



Masculinity As Foreign Policy Issue

By Cynthia Enloe, Clark University

The militarization of any country's foreign policy can be measured by monitoring the extent to which its policy: 1) is influenced by the views of Defense Department decisionmakers and/or senior military officers, 2) flows from civilian officials' own presumption that the military needs to carry exceptional weight, 3) assigns the military a leading role in implementing the nation's foreign policy, and 4) treats military security and national security as if they were synonymous. Employing these criteria, U.S. foreign policy today is militarized.

A feminist analysis can help reveal *why* U.S. foreign policy has become so militarized—and at what costs. Since 1980, due to the growth of the women's movement, it has become almost commonplace in many domestic U.S. policy circles to ask: "Will this proposed solution have disproportionately negative impacts on girls and women?" and "Does this policy option derive from unspoken assumptions about men's employment, men's health, or men's supposed abilities?" Notable strides

have been made in domestic policy arenas, even if there is still a long way to go before such intelligent questioning produces equally smart policy outcomes.

By contrast, in foreign policy, progress toward a more sophisticated—realistic—understanding of the causes and costs of policy options has been sluggish. In the 1970s and 1980s, women activists and feminist analysis did help drive popular protests against U.S. wars in Southeast Asia

and Central America. Yet, generally, U.S. foreign policy has been tightly controlled by the president and Congress, limiting a genuinely public debate. Stalling progress toward bringing feminist analyses into foreign policy decisionmaking processes has been the conventionally naive belief that international affairs—trade, immigration, high-tech weapons sales—have nothing to do with gender. They do.

Feminist foreign policy analysis is not naive. It derives from a systematic, eyes-wide-open curiosity, posing questions that nonfeminists too often imagine are irrelevant or find awkward to ask. For starters:

* Are any of the key actors motivated in part by a desire to appear "manly" in the eyes of their own principal allies or adversaries? What are the consequences?

* Which policy option will bring women "to the negotiating table"?

* Does the alleged reasonableness of any foreign policy choice rest on the unexamined assumption that women's issues in the target country can be addressed "later," that it is men's anxieties that must be dealt with immediately?

American feminist analysts and strategists have had the strongest impact on international political debates in recent years when they have worked in concert with women's advocates from both developed and developing countries, *and* when the U.S. military and its congressional allies have not felt that they had a stake in the outcome. Feminist networks have had success, for example, in putting trafficking in women on the agenda of international agencies, making systematic wartime rape a distinct prosecutable charge in the Yugoslavian and Rwandan international war crime tribunals, making women refugees' interests administratively visible, and defining women's control over their reproductive processes as warranting the status of an internationally recognized human right.

However, when Defense Department officials have weighed in, the Democratic-controlled White House and Republican-controlled Senate have shied away from feminist analyses. Consequently, the U.S. government either has invested energy in watering down new international treaties designed to roll back militarism, or has refused outright to ratify such agreements as, for instance, the treaty to ban landmines [see FPIF brief "The Mine Ban Treaty," v 5, n 21], the UN convention acknowledging the rights of children in war [see FPIF brief "Use of Children as Soldiers," v 4, n 27], and the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court, the first permanent international war crimes tribunal [see FPIF brief "International Criminal Court," v 3, n 4].

In each instance, it has been the Pentagon's ability to persuade civilian officials that the military's own goals would be compromised—its desire to maintain landmines in South Korea, its desire to enlist and deploy teenage recruits, and its prioritizing the protection of American soldiers stationed abroad when they are charged with criminal acts—that has carried the day in Washington. Civilian representatives' repeated privileging of military concerns over other important U.S. international goals is due in part to the nervousness that many male civilian executive and congressional officeholders feel when confronted with military resistance. This is not about hormones. It is about the male politician's angst over not appearing "manly." This, in turn, is about American political culture.

Key Points

- Feminist analysis reveals some of the chief causes and costs of militarizing U.S. foreign policies.
- Civilian policymakers' desire to appear "manly" is a chief reason for the Pentagon's remarkable influence over current U.S. foreign policy.
- U.S. military policies today marginalize women and entrench the masculinization of political life at home and abroad.

