

**FROM CIVIL SOCIETY TO CRITICAL
MASS
Women's Leadership, Global Security &
Democracy
in the 21st Century
by Anne B. Zill**

Women's Center for Ethics in Action
University of New England
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, Maine 04103
azill@mailbox.une.edu
207-797-7261

Consider the following list of values: consistency, inclusivity, inter-connectivity, collaboration, empathy, transparency, practicality, and long-term, big-picture considerations. How does the conduct of our government reflect these values? And what is to be done?

This paper posits the proposition that the United States government is doing only fair to middling in these early days of the 21st century, that our democracy needs reinvigorating, renewed attention to these core values, as well as to the rule of law itself. A critical mass of women in positions of leadership in government and civil society could speed up this process.

Therefore, this paper offers a three-pronged analysis:

- o The need for different values;
- o Some examples of women's salutary impact already;
- o Immediate and future opportunities for a positive influence upon world events.

Need:

The White House declared war upon the Al Quada but did not seek the approval of the Legislative branch of our government. Our government's military expenditures in Afghanistan are currently between \$1 and \$2 billion a month.¹ The military budget for fiscal 2003 is due to grow by approximately 14 percent. The government is promoting a ballistic missile defense system that requires the dismantling of an ABM (anti-ballistic missile) Treaty that has been in place for 30 years. We are refusing to ratify other treaties as well- among them, the International Criminal Court, designed to bring the rule of law to war criminals and international terrorists, and treaties banning nuclear testing and small weaponry arms trade around the world, as well as Kyoto to reduce carbon emissions and prevent global warming. Instead, our heads of government have found seductive the sentiments of Time Magazine's Lance Morrow, "A day cannot live in infamy without the nourishment of rage. Let's have rage ... [and] a policy of focused brutality...²

¹William D. Hartung, Nation Magazine, (January 15,2002).

²Originally appearing in Time Magazine, it was reprinted in a syndicated commentary by Norman Solomon entitled *Unnecessary Evils*, (December 2001).

We are living in a post September II historical moment when America's leaders are playing out a 'demonizing the enemy' scenario, declaring Osama Bin Laden "the evil one." Our country's current vision involves strengthening our cold war NATO alliance in a post-cold war period. We wish to remain the world's sole remaining super power by unilaterally dictating the terms of our alliances and engagements. We do not appear to be considering the long-term consequences - what the CIA calls "blowback" - of all these policies.

As Randall Forsberg of the Institute for Defense & Disarmament Studies notes in a recent paper, *Getting at the Roots of Terrorism*, "Even though people around the world admire US democracy and generosity, the imperious posture of the United States in arms control talks, telling others to "do as I say, not as I do," has contributed to the spread of weapons of mass destruction. And by dismissing international treaties, the United States has undercut respect for the forms of law that help protect the weak against the strong."

Parade Magazine's Personality Parade (1/20102) included a question about whether or not we have a policy against assassinating foreign leaders. The reply: "Gerald Ford's 1976 executive order prohibiting assassinations still stands, but it didn't deter plots against Lybia's Muarmnar Qaddafi in 1986 or inhibit President Bush from ordering Osama bin Laden captured "dead or alive." Our sources say Mr. Bush may lift the ban."

Right now the message from our leaders is that it is okay to pay attention to the rule of law, whether in the form of the constitution, the United Nations or international treaties, *only when it suits us*; which is to say only *some* of the time. We collaborate with other countries on occasion, but we call the shots. The intelligence budget of our country is still beyond the purview of the American people, and openness as a value is seen as antithetical to our national security. Exploring the reasons why the US might have incurred such animosity is discouraged in a world where "you are either with us or with the terrorists."

If the principals underlying our own democracy are not getting much attention at the moment, if our global policies lack consistency or long-term coherence, and our economic health is uneven and uncertain, one reason may be that half of the citizenry, women, remain grossly

underrepresented in positions of elected authority. There is no critical mass of women yet in either the U.S. Congress or governorships.³

Yet women are contributing elsewhere in radical and important ways, as I hope to show with the following examples:

Examples:

