

Columnist urges more female involvement in “building, deployment, targeting and use of nuclear weapons”

New York Times promotes a woman’s right to annihilate millions

David Walsh
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—“You’re talking about mass murder.”

—“I know we’ll get our hair mussed. But no more than 10-20 million dead. Tops! Depending on the breaks ...”

— *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964)

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In a May 15 *New York Times* opinion piece, “The Nuclear Weapons Sisterhood,” editorial board member Carol Giacomo complained that women were “particularly underrepresented in senior positions dealing with nuclear issues.”

Giacomo further lamented that government policies “involving the building, deployment, targeting and use of nuclear weapons have long been the province of an insular, innovation-averse group of men.”

The column asserted that for “women, people of color and transgender people, sexism, discrimination and harassment are often barriers to being hired, promoted or taken seriously in the national security bureaucracy—overseas and at home.”

Giacomo, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a longtime media figure on the intelligence-diplomatic beat, noted that women “hold only 20 percent of senior civilian jobs at the Pentagon” and “are particularly underrepresented in senior positions dealing with nuclear issues.”

The *Times* journalist took pains to disabuse any readers under the impression that she was advocating a stronger female presence because of old-fashioned views of women as more pacific creatures. Giacomo observed that there “is little evidence women are inherently more peaceful than men,” and pointed to a forthcoming paper that “goes so far as to argue that, in certain parliamentary democracies, women leaders, feeling a need to prove their strength, ‘may be more likely to initiate conflict than their male peers.’”

Does the author of the paper have Hillary Clinton in mind?

Lest the reader think the column was written tongue in cheek, as a parody of feminism, the reader should think again. Giacomo—and the *Times*—are deadly serious.

Her argument represents the ultimate logic of feminism,

which accepts the capitalist order and the exploitation of the working class, merely insisting that bourgeois women have an equal share in operating and benefiting from the profit system. Concretely, the demand for more women with the ability to drop nuclear bombs occurs within the context of the #MeToo sexual witch hunt, ferociously backed by the *Times*, and the general drive for more women in positions of corporate and political authority.

Giacomo was apparently inspired to write her piece by a study conducted by New America, a Washington-based liberal think tank, entitled “The ‘Consensual Straitjacket:’ Four Decades of Women in Nuclear Security,” based on interviews with 23 women who held top government positions.

That study too pointed out that many of the interviewees “were quick to push back on the essentialist notion that women are inherently more peaceful and therefore likely to tip the scale to disarmament or ‘softer’ outcomes. As one respondent bluntly put it, ‘we don’t soften policy by adding estrogen.’”

Another interviewee explained, “I do not think women are more peaceful. And it irritates me to no end, that kind of line of thinking. In part because just in a very practical way, I think it undercuts us being taken seriously by the hard security side of the house, which has mainly been lived in by men.”

The *Times* columnist and the New America authors promote a particularly foul brand of “women’s rights imperialism,” mixing feminist phraseology and criticisms with a full acceptance of the overall role of the Pentagon and CIA as defenders of American capitalism’s national interests.

“The ‘Consensual Straitjacket,’” for example, reported that the nuclear field’s “jargon is infamous for being not only dense but sexualized.” It continued: “The feminist scholar Carol Cohn recalls thinking that the classic ‘missile envy’ posited by feminist theorists and disarmament advocates was ‘uncomfortably reductionist.’ One summer in the field convinced her otherwise: ‘Lectures were filled with discussion of vertical erector launchers, thrust-to-weight ratios, soft lay downs, deep penetration, and the comparative advantages of

protracted versus spasm attacks—what one military adviser to the National Security Council has called ‘releasing 70 to 80 percent of our megatonnage in one orgasmic whump.’”

That the US military is full to the brim of male officials comfortably in the tradition of *Dr. Strangelove*’s psychotic Gen. Jack D. Ripper (“Women... women sense my power, and they seek the life essence. I do not avoid women... but I do deny them my essence”) will not come as a surprise to anyone with eyes in his or her head. However, replacing these maniacs with females will not lessen the danger that the American armed forces represent to the world’s population by one iota.

