WIN WITHOUT WAR

Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief
Intel for Advocacy

DATE: 3/5/2021
SL: [Guest Authors! 🎉] Fighting for a Feminist Foreign Policy 💛

The Takeaway:
- In honor of International Women's Day, we bring you a special edition of the Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief, authored by our partners, Diana Duarte and Yifat Susskind of [MADRE](#).
- Sexism and gendered norms are inherent to the U.S. foreign policy status quo. From endless war, to nuclear proliferation, to suffocating sanctions, today's foreign policy is predicated on, and reinforces, patriarchy. We need a foreign policy that *centers feminism*.
- Building a feminist foreign policy requires bringing impacted communities to the decisionmaking table. But diversity in positions of power is not enough. We need a total rethinking of the militarized, exploitative approach to U.S. foreign policy.

Feminism: The Way Forward for Progressive Foreign Policy

This Monday, March 8, is International Women's Day — a day to celebrate the struggles and achievements of the feminist movement, and to look ahead down the path of liberation. In honor of this day, and all of Women's History Month, we bring you a special edition of the Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief, guest authored by two inspiring feminists: Diana Duarte is the Director of Policy and Strategic Engagement, and Yifat Susskind is the Executive Director, of [MADRE](#), a leading international women's human rights organization. We're grateful for their contributions to the struggle, and excited to bring you their words:

Ursula K. LeGuin once said that, in hard times, writers must be "[realists of a larger reality](#)." Those of us who seek a progressive U.S. foreign policy can borrow from this advice. We often face the criticism that our demands are too big, too radical, too unrealistic. But the truth is that we're grappling with the larger reality that decades of bipartisan U.S. foreign policy doctrinaires have refused to confront: the [human toll of endless U.S. wars](#), of [resource extraction](#) and pollution, and of [economic ideologies](#) that [deepen poverty and marginalization](#). These are the consequences of U.S. foreign policy whose core function has been to secure U.S. dominance globally — with the threat of U.S. military attack looming as the ultimate enforcer.

International Women's Day is an opportunity to explore an emerging, powerful vision that can advance a transformed role for the United States in the world: through a feminist foreign policy.

The Waters We All Swim In
Patriarchal and gendered norms are all around us — but we are often unaware of their ubiquity. They lie in the assumptions we make about what policies are realistic, efficient or effective, versus those that are considered unreasonable or weak. This is not only about socially-constructed power relations that subordinate or uplift people according to their gender. It's also about a value system that divides everything — people, characteristics and yes, policy options — into binary categories. Then it privileges what we code as masculine (like aggression and individualism) and suppresses what we imagine as feminine (like care and collectivism). It warns us that we can only be strong through the threat or act of violence, and that compromise is dangerously weak. (Don't miss Carol Cohn's groundbreaking work on this dynamic at the crossroads of gender and security.)

We all saw this in action at the January 6 insurrection, when Trump rallied people to storm the Capitol warning "you'll never take back our country with weakness." We live with the assumption that war is a natural, default response to conflict, which makes other destructive policies like economic sanctions that sicken and starve children more palatable as a "peaceful" alternative. We see this thinking in the escalating rhetoric around "great power competition," rooted in the hierarchical assumption that the United States must compete for the spot at the top against countries like China, with our survival depending on pushing others back. There's little room left over for quaint notions of shared prosperity, cooperation or mutual reliance. (That kind of thinking is for "wimps.")

Every Policy Must Be Feminist Policy
In foreign policy discussions, if feminism or women's rights comes up at all, they often get siloed to specific categories, like gender-based violence or reproductive rights (which are essential concerns, but not the whole story). Or the conversation gets narrowly construed as a head-counting exercise to ensure diversity and gender parity in policymaking roles. Or, worse, women's rights get conscripted into justifications for war and U.S. aggression, as we've seen from Afghanistan to Libya to Iraq. A feminist foreign policy demands, instead, an understanding of the centrality of gender justice, human rights, and dismantling toxic norms of masculinity in every realm of foreign policy, from diplomacy and trade, to defense and foreign aid.

Otherwise, siloed or opportunistic definitions of feminist foreign policy result in little fundamental change, because they enable other policies that undermine feminist aims to proliferate. For example, a more holistic feminist policy lens would require an end to rampant Pentagon spending, armed attacks, and nuclear proliferation, and a recognition that war often has the most devastating impacts on women, girls, and communities at the margins — just this week,

WIN WITHOUT WAR

three female journalists [were killed](#) by the Islamic State in Afghanistan — and [diverts crucial resources away](#) from combating the most pressing challenges of our times, like rising inequality and environmental devastation.

"If They Don't Give You a Seat at the Table, Bring a Folding Chair"
Trailblazer [Shirley Chisholm's words](#) remind us that there are dominant racialized and gendered paradigms about what counts as policy expertise and who counts as having a perspective worth hearing. Feminist principles call for a fundamental rethinking of how we make policy, and [who is at the table](#). Those living in or from the Global South, and in places on the receiving end of U.S. foreign policy, are rarely afforded a platform to shape decisionmaking, and the voices of women and LGBTIQ+ people in those local communities are even more sidelined. U.S. policymaking is worse off for it.