An under-noted 20th century development has been the rising importance of civil society where women leaders are playing increasingly key leadership roles. These non governmental organizations (NGOs) frequently lead the way for government, both on the domestic and international stage, by forging new paths for governmental leaders to follow. One of the most powerful examples is the late **BeUa Abzug**, a former US Congresswoman from New York, who, in the last decade of her life, created an organization called WEDO (Women's Environment & Development Organization.) WEDO convened a World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet with 1,500 women from 83 nations in 1991 to produce the Women's Action Agenda for the 21st century. Out of that Agenda came WEDO's focus upon the United Nations Summits -- women, human rights, the environment, population, habitat, social development, and economic empowerment. Abzug made sure that an international women's caucus was active at each United Nations Summit held since 1992 and their views were included in each Summit's concluding documents. Several precedents were set: the first was the powerful presence of large numbers of non-governmental representatives. Second, there were numerous women leaders from many countries forging new global alliances, north, south, east-west. Third, they began to influence the official governmental delegations' decision-making because they had bothered to learn all the protocols. Finally, women repeatedly made the connection between ecological development, health, and all the other needs of society beginning with the human family and its women and children. The result was the elevation of the global civil society's impact upon these UN Summits, and the outcomes were more forward-looking and boldly visionary than they otherwise would have

³ Out of 535 members of the US Congress, 13 percent, or 72 are women; five women currently serve as governors (including the governor of Puerto Rico); 22.4 percent of elected officials in state legislatures are women - nowhere near 50%, or a critical mass in any of these categories of elected leaders.

been⁴ In UN Secretary General Kofi Anan's Memorial Service tribute to Abzug after her death in 1998, he declared that she had taught him how to be a better Secretary General than he otherwise would have been.

Another important protagonist among women leaders in civil society is **Lois Barber** who, more than twenty years ago, started an organization called *20/20 Vision* to empower citizens into advocacy for peace and environmental issues by designing a program to make grassroots advocacy simple for busy people and effective in influencing Congressional legislation. As co-founder in 1992 and co-director of **Earth Action** with New Zealander Nicholas Dunlop, Barber designed this global citizens organization made up of more than 2,000 citizen groups in over 160 countries plus hundreds of parliamentarians who collectively work to activate their memberships across the world on issues from global warming to children's rights several times a year. She is establishing an E-Parliament (E for earth as well as electronic) to link together all the democratically elected parliamentarians around the world in order to work in partnership on those most pressing issues that get tend to be buried under the domestic concerns of individual national governments or within the bureaucratic processes of United Nations agencies. There will be an E-Forum component as well for NGO input. This prescient program will grow as the required Internet technology spreads around the globe.

Cora Weiss has devoted her life to issues of peace and justice. Her greatest triumph is the 1999 Hague Appeal for Peace, a civil society conference that attracted nearly 10,000 participants from around the world, and has led to a series of follow-up global campaigns, which she coordinates from offices in New York and Europe. The Hague Appeal for Peace gathered an impressive array of people from over 100 different countries who discussed and debated in more than 400 panels and workshops mechanisms for abolishing war and creating a culture of peace in the 21st century. Six Nobel Peace prize winners were in attendance as well as Queen Noor of Jordan, the Secretary General of the UN and three heads of UN Agencies, a number of governmental officials and 1,500 people under the age of 25.

The continuing work of the Hague Peace Appeal focuses on developing an education program to reach people of all ages and all countries on the root causes of war, on international

⁴ See www.WEDO.org.

humanitarian and human rights laws and institutions, and on the prevention, resolution and transformation of violent conflict and disarmament and human security.

Zainab Salbi started Women for Women International in early 1993 after she and her parents had come to visit the United States at the very moment the 1991 Gulf War was launched. She was fortunate to escape the horror of war in her own homeland but in 1993, soon afterward, she watched the Balkan region of the former Yugoslavia as it too was torn apart. Her first thought was, "these women need help now, not later." Salbi flew to Croatia to distribute much needed emergency supplies and money that had been donated by her Alexandria, Virginia community. What she experienced launched her mission. Women for Women International was started out of her in-laws' basement on a shoestring budget with some dedicated volunteers.

Eight and a half years later, Women for Women International has five country offices - in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Columbia and Afghanistan offices are being established now. Nearly \$2 million in direct aid has been distributed, as well as over \$2 million in micro credit loans to help women develop grassroots businesses and economic opportunities. The mission is to provide women in war-torn areas with direct aid and emotional support as well as all the tools and resources needed to move out of crisis and poverty and into stability and self-sufficiency. This organization is dedicated to building a world that ensures equality and economic, political and social justice for all- with gender equality at its core.

