



**FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY
AND UKRAINE:
FOR NOW, JAPAN LEADS THE WAY**

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A gendered war is taking place in Ukraine, powered by [patriarchal authoritarianism](#) that thrives on unencumbered violence. Some [women bravely serve](#) in Ukraine’s military, the [media](#), and in [support roles on the front lines](#). Yet stereotypical gendered norms have been reinforced as most refugees are women, while Ukrainian men must stay and fight. Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) principles seem ignored by the security sector, as [women](#) are absent in peace talks, and reports of [sexual- and gender-based violence](#) abound. By applying a [feminist foreign policy](#) (FFP) lens—focused on a re-imagination of conflict resolution and human security—we consider how Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has influenced Indo-Pacific foreign policies, particularly aid, defense, diplomacy, trade, and immigration. We find that Japan stands out as demonstrating alignment with some FFP principles, and may be ripe for formal FFP adoption. Given other Asian states’ mixed responses,

however, the invasion of Ukraine may split the Indo-Pacific on this framework.

Aid, sanctions, and immigration

First, FFP principles recommend consideration of women, children, and minority communities in aid provision, with emphasis on humanitarian aid over military/defensive responses. Tokyo has provided ¥12 billion (\$95 million) in emergency humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and [promised more](#). This aid demonstrates consideration of women by including [hygiene products](#) alongside tents, winter clothing, and generators.

Japan is an [above average](#) official development assistance (ODA) contributor to gender equality as a member nation of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Assistance Committee. To build on this achievement, Japan could stipulate requirements similar to its [Jordanian Palestinian Refugees](#) ODA program for its aid to countries accepting Ukrainian refugees. This program included Alleviation of Social Gaps, which prioritized the empowerment of women refugees through vocational training and access to reproductive health education.

A second plank of FFP is [prioritization and allocation](#) of resources to peace over state security, including “gender equality [and] ... the human rights of all.” As such, arms trade with non-democratic countries that abuse human rights and subjugate women, and Indo-Pacific military build-up would signal anti-feminist responses. Japan has generally set a positive example by supporting Ukraine without inflaming conflict. Its commitment to [restricting](#) military equipment exports has led to its supply of bulletproof vests and non-lethal equipment, but no weapons (though it recently announced the [shipment of drones](#)). Tokyo, while a recipient of US extended nuclear deterrence, has also warned against any use of nuclear weapons, acknowledging the painful [history](#) of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Third, emphasizing consultation with and equality of all impacted groups, an FFP perspective opposes neo-colonialism, the forceful control or influence of other

states. Meanwhile, sanctions are not the preferred option because they typically [hurt those already most vulnerable](#). Sanctions, however, are less militaristic than lethal support, and therefore more acceptable in FFP terms. Eight years ago, when [Russia annexed Crimea](#), Japan failed to sanction Moscow in a bid to maintain diplomatic talks over islands both Russia and Japan claim as their own. By contrast, Japan has moved [more decisively](#) in 2022, [following US and EU](#) sanctions early on. [To date](#), Japan has restricted Russian banks, and sanctioned oligarchs, companies, and military entities. While Japan still relies on Russian fuel, seafood, and various goods, it has revoked Russia's most-favored [nation trade status](#), impacting ¥1.54 trillion (\$12 billion) in imports.

Fourth, a country's FFP would also need to include a generous immigration policy, in this case focusing on the [4.2 million Ukrainian refugees](#) rather than state security. Japan has considered [amending](#) its limited immigration policy and [opened its doors](#) to friends and family members of its Ukrainian population. The new policy would allow them to stay longer or work.

It won't be an easy fix—Japan's past hesitancy towards refugees will require complete immigration policy transformation to align with FFP principles. In 2020, Japan [approved](#) 47 out of 3,936 asylum applications (1.19% of the total). Though an improvement from 2019's 0.42% acceptance rate, [other countries](#) are accepting more Ukrainians in response to the crisis. Still, Tokyo seems determined to lessen restrictions. To demonstrate national support for the consideration of individual refugees, Japanese Foreign Minister Hiyashi Yoshimasa returned to home from Poland personally [escorting 20 Ukrainian refugees](#).

A divided Indo-Pacific?

The provision of military aid is essential for FFP precedent. While Japan is all-but-mandated to follow FFP-aligned guidelines due to Article 9 restrictions, other countries with fewer hurdles can more easily adapt their aid distribution.

What precedent, then, does Japan's restriction of military aid to Ukraine set for its future responses to a conflict in Asia? Furthermore, in case of a contingency—such as China invading Taiwan—how might the reactions of Indo-Pacific countries to the Ukraine crisis predict alignment with feminist values? There has been [debate](#) about whether comparing Taiwan to the invasion of Ukraine makes sense, but in either case we are likely to see both adherence to and straying from FFP principles.

The Indo-Pacific is split on Ukraine. The only other Indo-Pacific nation to demonstrate a feminist-aligned response to Ukraine is New Zealand, which [sanctioned Russia](#) and sent [humanitarian aid](#) to Ukraine *instead* of weapons. [Australia](#) did all that *and* sent military aid. [South Korea](#), [Singapore](#), and [Taiwan](#) have been moderately aligned in their responses, with offers to support *other* countries' refugee intakes financially and cut trade ties with Russia and implement [sanctions](#), but refusing to accept Ukrainian refugees.

Most states, however, have been quiet on Russian sanctions and avoided direct criticism. Vietnam has [vaguely condemned Russia](#), but abstained from voting on the March 2 UN Security Council [resolution](#) deploring the invasion. India has [worked around Western sanctions](#), while China has [criticized sanctions](#) amid [misogynistic](#) remarks about Ukrainian women. Smaller countries like the [Federated States of Micronesia](#) have cut diplomatic relations with Russia without imposing sanctions. The [Philippines](#) offered military bases to the United States if the war spreads to Asia, but moved ahead with the purchase of Russian defense equipment. Similarly, [India](#), [Vietnam](#), [Indonesia](#), [Myanmar](#), and [Malaysia](#) have chosen to protect Russian arms trade over supporting Ukraine. Given anti-colonialist affinities between Indo-Pacific nations and Ukraine, failing to offer stronger, clearer alignment with the West's rules-based order and with feminist principles may be a lost opportunity for smaller Indo-Pacific states.

It is unclear if Japan's response is what Ukrainian feminists want. Japan, however, has taken what might be considered feminist approaches to foreign policy,

offering humanitarian aid, resisting calls to provide military support, sanctioning Russia, and even increasing its intake of refugees. In so doing, Japan has modeled a foreign policy that other nations should emulate, especially smaller states, which could face similar threats in the future. Feminist foreign policy advocates hope that it continues to do so, while also addressing [domestic gender equality challenges](#) faced by Japanese women and its LGBTQ community. Any attempt at formal adoption of a Japanese FFP should include self-reflection on [where Japan stands](#) internationally on domestic gender policies, especially if Tokyo wants to set an example for other Indo-Pacific countries.

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