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## **UNCOVERING THE FALSEHOODS OF NATO'S "SECURITY"** **Steps along the road of a feminist peace activism**

**NATO = Security?** "Security" is a word whose commonsense meaning, as the Oxford dictionary puts it, is "a feeling of safety", of being "protected from danger". The term as used in international diplomacy, governmental and military discourse perverts this meaning. So, one task of our antiwar / peace movements is to uncover the falsehoods inherent in the "security" concept deployed by NATO. We have to define the 'real thing', and for this a feminist analysis is useful. We have to struggle to bring it into being, and for this a feminist practice is absolutely necessary.

### **Step 1: "Security" is not security for all nations but for some at the direct cost of others.**

NATO's member states interpret security as safety from external threat to "the nation state" as a political and territorial entity. By extension this means the safety of the coalition of nation states assembled by the USA in *its* own interests, states whose governments have in turn defined *their* own interest as sheltering under the US military umbrella. The first falsehood in "security", then, derives from "bloc mentality", which inevitably means the insecurity of nations and peoples deemed "other", outside the compliant coalition. Dire *insecurity* has been visited by NATO on Serbs, Iraqis, Afghans etc. to subdue and bring them within the US consensus and ensuring unhindered access for West-based capital to their resources and markets. Feminist analysts have suggested that women as women have little invested in bloc mentality. International relations are conducted mainly by men in masculinist institutions deploying masculinist concepts and values.<sup>i</sup> Except for a small and unrepresentative elite, women have little purchase on state power; we have even less international leverage; and, besides, we suffer in extreme and gender-specific ways in bombarded, invaded and occupied lands.

**Step 2: The means for achieving this false "security" are themselves sources of insecurity.** The second falsehood lies in the fact that the means of coercion chosen for external security (nuclear weapons) bring with them internal insecurity. The extension of NATO's nuclear weapons programme, combined with space technology, has certainly made the "enemies" of NATO insecure. But the "nuclear umbrella" also poisons those it's supposed to shelter, bringing risk of accident, explosion and radiation, and turning us into targets. Women's movements throughout Europe have long been at the heart of resistance to the development of nuclear warheads, installation of nuclear missiles and 'star wars' technologies, on grounds of their inherent danger and the social and economic costs they entail.

**Step 3: "Security" isn't just about defending the state from external threat; it targets suspected enemies at home.** The so-called War on Terror exposes how national armies back up the activities of domestic policing and immigration control. "Security" in NATO-speak doesn't just mean subduing non-compliant states, it means surveillance of the populations of its member states (and the aspirant populations clustered at their borders). We ourselves, in all our diversity and with our many rich links to other countries, are seen as major threats to national security. Opposing the War on Terror, we saw from the start that the struggle had to be two-fold. No to war, for sure. But also no to the erosion of civil liberties and the racist targetting of supposed enemies within. For women, "homeland security" involves infringement of our human rights in gender-specific ways – firstly by the state, secondly by the male leaders who exert power in our own politically volatile majority and minority communities.

**Step 4: "Security" for the state is not the same as security for human beings.** The fourth falsehood in the NATO concept of "security" was articulated in the UNDP's Human Development Report for 1994.<sup>ii</sup> Stepping out of the "military security" frame of thought, it replaced *the state* as the subject of security by *ordinary people* for whom "security symbolized protection from the threat of disease,

hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards”. It is now time,” the report asserted, “to make a transition from the narrow concept of national security to the all-encompassing concept of *human security*”. Freedom from want and from fear. It was a helpful conceptual shift that responded to years of groundbreaking thought by academics, activists and human rights organizations. But while “ordinary people” were listening, nation states of course were deaf to such a thought. In any case ...

**Step 5: The concept of “human security”, though an important acquisition for women, isn’t enough.** We need a concept of “women’s security” too. The UNDP report went on: “In no society are women secure or treated equally to men. Personal insecurity shadows them from cradle to grave. In the household, they are the last to eat. At school, they are the last to be educated. At work, they are the last to be hired and the first to be fired. And from childhood through adulthood, they are abused because of their gender”. Feminist analyses have shown that because women have less wealth and income than men, because we carry disproportionate responsibility for the wellbeing of family and community members, because of our reproductive role and sexual identities, we are adversely affected by the pursuit of militarization because it involves e.g. (a) diversion of funds from social to military budgets; (b) militarization of daily life and particularly of males; (c) hyped-up violence in popular cultures especially youth cultures; (d) specific forms of criminality, including gun ownership, sexual exploitation of women etc; (e) recruitment or abduction of women into the lower ranks of military and paramilitary forces; (f) increased control and surveillance of women as mothers – reproducers of the nation’s manpower. To say nothing of what war itself inflicts on women: uprooting, injury, rape.

**Step 6: The anti-war movements so far lack both a feminist analysis of militarism and war, and a feminist style of practice.** These events in Strasbourg are a case in point. Almost all the leadership of the political parties, and in many cases also of the activist organizations, are male. The critique of war policies and war machinery lacks recognition of the fact that *patriarchal gender systems are one of the root causes of militarism and war*. Yes, capitalist economic systems and nationalist state systems are clearly causes of war. But feminist antimilitarists add this additional thought: gender relations as we live them, relations of dominance and subordination, involving the specialization of males for authority, force and violence – these too are a motor of war policies and war fighting. They predispose our societies to war. If our antiwar movements grasped this simple fact they would call not only for the abolition of economic exploitation and nationalist/racist hatreds but ALSO for a dramatic change in the way we live our lives as men and women. And we would take more care to ensure that our antiwar movement leads by example. Interestingly, men who have been subject to military conscription and have rejected military values are often good advocates of change in masculinities.

**Step 7: From opposing “security” to securing life.** Do our European women’s antimilitarist movements have the capacity to do two things at once? We need to make more effective our specifically feminist practice of protest against our own war-prone states, the militarization of the European Union and NATO’s ever-growing reach. BUT ALSO we need to inspire and achieve something more: a movement for *counter-hegemony*. Counter-hegemony? De-legitimizing, out-dating, under-mining and over-whelming the hegemonic IR/military consensus on the meaning of “security”. Replacing it with an alternative, popular, mobilizing, woman-centred and irresistible vision of real, all-species-encompassing, human and women’s security. This, as we have always known, implies simultaneously creating and protesting, demonstrating peace while opposing war, modelling justice, equality and inclusion while resisting violence, touching people while challenging authorities, struggling with our “friends” as well as our “enemies” (*doble militancia*), making the road as we walk it (*se hace el camino al andar!*).

<sup>i</sup> Impossible to reference adequately here, but please "google scholar" the following. On gender/IR: Sandra Whitworth, V.Spike Peterson, Rebecca Grant, J. Ann Tickner, Anne S. Runyan etc. Effects on women of armed conflict: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Ruth Jacobson, Ronit Lentin, Meredith Turshen etc. On women/nuclear weapons: Rebecca Johnson, Grace Paley, Sian Jones, Jill Liddington etc. Feminist analysis of militarization/men/women: Cynthia Enloe, Cynthia Cockburn, A.G. Altinay, R.W. Connell. On gender/security policy: Carol Cohn, Felicity Hill, International Alert. On women/peace building: Dyan Mazurana, Judy El-Bushra etc. On human security: Johann Galtung, Amartya Sen. On women's security: S.N. Anderlini, Mary Caprioli. WILPF. Among many others.

<sup>ii</sup> [http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/1994/en/pdf/hdr\\_1994](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/1994/en/pdf/hdr_1994)