



Debate at European Parliament on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023  
Speech by MEP Clare Daly

I can't tell you how happy I am that this event is taking place, and that the Global Women for Peace United Against NATO declaration has been produced and circulated.

It has never been more needed.

Because feminism has been ruthlessly co-opted by the military industrial complex. A succession of young, glossy female politicians and media personalities have been pushed to the fore across Europe to argue on NATO's behalf, to argue for more war, more militarism, more arms spending. NATO has cottoned on to the power of social media and the emotional heft of identity politics, and is leveraging online influencers and the thinnest imaginable conception of gender equality to push its patriarchal, militarist agenda. I attended a Consultative Forum on International Security hosted by the Irish government last week, and it was *striking* how many young, attractive women were given prominent positions on the platform to argue against Ireland's traditional policy of neutrality and in favour of militarism. This is a project, there is no doubt about it. We've all heard of greenwashing by corporations; it's time to start talking about girl-washing by the military industrial complex. And the fightback against it, which I know is being pursued by all the organisations participating in these events over the next few days, needs our full support.

War and militarism are *anathema* to feminism. They are opposites, they cannot be reconciled. Anyone who tries to reconcile them, anyone who tries to abuse the language of gender equality to justify war and violence - those people are not advancing the cause of feminism, which is the cause of equality, of resistance to all forms of violence, exploitation and discrimination, the cause of care - for each other and the planet that sustains us. Anyone who argues for a 'feminist militarism' is *abusing* feminism, they're ruthlessly exploiting the years of feminist work and advocacy, the decades of feminist activism that have won women some measure of rights; they're cynically milking the blood sweat and tears of the hundreds of thousands of women all over the world who have made it their life's work to advocate for a better, fairer, more sustainable world based on feminist principles; and they're plundering the goodwill generated by all of that for their own, selfish and greedy ends.

We have to be loud in calling that out. We have to be crystal clear in our position that girl-washing militarism is an act of breathtaking cynicism that we will not stand for. No amount of women in 'Chanterelle beige plutonium-powered pants suits,' as my great friend the late poet Kevin Higgins once put it, women who allow themselves to be used as lobbyists for violence, these women cannot



be allowed to so much hint or imply that they speak on behalf of anything other than the military industrial complex that's bought and paid for them, metaphorically or otherwise.

Equality, justice and peace are the principles that underlie women's struggle for freedom, as the Declaration so eloquently puts it. There is no space within that for militarism - there is no space within it for the use of force and violence to achieve your goals, whatever they may be. NATO and nation state warmongers might like to talk about 'implementing feminist principles,' but we have to be absolutely trenchant and firm that this is absolute and utter nonsense. Feminism and militarism do not mix, there is no feminist militarism. You can glue a pair of fins to a dog and call it a fish, but it's still a dog, though granted a pretty stupid looking one. In the same way you can glue brittle statements about gender parity and gender progressivism to militarist structures, but you're still in the end left with institutions and structures whose entire existence is antithetical to feminist principles.

That doesn't stop those institutions and structures from trying, though - everywhere we look we can see them trying to glue fins to a dog and persuade us all to call him Splashy.

For years now, NATO has engaged in a highly strategic and highly considered communications strategy to try and position itself as a cosmopolitan defender of gender justice and human rights. The goal, of course, is to legitimate its actions and existence, and to open up a whole new market of support for its project. Recognising the fact that it had an image problem, since it was rightly perceived as the enforcer of Western patriarchal muscular militarism at a time when the problematisation of 'toxic masculinity' was increasingly popular and mainstream, and conscious of the fact that feminist anti-militarism was gaining ground with the young and the progressive in the wake of America's high-profile and disastrous invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, NATO seems to have taken a very deliberate decision to market itself differently, and the language of gender equality was just what it needed.

It took eight years for NATO to cotton on to the potential marketing power of UNSC Resolution 1325, but when they did, they seized on it with gusto. In 2008, they were happily declaring that the 1325 policy on Women, Peace and Security should from then on be 'an integral part of NATO's corporate identity, in the way it plans and conducts its everyday business and organises its civilian and military structures'. It should also be fully integrated into 'all aspects of NATO-led operations'. By 2010, NATO HQ was hosting a multimedia exhibition on NATO's implementation of resolution 1325. In it, young women in military fatigues cuddled smiling babies. It started hosting International Women's Day events. Also in 2010, NATO joined in the celebrations of the tenth



anniversary of the passing of the Resolution. To mark the occasion, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen gave a speech at the European Commission on 'Empowering Women in Peace and Security'. He spoke somberly of 'the ongoing victimisation of women in conflict situations and the marginalisation of women in matters of peace-building' as having a profound impact on global security, and being one of 'the key security issues of our time'. He didn't, obviously, suggest disbanding NATO as a solution - instead the implication was that those barbarian others not in NATO were responsible for these awful crimes against justice, while NATO was striving might and main to shoot its way to a better world.