Salbi and associates determined to [md sponsors who would commit a certain amount of money to a woman in one of the five areas of her choosing for a minimum of six months at the rate of \$10 a month or more. Because the organization has been featured on Oprah three times with an overwhelming response on each occasion over the last year and a half, there is now a waiting list of sponsors waiting to be paired with a woman in need due to a lack of staff and resources. Although Women for Women's annual budget has grown to well over \$1

⁵ This quotation is taken from the web page, www.womenforwomen.org, although this author is a member of the organization's Board of Directors, and familiar with its history and current programs.

million, its next IO-month goal is to raise an additional \$1 million to expand its outreach, as well as staff and resources.

The work of just four women leaders is sketched here. There are many other powerful international organizations launched and run by women here in the US that could also be featured: The Institute for Defense & Disarmament Studies (IDDS), Global Fund for Women, Catholics for Free Choice, Vital Voices, Center for Women's Global Leadership, Women Waging Peace, Women in International Security (WIIS), Network of East-West Women, Feminist Majority, Institute for Women's Policy Research, Womens Action for New Directions (WAND), and Children in Crisis.

Opportunities:

Women's leadership, still largely confined to civil society, offers a number of lessons in how to invigorate US dealings with the rest of the world as well as rejuvenate our democracy at home. Here are a few examples drawn from the four women's work sketched above.

1) Learn the rules of the global game and play by them. That was a key ingredient of the Abzug WEDO success. In the current context, it means that we would look to the International Criminal Court as the venue for bringing the al Qaeda terrorists to justice. The world opprobrium concerning our treatment of prisoners would be mute because our government would honor such instruments as the Geneva Convention and our own constitution to guarantee fundamental human rights for all human beings.

2) Practice some of the fundamental tenets of democracy such as majority rule, the worth of the individual and usefulness of organizing openly for change. Lois Barber's *Earth Action Planet Postcards* to organizations around the world that describe the issue and give a very clear list of actions people can take is a perfect example. The tag line reads: "The only thing that will save the Earth is persistent pressure from citizens." If we have drifted away from these basic principles, a critical mass of women leaders can help bring us back. Women leaders might take the lead in getting excessive money out of politics, an out-of-whack CEO versus employees compensation, and a

cessation of support for non-democratic countries where the rights of individual citizens and the rule of law are not valued.

3) Share power; learn the value of interdependence and connection. Just as Cora Weiss has brought together ordinary citizens with a number of world leaders and luminaries to work together on building a culture of-peace, so a critical mass of women leaders could help the US forge a different style of leadership, one that honored the contributions of many different peoples and countries, large and small, north and south, on the theory that the meek may one day inherit the earth, or at least be our allies when we need them.

4) Redefine national security as human security; demonstrate the relationship between the welfare of all human beings, and women's involvement in political and economic development programs. Zainab Salbi figured out that women could play a central role in rebuilding the social and economic fabric of their war-torn societies in very different countries around the world. She further realized that American women could help by sending some money and letters of support. With the presence of a critical mass of women in positions of leadership, the US could shift the nature of our engagement in the world toward support for the human rights of every living being, and a posture of empowerment way beyond a focus on weaponry. As Bella Abzug observed, "Security is what we all seek but it also comes from within, from inner strength. It emanates from our ability to love and treasure the peoples of the earth, especially those with whom we may not necessarily agree or who are different than US"⁶

While these four principles represent a different sensibility from the *raison d'etre* of current US foreign policy, they are fundamentally democratic values and deeply interconnected. Other related values implicit in these women's work include a respect for life, celebration of diversity, and the need to care for the least among us. A compassionate global human security would require attention to the long-term consequences of our actions as well as a focus upon our future -- children and their education. Open and collaborative behaviors would be rewarded -- not because it is easy or always characteristic of our human natures --

⁶See www.WEDO.org.

but because being honest, transparent and inclusive breeds trust. To get beyond an overarching dependence upon military might, weaponry and the threat of violence, we will need a lot more trust and reliability among partners all over the globe.

The notion of a critical mass of women leaders is stressed because changing the way our country operates in the world will not be easy. It cannot be done with a small percentage of leaders. Paradigms of behavior change when the comfort level for different operating principles becomes high enough. Recycling, for example, caught on in this country when it became easy to do. It may not require a precise 50% of each gender in the leadership mix , but it will certainly not happen with, say, only 13% women elected national legislators, despite the example of civil society leaders. The election of more women needs to be given the highest priority. As Abzug noted frequently, including in the last speech she gave at the 42nd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, March 1998, " ...We have done almost everything in pairs since Noah except govern. And the world has suffered for it. And we must make it our business to make certain that as we move into the millennium, the millennium will be not only the year but the century of the woman. And until we understand that our economic and political power is also deeply wound up with human rights, we will not achieve that."