Problems with Current U.S. Policy

Many observers have remarked on the peculiar American contemporary political culture that equates military experience and/or military expertise with political leadership. It is this cultural inclination that has made it very risky for any American public figure to appear less "manly" than a uniformed senior military male officer. It is a culture—too often unchallenged by ordinary voters—that has given individuals with alleged military knowledge a disproportionate advantage in foreign policy debates.

Such a masculinized and militarized culture pressures nervous civilian candidates into appearing "tough" on military issues. The thought of *not* embracing a parade of militarized policy positions—that increase the defense budget, make NATO the primary institution for building a new European security, expand Junior ROTC programs in high schools, insure American male soldiers' access to prostitutes overseas, invest in destabilizing antimissile technology, maintain crippling but politically ineffectual economic sanctions and bombing raids against Iraq, accept the Pentagon's flawed policy of "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue," and finance a military-driven antidrug policy—would leave most American public officials (women and men) feeling uncomfortably vulnerable in the political culture that assigns high value to masculinized toughness. The result: a political competition to appear "tough" has produced U.S. foreign policies that severely limit the American capacity to play a useful role in creating a more genuinely secure international community. That is, America's conventional, masculinized political culture makes it unlikely that Washington policymakers will either come to grips with a realistic analysis of potential global threats or act to strengthen those multilateral institutions most effective in preventing and ending conflicts.

A feminist analysis turns the political spotlight on the conventional notion of manliness as a major factor shaping U.S. foreign policy choices. It demonstrates that popular gender presumptions are not just the stuff of sociology texts. Every official who has tried not to appear "soft" knows this. For example, early in his administration, Bill Clinton made known his abhorrence of landmines and his determination to ban them. But by 1998, he had caved in to military pressure and stated, instead, that the U.S. would not sign the widely endorsed international landmines treaty until the Defense Department came up with an "alternative."

Feminist questioning also produces a more realistic accounting of the consequences of macho policies. Despite slight increases in the number of women in policy positions, U.S. militarized policies in the post-cold war era have served to strengthen the privileged posi-

tions of men in decisionmaking, both in the United States and in other countries. For instance, the U.S. government is currently promoting NATO as the central bastion of Western security. Although it is true that there are now women soldiers in all NATO governments' armed forces (the Italians were the most recent to enlist women), NATO remains a masculinized political organization. The alliance's policies are hammered out by a virtually all-male elite in which the roles of masculinity are silently accepted, when they should be openly questioned. Thus, to the extent that the U.S. succeeds in pressing NATO to wield more political influence than the European Parliament (where women have won an increasing proportion of seats), not only American women but also European women will be shunted to the wings of the political stage.

Consider what feminist analysis reveals about the consequences of militarizing antidrug policy. The American government's new billion-dollar-plus aid package to the Colombian military will, as its critics have noted [See FPIF brief "Colombia in Crisis," v 5, n 5], further intensify the civil war and human rights abuses. But less discussed is the fact that this policy will serve to marginalize women of all classes in Colombia's political life. This—the obsession of America's politicians and senior appointees with not appearing "soft" on drugs—militarizes drug prevention efforts and, in so doing, disempowers women both in the U.S. and in the drug producing countries. Women—both as grassroots urban activists in American cities and as mobilizers of a broad, cross-class peace movement in Colombia—have offered alternative analyses and solutions to the problems of drug addiction and drug trade. However, their valuable ideas are drowned out by the sounds of helicopter engines and M-16 rifles.

This example illustrates a more general phenomenon. When any policy approach is militarized, one of the first things that happens is that women's voices are silenced. We find that when the U.S. touts any military institution as the best hope for stability, security, and development, the result is deeply gendered: the politics of masculinity are made to seem "natural," the male grasp on political influence is tightened, and most women's access to real political influence shrinks dramatically.

Key Problems

- Foreign policy is debated in Washington without policymakers examining their own masculinized presumptions.
- Senior policymakers in both the executive branch and Congress allow militarized anxieties to override more realistic understandings of current national "security."
- The consequences that militarized policies hold for women are typically ignored when U.S. officials weigh foreign policy options.

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Toward a New Foreign Policy

Asking feminist questions openly, making them an explicit part of serious foreign policy discussion, is likely to produce a much more clear-eyed understanding of what is driving any given issue debate and what are the probable outcomes of one policy choice over another. Precisely because the United States currently has such an impact on the internal political workings of so many other countries, we need to start taking a hard look at American political culture. If this globalizing culture

continues to elevate a masculinized "toughness" to the status of an enshrined good, military needs will continue to be assigned top political priority, and it will be impossible for the U.S. to create a more imaginative, more internationally useful foreign policy.

