

DC just can't quit recommending war with Iran

Welcome to a rare Monday edition of The Debrief - we hope you enjoyed your multi-holiday Friday

The Headline

Recently, the Center for New American Security (CNAS) released a [report](#) titled “Disarming the Bomb: Distilling the Drivers and Disincentives for Iran’s Nuclear Program,” based on an October 2022 “scenario exercise” about nuclear diplomacy with Iran run by the CNAS Middle East team. The report’s central thesis is that the Iranian government is pursuing a nuclear weapon as a means to regime survival, and therefore the best way to prevent an Iranian bomb is for the U.S. to threaten the regime with violent overthrow before they can acquire one. Specifically, the report called for “publicly contemplat[ing]... an Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF)” and “sending private messages to Iran’s political and military leaders indicating [U.S.] resolve to see them removed from should they not abandon the nuclear program.”

These recommendations are self-evidently counterproductive. Threatening regime change only increases the Iranian government’s incentive to pursue nuclear weapons, as a deterrent against U.S. attack. The report itself even acknowledges that threats of violence against Iran make a rush to nuclear weapons more likely - just before it recommends issuing threats anyway. We know from horrible experience that regime change is not a viable policy option. If the U.S. actually went to war to overthrow the government in Tehran, the resulting war would likely be [much more](#) destructive than even the Iraq War, and people in Iran would suffer from it more than anyone. It’s almost unfathomable that anyone would be advocating a regime change war based over weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East nearly 20 years to the day after the start of the Iraq War, but welcome to Washington.

Thankfully, this policy proposal is so absurd even Congress has rejected it. Lawmakers voted down legislation targeting war with Iran both [during the Trump administration](#) and [again just last month](#) joining the U.S. public in demanding non-military approaches to limiting Iran’s nuclear program. Recent developments show potential paths forward to prevent war. Within the region, Saudi Arabia and Iran have significantly [eased tensions](#), leading to a Ramadan [meeting between their respective foreign ministers](#) and [further détente](#) between Iran and Saudi allies. Here in Washington, the Biden administration appears to be sticking with a diplomatic path as well, with recent [reports](#) of a potential freeze-for-freeze deal to slow Iran’s nuclear advancements.

What’s next: The Iranian government’s nuclear program and its violence against protestors remains a crisis. However, [draconian sanctions](#) and military threats will not alleviate either. They will only cause the people of Iran to suffer. War is not a policy proposal to be thrown around casually by think tanks halfway around the world from where the fighting would take place, detached from real people who would be directly impacted. A new AUMF may put smiles on the faces of defense contractors who fund institutions like CNAS, but our policy debates would be

better inspired by the families who fear burying caskets of those close to them if such an authorization was actually pursued. Our foreign policy institutions should be dedicating their considerable resources to developing tools for peace, not plotting paths to war.

The Happenings

April 8th, 2:00 EDT: “Whose property? A discussion on IP, labor, and technology,” [Justice is Global](#)

April 10th, 2:00-3:00 PM EDT: “The state of the global economy: A conversation with US Treasury Undersecretary Jay Shambaugh,” [Brookings Institution](#)

April 26th, 6:30-7:30 PM EDT: “Interrupting Gun Violence for Peaceful Communities,” [Friends Committee on National Legislation \(FCNL\)](#)

The Spotlight

In today's spotlight, we interview Genevieve Riccoboni, program coordinator at the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). You can follow her on Twitter [here](#).

1): What was the first moment you realized you were interested in working at the nexus of feminism and security? Do you have any lessons learned for students or those just starting in a similar career path?

I have been working for four years in WILPF's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) program. We focus on advancing women's participation and leadership, preventing armed conflict and violence, and advocating for gender-sensitive approaches to peace and security. WILPF is a global membership organization, and I work with our members to bring their perspectives on WPS to the UN.

I was drawn to working on these issues for a number of reasons. Feminism, for me, answers a lot of key questions about how to stop war and build peace. Feminism is a movement for women's rights and freedom, but also a mode of thought that helps us analyze and challenge power structures. In the foreign policy context, feminism helps us think differently about what the words “security” and “peace” might mean from different vantage points, or to ask whose needs should be centered in a peace process. It also complicates the binary between “wartime” and “peacetime” by making us examine the forms of violence that are experienced by women or marginalized groups. What motivates me in this work is the desire to shift power and decision-making authority away from only the people with the weapons, and instead to re-center the needs and rights of people who are impacted by the decision to use violence.

All of us in the foreign policy world are working on issues that are related to the work of broader social movements, e.g., the feminist movement, climate justice movement. To anyone starting in this field, I think it's important to see ourselves as accountable in some way to those

movements, and also to learn from the people who are directly affected by the issues we work on if we aren't those people ourselves.

2): What is one thing you wish was better or more widely understood about what a feminist foreign policy means? How does it fit into the Women, Peace, and Security agenda?

Feminist foreign policy (FFP) is a newer term, although conceptually it has a lot of connections to other frameworks such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda. There is no one definition of FFP, and I think it's our job as advocates to articulate what it means to us.