After all, the times are propitious. Balance of power politics was a Metternichian, 19th century construction, promulgated most recently by Henry Kissinger, with an out-of-synch, wrong century feel today. The European Union represents one new model, other regional models are forming as well. Thinking practically about our long term interests dictates that we join in some ventures involving all these regional alliances, as well as taking the UN seriously on a consistent basis for programs like universal education, health care and economic development. If we promote these *social programs* with funds and American know-how way beyond our current token levels, we ensure ourselves a role as a team player at the tables of the future. Furthermore, exporting life-giving rather than death-delivering mechanisms will look a lot better on our own future report cards.

The militarized national security and global imperative thrusts of our current foreign engagement have inherent limitations. The spread of weaponry around the world has come

back to haunt this country repeatedly, most dramatically in the recent past in the form of Taliban scud missiles, originally sold by the US to Afghan "freedom fighters" against the Russians, being used against our own planes in the Afghanistan bombing missions.

Are we supposed to be proud of the US sale of an airplane to China with 27 different listening devices embedded within it? This behavior has an embarrassingly puerile quality. Surely there is more than a fine line in this instance between deceptive, dishonest business practices on the part of the U.S. government, and a set of values involving straight dealings by leaders who are good on their word. This country could set an example of a new construct of global leadership by reliably keeping our word and honoring the rules of the road. For the self declared sole remaining super power to choose to perpetuate cold war game-playing in a 21st century context represents a short sighted strategy for a country based upon the twin principles of democracy and the rule of law. Constance H. Buchanan has written that women must begin to look to themselves, therefore, for public vision that reinterprets important traditional values, such as the effective and moral roles of families as part of larger communities...They are entering uncharted territory with regard both to their own public leadership and the American values crisis they must help address...⁷

Being practical is not inconsistent with big thinking, although it must require a view outside the mold of a lingering cold war mentality or the political gestalt of a lone super power. "Rather than compartmentalize our domestic and international advocacy, we should learn from women's experiences across the globe, and strengthen our calls for inclusion and self-determination.... We should offer alternatives to the "with us or against us" paradigm. Such polarizing rhetoric silences debate, ignores diversity and eclipses individual liberty...⁸

"When women's influence increases, .. it strengthens the moderate center, bolstering economic stability and democratic order. Women might serve as powerful assets in the west's attempt to counter Islamic radicalism...⁹

⁷ Constance H. Buchanan, *Choosing to Lead*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 220.

⁸ "Implications of the Current Crisis for the International Women's Movement," *Network of East-West Women*, (October 10, 2001).

⁹ Barbara Crossette, "Living in a World Without Women," *N.Y. Times*, (November 11, 2001); p. I.

"US international policy should unequivocally oppose violence against women and regimes that condone it Women need to be included as equal partners in implementing political and economic development. U.S. foreign policy should make women's involvement in democratization central to its international aid programs."¹⁰

National security is by now an oxymoron. What can be merely 'national' in these global everything days? Doesn't security at its core mean the state of feeling safe in one's home and indeed, anywhere? Security can also mean a guarantee or a pledge of the safety of a country against espionage, terrorism or other danger. Might security in this new century be linked to -- instead of secrecy, hierarchy and enemies- the notion of shared power, interdependence, democracy, economic and social health, as well as to the full participation of women and men together, equally engaged across nations, cultures and politics, in the pursuit of full participation of all citizens in a quest for excellence around the globe?

Addendum:

This paper posits the proposition that a critical mass of U.S. women leaders needs to govern in the 21st century. Women leaders can help us to be practical and grounded in our calculation of geo-political moves at this moment in history when our country keeps failing to think through the whole chess game wisely enough. However desirable the notion is that human beings can get beyond killing and begin to see wars as shortsighted solutions, the use of arms may never be outlawed. Perhaps this urge is just too ingrained in the human DNA or male testosterone. But more women leaders *can* help us to focus upon a necessary mix of philosophy and psychology, a marriage of our understanding of human nature for better or worse, with our fondest visions of spreading democracy, human rights and social/economic gains for all of humankind in this new century.

¹⁰ Amy Caiazza, PhD, "Why Gender Matters in Understanding September 11," Institute for Women's Policy Research, (November, 2001).