Cultures are not immutable. Americans, in fact, are forever lecturing other societies—Indonesia, Russia, Mexico, France—on how they should remake their cultures. U.S. citizens, however, have been loath to lift up the rock of political

convention to peer underneath at the masculinized presumptions and worries that shape American foreign policies.

What would be the most immediate steps toward unravelling the masculinized U.S. foreign policy knot? A first step would be to muster the political will to congressionally ratify the International Criminal Court treaty, the antilandmines treaty, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A second step would be for Democrats and Republicans to halt their reckless game of "chicken" regarding both the antimissile defense sys-

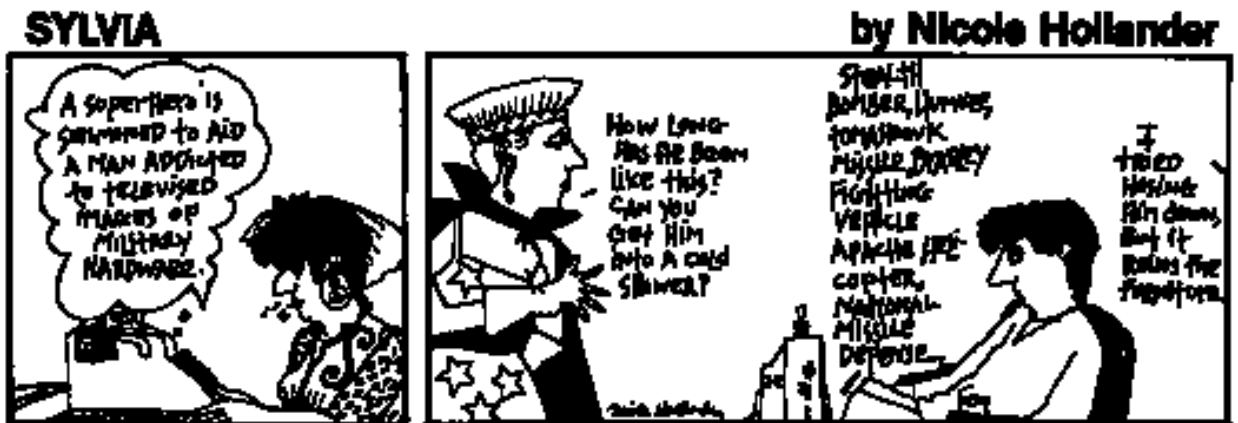
tem and increases in U.S. military spending. A third step would entail daring to own up to the consequences of making the military Colombia's most potent institution and opting, instead, to join European countries in supporting Colombia's peace process and adopting anti-narcotics policies that treat drugs largely as a medical and social problem rather than a military problem. A fourth step would be to shelve U.S. efforts to remilitarize Europe and Japan. Together, these four policy steps would amount to a realistic strategy for crafting a less-militarized, less-distortedly masculinized foreign policy.

A feminist-informed analyst always asks: "Which notions of manliness are shaping this policy discussion?" and "Will the gap between women's and men's access to economic and political influence be widened or narrowed by this particular policy option?" By deploying feminist analytical tools, U.S. citizens can clarify decisions about whether to foster militarization as the centerpiece of the post-cold war international system. Moreover, by deploying feminist analysis, Americans are much more likely to craft a U.S. foreign policy that will provide the foundation for a long lasting global structure of genuine security, one that ensures women, both in the U.S. and abroad, an effective public voice.

Cynthia Enloe is a leading feminist scholar and a professor of government and women's studies at Clark University. She is indebted to Carol Cohn, Mary Katzenstein, and Linda Yarr for their thoughtful readings and suggestions regarding this brief.

Key Recommendations

- Feminist investigation should be treated as a serious analytical tool when assessing any foreign policy.
- Militarized values and anxieties should not be *a priori* more salient than other concerns when officials negotiate an international agreement.
- U.S. policymakers should see empowering women in the political life of other countries as an effective way to foster internal democratization and international stability.



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World Wide Web

International Campaign to Ban Landmines

<http://www.icbl.org/>

International Criminal Court (ICC) Caucus

<http://www.iccnw.org/>

Youth and Military Online News

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