So the word “feminist” reflects rather well the dilemma in trying to assess the utility of the pledge, “Canada is back”

Time does not permit further elaboration but, in answering the third question (on whether the Justin Trudeau approach to foreign policy represents a paradigm shift), I will come back to the issue of military exports and Canadian efforts to strengthen their regulation for the future.