To me, there are a few different components to an FFP. The first and clear one is a dedicated focus on women's rights, e.g. through sustained, long-term funding to women's rights organizations, or advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights. But the second component for me is about values and coherence. Women's rights can't be achieved in a policy silo because women are also members of communities. If you're funding a program on girls' education, but simultaneously selling weapons to conflict parties that are bombing that girl's village, can the overall impacts of those policies be called feminist? If you're funding a women's health program but also pushing privatization and austerity, are you creating the structural conditions for women's empowerment? Policy coherence is essential. This is also true in terms of the connection between domestic and foreign policy. If you have an FFP but domestically women's rights are regressing or women's movements are being suppressed, that's also incoherent.

Because of this, I'm somewhat conflicted about the label. It's great to see governments embracing the term feminism, but we already have a lot of existing global policy frameworks on peace and women's rights with implementation lacking in many countries. Things can also go backward – Sweden was the first country to adopt an FFP, and a new right-wing government just scrapped it. I'd like to see far more funding for women's rights but also just generally more investment in diplomacy, conflict prevention, and things that will benefit all people.

3): What most excites you about working with the UN, and how does the policy debate there differ from the policy debate in Washington?

Effective multilateralism is critical to the future of our planet, and it is also really hard! I have a lot of respect for the diplomats and UN officials who keep finding areas of consensus and collaboration amidst divisions. Doing advocacy at the UN is also different from domestic advocacy too – there isn't the same accountability that, for example, the US government has to the American people. That means that you have to be strategic and make the case for your issues in a way that aligns with various countries' interests and priorities.

There is a lot of discussion rightfully at the moment about how to strengthen the UN and reform it to make it more effective. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has resurfaced the well-documented critiques of the UN Security Council, particularly around permanent membership and the use of

the veto. UN reform is a really important discussion that I'm excited to be taking part in, because we really need these institutions to work.

In the WPS field, we have also gotten more member states and UN officials talking about gender in relation to peace and security at the UN. One way we have done this is by working in coalitions to bring women experts to address the UNSC and provide recommendations on country and thematic situations. However, just like here at home in the U.S., gender, women's rights, and LGBTQI issues sometimes also receive pushback from more conservative actors. We are always trying to find new ways to build the political will for finding more inclusive, nonviolent, and feminist approaches to building peace.

Buried Ledes

A group of family members of 9/11 victims [held an event](#) in Atlanta this week to protest golfers from the Saudi government-owned LIV Tour playing in the Masters tournament. The Chair of 9/11 Families United, Terry Strada, urged the Chairman of the Augusta National Golf Club to consider the potential harm caused by normalizing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Last year, this group protested an LIV Tour event at former president Trump's golf course, which was criticized as a high-profile example of Saudi sportswashing to hide its human rights abuses.

Texas may soon implement new environmental [restrictions](#) on renewable energy projects. State lawmakers are considering a variety of bills to impede solar and wind projects, one of which would impose new environmental permit requirements on renewable energy power plants, though not on fossil fuel plants.

The locations of [4 new U.S. military bases](#) in the Philippines were announced this week. This deal is widely recognized as part of a U.S. effort to counter Chinese regional influence, and some human rights activists are [concerned](#) that this expanded support could endanger government dissidents in the Philippines given the Filipino government's human rights abuses.

Despite having no consular or diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, the U.S. [continues to relocate](#) thousands of U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, unaccompanied children, refugees, and Afghans qualifying under the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program from Afghanistan. According to the State Department, more than 90,000 Afghans have been resettled across the U.S. over the past 20 months, and more than 11,000 SIVs were issued to Afghans between October 2021 and September 2022. Though aware of these relocation flights, the Taliban has not impeded the process.

The United Nations General Assembly has adopted a resolution [calling](#) for the International Court of Justice to establish obligations under international law for nations to protect populations from the impact of the climate crisis. The U.S. – the

world's largest historical greenhouse gas emitter – did not support the resolution, with one Biden administration official saying: "We believe that diplomacy – not an international judicial process – is the most effective path forward for advancing global efforts to tackle the climate crisis."

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** says that **one in every six people around the world are affected by infertility**. A new WHO report looking at 133 studies over three decades found that 17.5% of individuals experienced infertility at some point in their life. The report did not find a significant difference in infertility between richer and poorer nations.

90% of Parisians have voted to outlaw electric scooters in France's capital. Even Paris' mayor, Anne Hidalgo, who promotes cycling and bike-sharing, supported a ban on e-scooters.

Mike Check!

A new GOP-led House means a Congress in which Congressmen named Michael outnumber women as committee chairs. Here's Mike Check, an occasional series dedicated to keeping track of what the Mikes are doing with all that power.

In March, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said of the 2002 Iraq AUMF repeal, "I think it has a good chance of one getting through the committee and getting to the floor." Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee **Mike** Rogers seemed amenable, saying of the repeal, "I don't have a big problem." Great! We'll take it. Let's get it to the floor and passed ASAP.