For instance, to achieve a U.S.-Yemen policy that can end bloodshed and foster lasting peace, U.S. policymakers need to hear from people like Muna Luqman, whose organization [Food4Humanity](#) has not only built girls' schools, delivered food aid, and rebuilt water systems amid Yemen's war, but has helped to [nurture a network of women peacebuilders](#), who have built grassroots ties to and deep-rooted trust in communities — a vital asset in the success of any peace effort. And she's not alone. Studies have revealed that centering women's meaningful participation in peace processes results in agreements that are [35% more likely to last at least 15 years](#). Peace organizers and rights activists like [Stella Duque](#) and [Charo Mina-Rojas](#) in Colombia, [Yanar Mohammed](#) in Iraq, and so many others have the vital expertise that can shape a U.S. foreign policy for peace.

Feminist Approaches Draw a Roadmap to Better Policy Solutions
To be clear, this requirement of inclusion goes beyond just having more gender diversity around the table. As much as [basic equity and effectiveness demands](#) inclusion, there are [dangers](#) in [over-reliance on that singular lens](#). This is about a fundamental reorientation of values.

One method to achieve this is gender analysis, which reviews policies to reveal their different or disproportionate impact on people of different genders. Black feminist scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw innovated the [concept of intersectionality](#) to grasp the ways that all forms of identity (such as race, disability, class, sexuality, and more) interact to produce different outcomes and perspectives. This analysis then allows us to produce effective policy strategies to navigate those gender impacts and confront potential harms.

Finally, a feminist foreign policy would also uplift and resource practical, local solutions developed by grassroots women. In the realm of climate response, for instance, this can mean learning from local women's adaptation strategies — from [protecting wetlands in Jamaica](#) to women [pooling their knowledge as subsistence farmers in Sudan](#) — that offer a blueprint for broader U.S. and international policymaking.

It's time to reject the patriarchal status quo. It's time to end endless war and exploitation. It's time to put feminism at the heart of foreign policy.

Leading the Fight for a Feminist Foreign Policy

Want to learn more about how we can build a feminist foreign policy? Here are some illuminating resources and just a few of the many organizations at the forefront of the fight:

- [Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy](#)
- [Feminist Green New Deal](#)
- [Feminist Peace Initiative](#)
- [Grassroots Global Justice — Investing in the Feminist Economy](#)
- [MADRE — Feminist Foreign Policy Jumpstart](#)
- [Women Cross DMZ — Path to Peace Report](#)
- [Women of Color Advancing Peace, Security, and Conflict Transformation](#)
- [Women's Action for New Directions (WAND)](#)

BURIED LEDES

President Biden has been dragging his feet on rejoining the Iran deal. But hardliners will only grow bolder the longer Trump's dangerous policies remain in place. This week, we joined 30+ orgs to say: **There's simply no excuse — the [U.S. must rejoin](#) the Iran deal, immediately.**

[Biden has signalled](#) he's unlikely to hold Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) accountable for [his role](#) in journalist Jamal Khashoggi's 2018 murder. **Jamal deserves justice, and we've joined 40+ organizations [calling on Biden](#) to #SanctionMBS.**

And while the U.S government won't sanction an individual tyrant for murder, it continues to impose harsh sanctions on entire populations. **80 House Democrats are [urging Biden](#) to repeal sanctions on the Cuban people** and reinitiate detente with Cuba.

Speaking of countries suffering direly under suffocating U.S. sanctions: No, President Biden, **there is no world in which Venezuela [presents](#) an "extraordinary threat" to the national security of the United States.**

Yet another example of the damaging impacts of U.S. militarism on our health and climate: **chemicals from the Luke Air Force Base near Phoenix, AZ, have [contaminated drinking water](#)** for 6,000 nearby residents.

As for our ~800 bases abroad, **experts across the political spectrum agree that it's well past time for the U.S. to close some of these outdated, Cold War-era sites** that cost billions per year and perpetuate our endless wars.

On Wednesday, **security forces in Burma killed at least 38 peaceful protestors**, bringing the death toll to at least 54 people since the February 1 military coup. And in face of this violent repression, it's often women who are on the frontlines.

With the U.S. no longer standing in the way, **the IMF is set to release 500 billion in special relief funds called Special Drawing Rights.** It's *real* progress, and credit to the Biden admin for acceding. But we need more: $3 trillion *and* for the U.S. to redistribute its share.

The United States **opposes an ICC probe into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian territories**, once again blocking any path to justice for the Palestinian people.

With last weeks' airstrike on Syria, we were once again reminded of the sad reality that Congress has largely abandoned its constitutional role of checking the president's war powers. **But with a growing movement to repeal the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs, they have a chance to take it back.**

From the Sunrise movement, to the Poor People's Campaign, to Black Lives Matter, **civic movements act as a bridge between domestic and foreign policy** — and are key to democratizing both.

And finally, is mayo the ultimate condiment? **These turtles think so.**