At that time, Dr. Stefanie Babst was Acting NATO Assistant Secretary, and held up as a 'flagship' senior woman for NATO. She spoke warmly of NATO's 'gender conscious' occupation of Afghanistan, lauding the fact that NATO had trained Afghanistan's first ever female paratrooper. She wrote: 'Anyone who knows anything about Afghanistan realizes what an historic step that is. It is a real indication of the change for the better we are seeing in Afghanistan.' Was it, indeed. I'm sure the 97% of the Afghan population currently living in poverty, the Afghan women selling their organs to feed their children, the Afghan mothers selling their daughters to survive, while the US squats spitefully on 8.9 billion dollars from the Afghan Central Bank, I'm quite sure they are absolutely delighted that NATO trained up some female paratroopers - that's real change they can believe in.

Consistently and relentlessly over recent years, NATO has used its massive media and financial muscle to feed into the public sphere an understanding of the Women, Peace and Security agenda as a means to support military operational effectiveness, and to sell its role as masculinist protector which reinforces hegemonic militaristic, masculine ideals and norms as entirely unproblematic in regard to gender progressivism. The anti-militarist roots of many of those who worked so hard to get resolution 1325 passed are studiously ignored; instead we are browbeaten into believing that the women, peace and security agenda just means 'more militarism, but for everybody!'

By 2018 NATO was hosting Angelina Jolie at NATO HQ here in Brussels to talk about conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. The Guardian newspaper was publishing an op-ed co-authored by her and the NATO Secretary General. With this brief alliance with Jolie, NATO got it all - Hollywood glamour, a sheen of progressivism, even humanitarianism. It could position itself in the mind of a public that perhaps knew or cared little about NATO as a kind of United Colours of Benetton, trying to teach the whole world to sing in perfect harmony. It could do all of this without suffering for so much as a second any twinge of shame or moral scruple - because fundamentally, NATO as an organisation is without either.



In 2021, the Atlantic Council was arguing that NATO should adopt a ‘feminist foreign policy’. Feminist foreign policy, wrote the authors, ‘could lend the Alliance a strategic advantage in its great power competitions with the authoritarian regimes in China and Russia. The addition of FFP principles to existing liberal democratic values can make NATO democracies even more competitive than they already are against authoritarian regimes.’ The language of competition and strategic advantage, in the same breath as feminist principles - it’d take your breath away. Feminism is about cooperation, not competition. Feminism does not advocate for strategic advantage over state rivals, or indeed often put great store in the very concept of the nation state, being as it is the site of so much historic oppression of women. To use feminism in this way is to void it entirely of all meaning. It is to suck out all the joy, all the care, all the painstaking work at a human, community level to build coalitions, to negotiate, to compromise and to navigate difference. It is grotesque.

Key to NATO’s evolving self-narrative as cosmopolitan defender of women’s rights has been its embrace of new forms of digital communication, with NATO deftly using social media in a turn to digital diplomacy in global politics. Social media has been used to visually project a select few senior women in NATO, belying the gendered reality of an organisation dominated by men in decision-making positions. NATO has also used its institutional muscle to set the narrative in the mainstream press, where it is regularly and reliably framed as an organisation that stands up for human rights and justice, against authoritarianism and the uncivilised ‘Other’ out there in what Josep Borrell has called ‘the Jungle’ outside the West’s ‘garden’. Meanwhile, those plutonium-powered pantsuit wearers in US and European politics flaunt their centre-left credentials and push themselves forward to sell the idea that might is right, and that this is somehow feminist.

All of this is deeply, deeply destructive. It is also staggeringly cynical, utterly obscene. But it’s what capitalists do. They take everything good and they grind it into dust. They take democracy and try and enforce it down the barrel of a gun. They take feminism and turn it into a weapon, a strategic lever and a marketing exercise. That use and abuse of something that could be a powerful force for good, a force for deep and essential change, will destroy it if we let it.

So we can’t be shy about this. I don’t actually blame a lot of the women working on the WSP agenda in organisations like NATO. No doubt some of them are very good people, and they genuinely want to do good. But we have to resist the idea that incrementalism is possible or plausible here. There is no route to peace, equality and justice through bombs and violence; we cannot care for the world and for our communities if everyone lives in constant fear, if everyone exists in a constant state of distrust. There is no ‘changing’ NATO, there is no softening it, or

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making it more 'responsive to gender needs'. NATO is a tool of Western domination. It is an institutional weapon, a missile squatting on the outskirts of this city and pointed at all of us; at everyone, all over the world. Its logic is one of domination, not equality, or justice, or peace. Feminism rejects domination utterly as a principle. There is no squaring that circle, the two are implacably opposed. So there is no incrementalism, and we have say to them, steadfastly, definitively: 'No pasaran!' We continue our fight, we do not lend our energies or our time to theirs. Because our fight is *against* them. The only feminist NATO is a disbanded NATO. Let's make sure everyone hears that from us, and make sure they hear it loud and clear.