

Comments on the Feminist Critique of the New Security Agenda
By Gigi Francisco, DAWN
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Introduction

I am privileged to be part of this conversation and would like to congratulate the Feminist Institute and the Heinrich Boell Foundation for threading into what, for feminists, is the largely under-charted sea of “hard” security issues. It is in the spirit of uniting with the political intent and feminist critique of the paper that I have agreed to join in this debate. Thank you for the opportunity.

I come from a region that is identified in the paper as one of the top three geographic regions where more wars had been fought since the end of the Cold War. May I add that I also come from a country that is listed as one of ten countries on the SCHENGEN “watch out” list for so-called “terrorist activities.” Finally, I would also like to say that I am a founding member of the Asian Peace Alliance that has some discussion and tensions with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) which is prominently mentioned in this paper.

My comments will be focused more on the implication of the paper’s critique to the international security system and less on the European and German spheres where I believe the other panelists are more knowledgeable in.

Key points

- The FI paper begins with an outline of the international state of peace and security by mapping out the terrain of peace. This part particularly speaks of the increase in wars and points to the phenomenon of “small” or “new” wars that have been linked to “failed” or “failing” states in the South. A number of causes for these wars were also identified – corruption, ethnic, religious conflicts and conflicts over natural resources, etc. What it fails to point out is that when one looks more closely at many of these wars, one will find a direct, indirect, covert and overt participation of powerful countries in them, not just in recent times but historically as well. The stage-setting introduction also fails to point out that such a scenario of “small” wars has been overlaid by the unilateralist war waged through the strategy of pre-emptive attacks and occupation such as in Afghanistan and Iraq that could not be prevented nor censored by the United Nations and the international community; and that in fact, the two feed on each other.
- From the perspective of the South, we are seeing today the consolidation of an international security system anchored on “unipolarity” in which a hierarchy of powerful and rich states – with the US on top - acts in accord and increasing precision as a triangulated global police force. This system is strongly supported by the international media with a cultural construction that make us believe that

the stage for wars is in the South where there are serious problems in governance and where social fragmentations are rife for violent actions, while the 'civilized' North need to be secured from forays of terrorist attacks. The same media hype justify the use everywhere of stepped-up security precautions, increased military budget, fortressing of national borders, stricter control of migrants, and social disciplining of citizens that include the curtailment of their civil and political, especially the right to legitimate dissent.

- The new European Security Strategy and the new security guidelines of the Federal Republic of Germany may be examined as falling pretty much within this ambit. As well, the insistence of Germany to get on board an expanded Security Council within an overall framework of state-centric security package as found in the UN Reform process may also be assessed as a neat part of this global security puzzle. To secure its leading role in international politics, Germany cannot afford to be outside of the big players' club, this notwithstanding that already there are other European countries sitting on the table.
- And if the international community finally adopts the proposals contained in the UN reform proposal, we will have global security system with a toothless supranational body that is the United Nations in which the dominance of state interests guided by their expanded domestic security framework prevails. Gina Vargas spoke last night of the need to construct a new global normativity for rights, development, and peace. If one were to go by the proposals facing us in the UN Reform process, the concept of what is "global" appears to have become stuck with permanent conflict and deterrence found in the old realist concept of "inter-national" or "inter-governmental" politics and dynamic and the notion of "inter-dependency" left fossilized in the international system of dependency. Indeed the World Trade Organization and the corporate-led project of global market integration that is putting many states at risk have much to do with this unfavorable international climate that seem to have stalled creative imagination and construction of genuine "globality." One could also see the recent defeat of the European Constitution through such critical lens.
- Indeed under such circumstances, some of us who may still be able to influence governments could adopt a strategy in which in the short-term feminist critique and positive proposals might try to minimize the prospects and damage of war and military operations and using this as an entry point and trajectory, might try to argue from within the 'establishment' for what could be a step-by-step shift in institutional paradigm. And I say some of us because not all of us are within the establishment or works with the establishment. The mass of feminists and women's movements are in fact outside of establishments and are located in sites of struggle that are inspired by "Another world is Possible!" I totally agree with the writers of this paper that institutional change is a challenging realm for feminists especially if one were to do it from within the establishment, not to mention on the issue of security and military actions!

- What is most interesting for me among the proposals in the paper is that on civilian conflict management. The term “civilian” is most notable because it is a language used only in highly militaristic circles and strategic studies frameworks. I agree there are many conflicts and they occur in both what the military may classify as ‘peaceful’ areas or “conflict” areas. As women, we are only too familiar with conflicts because our very households and intimate relations are characterized by a series of conflict-cooperation circumstances. The examples provided in the paper exclusively focus on conflict management efforts in so-called conflict areas. By not touching on conflict and conflict management during peacetime or in conditions outside of the military’s sphere, I feel that the feminist critique in this paper might have missed a critical opportunity. Worse, the paper may have further strengthened the notion that peace may be achieved only under the cover of military operations and intervention.
- I would also like to take special note of the forewarning that the paper gave about attempts to use women’s rights as justification for military interventions. I am afraid that this will remain a critical point of debate for feminists in the coming years, particularly since the UN Reform package had given its blessings on preemptive attacks and occupations. We can talk more about this in the open forum.
- My final word of caution is this: let us be careful about using Resolution 1325 as the means or mechanism by which NGOs and civil society organizations may earn their participation in the proposed Peace Building Commission. “We the peoples” want a new United Nations where the social actors that decide on issues of development, peace and rights are not limited to the governmental executives. We want the people to be on the decision-making body. Resolution 1325 is important but it cannot be used as an escape mechanism for denying the right of the people to be at the center of decision-making in the United Nations.

Thank you.