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Dear Hillary, Madeleine and Gloria: Full Feminism Demands We Say No to America's Deadly Imperial Wars

By Sarah Lazare / AlterNet

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Two powerful backers of Hillary Clinton attracted headlines—and outrage—this weekend when they uttered sweeping statements under the banner of “feminism,” calling on young women to back the former Secretary of State’s presidential bid.

Madeleine Albright, the first woman to serve as U.S. Secretary of State, introduced Clinton in New Hampshire on Saturday by declaring, “There’s a special place in hell for women who don’t help each other!”

In the days following, many have scrutinized the hawkish track record of Albright, who also served as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. In just one example, Albright told "60 Minutes" in 1996 that half a million children who died as a result of U.S. sanctions against Iraq were "worth" the price.

"Albright has a hell of a lot of nerve telling young women who may be very concerned about Clinton's support for virtually all U.S. wars of recent years that they should vote for her because she's a woman," Phyllis Bennis, senior fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies, told AlterNet.

Meanwhile, speaking with HBO's "Real Time" host Bill Maher on Friday, feminist icon Gloria Steinem claimed that young women are backing presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in order to meet guys. Women get "more activist as they grow older," she said. "And when you're younger, you think: 'Where are the boys? The boys are with Bernie.'" Steinem later apologized for the comment on her Facebook page, writing that she "misspoke."

Nonetheless, the statement rightfully provoked rebuke, including from some who grew up respecting Steinem. "The good news is that more and more of us are ready to change the whole system, and fewer and fewer are willing to believe that imperial feminism is the best we can do," declared Philadelphia-based writer Sarah Grey.

These recent controversial comments stem from a broader campaign strategy, with Clinton leveraging high-profile (and often white and wealthy) self-avowed feminists to bolster her campaign. Among them is Lena Dunham, the creator of the hit series "Girls," who has sought to win support for Clinton among young women.

Feminists should unequivocally declare that Clinton's policies of war and empire that kill, wound and traumatize women around the world are not compatible with feminism. Of course we defend any woman, including Clinton, against sexism. But that defense must not lead to reflexive embrace of an entire platform, nor claims that elite politicians like Clinton somehow have a monopoly on feminism.

As Rania Masri, an activist and professor, put it in an interview with AlterNet, "Feminism demands a critique of U.S. policies, both domestically and internationally. It demands a critique of all wars and all hegemonies and of all structures of oppression."

Masri noted that these concepts are not new, and in fact, have been built up by powerful and visionary feminists, many of them people of color, including the poet and organizer Audre Lorde, who urged nuanced and intersectional movements. "There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives," Lorde famously said.

Clinton's foreign policy, however, falls in line with policies of war and empire. As a U.S. senator for New York, Clinton cast one of the most influential votes in favor of the 2003 Iraq war, signaling to other Democrats to back the invasion. She has since acknowledged this decision was a mistake, but her actions indicate she has learned nothing.

Under the Obama administration, Clinton consistently represented the pro-war wing, advocating military aggression and escalation from Iraq and Libya to Afghanistan and Ukraine. She was cautious on the global nuclear deal, saying she would "not hesitate" to take military action against Iran, and during her campaign declared her unbreakable bond with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In her memoir *Hard Choices*, Clinton took credit for the military pivot to the Asia-Pacific, which continues to escalate military buildup and aggression region-wide to hedge against China.

Meanwhile, on the campaign trail, Clinton has been conspicuously silent about close U.S. ally Saudi Arabia's brutal military assault on Yemen, now into its tenth month. She has said nothing about ethnic cleansing and war crimes perpetuated by Israel, while vowing to donors to crush the Palestinian human rights movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS).

Foreign Policy in Focus columnist Conn Hallinan recently took on the grim task of attempting to tally those killed in foreign policy disasters related to Clinton. According to some calculations, the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq killed over one million people due to war-related causes. Nearly a quarter million Afghans have died since the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and millions more have been forced to flee their homes and become refugees.

In June 2014, I spoke with Yanar Mohammed of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, who warned against further U.S. military intervention in the country. "These wars are against women," Mohammed said, "and women are becoming the first victims."