Along the same lines as Giacomo’s column, Julianne Smith, former deputy national security adviser to Vice President Joseph Biden and the director of the Trans-Atlantic Security Program at the Center for a New American Security, published an opinion piece in the *Times* in August 2017, “Send the Breast Pump With the Defense Attaché.”

Smith, sadly, took note of the fact that only “20 percent of senior Pentagon staff positions and 30 percent of senior State Department positions are held by women.” She elaborated: “Within the intelligence community, women account for about 38 percent of the total work force, but hold only 28 percent of senior positions and make up 18 percent of people hired at senior pay levels. At the FBI, women hold just 12 percent of the bureau’s 220 senior agent positions.”

On the positive side, Smith wrote, almost “100 years since the first woman entered the [US State Department’s] Foreign Service, women now hold 54 of 169 currently occupied chief of mission positions. At the CIA, the percentage of women has grown to 46 percent in 2012, the most recent data available.”

No doubt a section of liberal and left feminists will defend greater female representation among military and intelligence decision-makers as “a step forward.” After all, retired CIA operations officer Karen deLacy was not alone, at the time of torturer Gina Haspel’s nomination to head the CIA, in arguing in the *Washington Post* that “much like #MeToo and #TimesUp, Haspel’s nomination provides an opportunity to get gender equality right in the field of espionage.” DeLacy reported that “an inclusion crisis exists in the clandestine cadre of the CIA: fewer women applying to be operations officers, few women in important leadership positions, and continuing harassment of and discrimination against women.”

Nor should we omit in this regard the November 28, 2017 “#Metoonatsec [i.e., #MeToo National Security] Open Letter on Sexual Harassment in National Security,” signed by 223 women in the US military-intelligence apparatus. The signatories complained that they too were “survivors of sexual harassment, assault, and abuse or know others who are.”

A sampling of those on the list includes Wendy R. Anderson, deputy chief of staff, secretary of defense; Alexandra Kahan, National Security Council and US Department of State; Courtney La Bau, senior advisor, Department of Homeland Security; Liliana Ayalde, former ambassador to Brazil and

currently the civilian deputy to the commander and foreign policy advisor for the United States Southern Command; Kelly Magsamen, principal deputy assistant secretary of defense; and Laura Holgate, special assistant to the president for WMD-terrorism & threat reduction.

How many monstrous crimes and conspiracies have this sordid collection of former ambassadors, military officers, CIA agents, State Department officials and academics proposed, planned or overseen in their careers?

Last year, the *Times* protested the relative dearth of female billionaires and promoted “women who aggressively seek money and power.” Now, the newspaper, in the form of Giacomo’s column, urges that women be more fully represented among those with the power to unleash mass annihilation and the destruction of life on the planet.

No doubt, concrete social interests and aspirations find expression in the deeply reactionary effort exemplified by Giacomo’s article. The women in the national security apparatus are pressing for bigger incomes and more privileges, if necessary at the expense of their male colleagues, just as their counterparts in Hollywood, on college campuses and in the media are doing.

Beyond that, however, the *New York Times*, as always, is pursuing a definite ideological and political agenda in this bloodcurdling campaign. The newspaper’s editors know full well that to remain in power in the next period, the American ruling elite will need to carry out the most horrific crimes, at home and abroad—crimes for which there is no precedent in US history, violent as it is.

Since the 9/11 events and the subsequent measures and actions taken, using the terrorist attacks as an opportunity—including military invasions, the practice of torture, the legitimization of universal spying on the population, drone assassinations, etc.—layers of the middle class have been encouraged to accept the most barbaric policies in the name of “homeland security” and to view them as the “new normal.”

The *Times*, in columns such as Giacomo’s, is attempting to inure these layers to mass violence and overcome inevitable squeamishness (among women in this instance) about the horrors of wide scale human destruction, up to and including the consequences of nuclear war.

This is a sinister business.



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