Foreword

Here is a simple yet profound truth: If we hope to prevent conflicts and build lasting peace wherever war, violence, and instability threaten communities, we must empower women as full and equal partners at every step.

The moral argument is clear. Women are half the population. It is only right that they participate in the discussions and decisions that will shape their futures. But this is also a strategic goal because women are not only victims of conflict, but they are also agents of peace. There are remarkable stories of women crusading for peace and lasting security in places such as Colombia, Kosovo, Liberia, Yemen, Iraq, and too many others to list.

Around the world, dozens of conflicts are undermining stability, ravaging the fabric of society, and destroying populations. Persuading warring factions to lay down their arms is only the first step. An enduring peace needs reconciliation and justice. Citizens need opportunity and lasting security. Societies need to rebuild trust. Without these, peace can be hollow and fleeting. Indeed, we know from history how frequently peace agreements fail.

There is a growing body of evidence that shows how outcomes are better for whole societies when women participate in peace talks, security-sector planning, and reconstruction efforts. For example, women often raise day-to-day issues such as human rights, citizen security, employment, and health-care, which make peace and security plans more relevant and more durable. They speak on behalf of marginalized groups, often crossing cultural and sectarian divides, which helps give voice to everyone seeking a peaceful future. And once consensus is reached, women can help translate peace from an agreement on paper into changes that make a real difference in people’s lives.

On a practical level, women often know about the dynamics and events in the community through their daily interactions. As women carry out daily activities within their communities, for instance, they may see and hear things in a way that men do not. When women serve as police officers or military members, they make the security sector more representative of the population. Their networks help security forces better understand the undercurrents of the community, serve its needs more effectively, and earn its trust. Women’s leadership in the security sector also reinforces
the importance of women's participation in every part of society and opens up opportunities for other women to be engaged.

Women are a powerful force for peace across all of these dimensions. The United States has seen this clearly through our experience with armed conflict in areas where women leaders have sought every day to create stability and opportunity—even when the prospects for peace seemed elusive. Building on these lessons and those of our partners across the international community, in December 2011 President Barack Obama released the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. The plan offers a comprehensive roadmap for accelerating and institutionalizing our efforts to advance women's participation in making and keeping the peace. In short, the U.S. Government has made it a foreign policy and national security priority to put women at the heart of our peace and security efforts.

During our tenures as Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, we witnessed the major contributions women have made in areas affected by conflict, crisis, and transition. Take Afghanistan, where our Servicemembers, diplomats, and development experts are working with the Afghan people to help build a stable, prosperous society. Because there can be no lasting peace in Afghanistan without the full participation of women, we have worked to include women at every step. We sent teams of female Marines to work directly with Afghan women and help them advocate for their rights. Our Provincial Reconstructions Teams engage with communities to curb violence against women and end practices that destabilize societies, such as honor killing and female immolation. And we are training more Afghan women to join the security forces and the national police so that they can help protect women's rights and uphold the rule of law.

In active conflict zones, we know women often suffer disproportionate burdens, including rape as a tactic of war. We also know women can be valiant warriors. American women in uniform have faced the reality of combat and proved their willingness to fight and to die to defend our country. That is why in January 2013, the Defense Department rescinded the restriction excluding women from direct ground combat units and positions. The challenge for all of us moving forward is how we can better engage women as equal partners in all aspects of peace and security.

This book springs from our government-wide commitment to advance that mission. You will read about the experience of leaders such as Admiral James Stavridis, USN (Ret.), former North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, and Admiral William McRaven, USN (Ret.), former commander of U.S. Special Operations. Both are skilled and accomplished leaders who understand the importance of women as security actors. You will hear from multilateral partners such as NATO, which made a policy commitment to support women’s participation at the highest levels of decisionmaking about building global security, resolving crises, and preventing future instability. You will find the firsthand accounts of people such as Michelle Bachelet, Princeton Lyman, and Navi Pillay, who have partnered with women to build peace, defend human rights, and promote accountability around the world. And you will hear from women on the ground whose names you may not yet know, but who are working each day toward a better, more peaceful future.

With this book, we hope to advance the critical dialogue on the importance of women in international peace and security. General Martin Dempsey, USA, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has recognized that we undercut the contributions of women at our own peril. We cannot deny ourselves half the talent, half the resources, and half the potential of the population. Instead, we must recognize that women are indispensable partners in creating peace and lasting stability. Working together, we can change the way we think about conflict and how we prevent it.

Hillary Rodham Clinton
67th U.S. Secretary of State

Leon Panetta
23rd U.S. Secretary of Defense