

Fighting the US War Machine Part of Feminist Battle Under Trump

TeleSur

Although anti-war activism can be a powerful show of solidarity between women, it won't be topping the U.S. movement's agenda this International Women's Day.

Few know the true history of Mother's Day, originally a call for mothers to demand peace and disarmament following the U.S. Civil War. International Women's Day, too, has traditionally been used as a platform for women around the world to preach an end to militarization and patriarchal violence that knows no borders.

With peace nowhere near the horizon, 2017 is no exception to the call.

Bombs keep displacing families, disrupting economies and leaving soldiers traumatized, all adding to the calculus of exacerbated gender inequality and violence against women. The political spaces that rise where there is destruction — either orchestrated by local or international powers or shaped by a vacuum — rarely favor women and often allow sexual exploitation to worsen. Beyond the economic and psychological effects of war, women are also direct victims who are killed, imprisoned, tortured and raped alongside men.

While anti-war work is one of the clearest shows of solidarity with other women and lends itself naturally to a host of other feminist battles, it won't be seen topping the list of demands when women hit the street on Wednesday for International Women's Day in the United States.

An issue far, far away

Medea Benjamin, founder and leader of the women-led peace group Code Pink, said that she tried unsuccessfully to include an anti-war message in the Women's March on Inauguration Day.

"It's quite astounding that so many important issues were included but not this critical issue of oppression, war and militarism," she told teleSUR, adding that women "have to be more holistic in our view of women's issues and our view of the world." Benjamin said that feminists in the U.S. tend to fall back on reproductive rights and equal pay but feel uncomfortable venturing into talk of war because many are worried about disrespecting the troops.

Those in unions might also refrain from denouncing an industry that employs people in every congressional district, while some women of color and women from immigrant and working class backgrounds might see the military as their only way to access high positions, education and citizenship.

War is also less visible and therefore may feel less pressing. The U.S. government, said Benjamin, knows this and tries hard to keep it that way. Technologies like drones mean less casualties on the U.S. side, which means less resistance.

Innocent civilians abroad are killed “without much of a peep from the American public, who has learned to accept the racist notion that the people being killed in these faraway Muslim lands are terrorists because our government calls them terrorists,” said Benjamin. “It’s as if their lives don’t matter.”

The deeper logic of war

Benjamin started Code Pink after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, when she was “just startled by the level of testosterone and macho posturing — between Bin Laden and George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein — and the drumbeat to take revenge, even if that revenge meant a lot more innocent people would be killed,” she said. “We wanted to make sure (that outside of) all of these macho calls for war, that women’s voices can be heard.”

Sixteen years later, the U.S. president is surrounding himself with a historic number of generals. “He is hearing this military mindset every single day,” said Benjamin, adding that with the enormous sums pumped into propaganda for the military-industrial complex, U.S. residents are regularly engulfed by the mindset, too.

According to Benjamin, the result is the increasing encroachment of militarism both in politics and daily life that “allows the military-industrial to rule our foreign policy as well as creep into the mindset of the American people,” hence soaring rates of gun and domestic violence.

Donald Trump’s promise to boost military spending by 10 percent and further militarize the police — which spills into fights against Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids and police brutality — is nothing new, but it’s still dangerous.

Maria Butler, director of global programs at Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, which works to include women and the communities they represent in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, argued that Trump’s “valuing of old-thinking traditional security and militarism” over alternative “holistic or sustainable” forms of securing peace is a sign of an entrenched mindset that predates him. The mindset, she said, is based in nationalism and the “meaning of power and operation of power in our world and its links to patriarchy.”

That emphasis on conventional forms of state security then easily translates into policies like Trump’s travel ban, which, rather than resolving anything, “plays into the normalization of war and violence and othering” and penalizes people who were working to end the very conflicts that the ban claimed to combat.

The work ahead

Despite constant setbacks, as Butler put it, “the mechanisms for dismantling patriarchy are many and growing.”

While Benjamin works on ending war by cutting the U.S. fuel and Butler does so by amplifying women’s voices in areas of conflict, both operate on the same premise: women are the best ambassadors of peace — yet not all women. Many are hawkish, and many are not committed to peace.

“Our unity is our strength, especially today when we’re facing fascist forces,” said Butler. But numbers aren’t everything. “It’s about changing the game, not just the players,” she added.

<http://www.telesur.tv/english/news/Fighting-the-US-War-Machine-Part-of-Feminist-Battle-Under-Trump-20170305-0009.html>

Women are working “invisible” roles to build and maintain peace not just through official avenues, like at the negotiating table, but they are also working on the sidelines and on the ground to rebuild their communities and promote alternative visions in politics and society.

Back in the countries promoting and financing war, Benjamin said that mothers and school teachers play an essential role. They can teach how to de-escalate conflict, promote an end to bullying, support non-violent methods and fight for a demilitarized police.

Come Wednesday, women — and men — globally will bring picket signs, anti-Trump signs, sexual equality signs, and the like.

Those bringing peace and anti-war signs are sure to be championing all of the above, too.