

NATO's Fraudulent War on Behalf of Women

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In a recent [Guardian](#) article titled “Why NATO Must Defend Women’s Rights,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Hollywood movie star Angelina Jolie assert that “NATO has the responsibility and opportunity to be a leading protector of women’s rights.” NATO, moreover, “can become the global military leader in how to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict.” The two vowed to identify “ways in which NATO can strengthen its contribution to women’s protection and participation in all aspects of conflict-prevention and resolution.”

The pairing of a NATO bureaucrat and a famous movie actress may at first glance appear odd. However, this partnership has been long in the making. Some years ago, NATO, always on the lookout for a reason to justify its continued existence, not to mention its perpetual expansion, came up with a new *raison d’être*: It would be the global champion of women.

“Achieving gender equality is our collective task. And NATO is doing its part,” [said](#) Mari Skåre, the NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, in 2013.

In March 2016, on International Women’s Day, NATO [held](#) a so-called “Barbershop Conference” on gender equality. Stoltenberg took the opportunity to declare that *gender equality* was a frightfully important issue for NATO because “NATO is a values-based organization and none of the Alliance’s fundamental values—individual liberties, democracy, human rights and the rule of law—work without equality.” Diversity was a source of strength.

“We learned in Afghanistan and in the Balkans that by integrating gender within our operations, we make a tangible difference to the lives of women and children,” Stoltenberg explained.

He stressed that NATO is proud of its record in embedding gender perspectives within its work. Last November, Stoltenberg [was at it again](#):

“Empowering women is not just the right thing to do, it’s the smart thing to do: it makes countries safer and more stable. NATO is determined to make a difference.”

NATO has indeed made a difference but not through empowering women. When it isn’t bombing, killing, blowing up bridges and buildings, destroying wedding receptions, empowering jihadis, triggering refugee flows and ruining the lives of countless women, NATO holds unctuous press briefings, organizes self-congratulatory conferences and

publishes articles such as the one by Stoltenberg/Jolie seeking to present a gargantuan 29-state military coalition as a do-gooder charity helping out the needy.



This is where Angelina Jolie comes in. Jolie is a goodwill ambassador of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and, in that capacity, wanders around the world berating the “international community” for not doing enough to address humanitarian crises. Her take on these crises is invariably the same as that of NATO.

“It is important that we intervene in a timely fashion,” she once [explained](#), “diplomatically if we can, with force if we must.”

In October 2011, following seven months of relentless NATO bombing, Jolie rushed to Libya and excitedly [hailed](#) the Libyan “revolution”:

I’m...here on behalf of the Libyan people to show them solidarity. I think this revolution on behalf of human rights, which is what I feel these people really have been doing and what they have pushed for, and to help them to implement these new laws and help them with the future of their country.

Sometimes it’s breathless enthusiasm for “revolution,” sometimes it’s tearful pleading for plain, old-fashioned “humanitarian intervention”—Angelina Jolie is nothing if not consistent in her advocacy for Western use of force. When it comes to Syria, Jolie has [declared](#) that “some form of intervention is absolutely necessary.” She sneered at the U.N. Security Council permanent members that stood in the way of intervention.

“I feel very strongly that the use of a veto when you have financial interests in the country should be questioned and the use of a veto against humanitarian intervention should be questioned,” she said in an interview.

Jolie was of course simply echoing the blustery words of the Obama administration. Recall Susan Rice’s tirade following Russia’s and China’s veto of a February 2012 Security Council resolution calling for Bashar al Assad to step aside and for the Syrian army to return to its barracks. Rice, then U.S. permanent representative at the U.N., [called](#) the vetoes “disgusting and shameful.” The countries “that have blocked potentially the last effort to resolve this peacefully...will have any future blood spill on their hands.”

This kind of attack on the veto-wielding Security Council members has become a staple of the humanitarian intervention crowd. For example, former French President François Hollande [told](#) the U.N. General Assembly in September 2013 that when mass atrocities were taking place, U.N. Security Council permanent members must give up their veto powers:

The U.N. has a responsibility to take action. And whenever our organization proves to be powerless, it's peace that pays the price. That's why I am proposing that a code of good conduct be defined by the permanent members of the Security Council, and that in the event of a mass crime they can decide to collectively renounce their veto powers.

Taking action, of course, means taking military action. It never means, say, the lifting of sanctions so that food, oil, medical supplies could get through. To the contrary, if military action is ruled out, the humanitarians immediately resort to demanding the tightening of sanctions. Interventionists such as Hollande, Rice, et al., never explain why it is necessary for U.N. permanent members to give up their veto if the right course of action is so self-evident. The unstated assumption obviously is that any reluctance to sanction the use of force must be motivated by moral failings such as greed, selfishness, political ambition or lack of compassion.

The heartlessness of the so-called international community was the message of the 2011 film she wrote and directed about the 1992-95 war in Bosnia, *In the Land of Blood and Honey*. The film, [she said](#), points a "finger at the international community, which should have intervened in the Bosnian war much sooner." She proudly boasted that among the experts she consulted in making the film were Richard Holbrooke and Wesley Clark, two figures who played prominent roles in the devastation of Bosnia and Kosovo. The film, predictably, features villainous Serbs persecuting innocent Muslims. Asked whether her film should have been a little more balanced, Jolie replied

"The fact is that the war was not balanced. I could not make a film where it's 50-50. It's inaccurate to what happened."

This is standard NATO stuff, particularly the part about NATO's military intervention as having finally brought peace to Bosnia.

Jolie is useful to NATO not only because she can be relied on to echo the military alliance's self-justifying rationales for its favored solution to any problem, namely, the threat to use force. Jolie's is the glamorous face of NATO's revamped PR campaign. NATO would have us believe that it's not only bringing enlightenment to backward societies but also to us, NATO member-state citizens, by informing us about something of which we had hitherto been apparently unaware: sexual violence occurs during wartime. The obvious remedy—doing everything possible to avoid war—is not one that either NATO or Jolie favors. NATO can't very well be expected to advocate itself out of existence. In NATOspeak you threaten and defend military action even as you bemoan in lachrymose terms its predictable consequences, namely, war crimes, including sexual crimes.

Image below is Angelina Jolie in Bosnia (Source: [Rex via Marie Claire](#))



In April 2014, Jolie traipsed around the Balkans with British Foreign Secretary William Hague, visiting the Srebrenica memorial center in Potocari, Bosnia. During the visit, Jolie [stated](#),

“The use of rape as a weapon of war is one of the most harrowing and savage of these crimes against civilians. This is rape so brutal, with such extreme violence, that it is even hard to talk about it.”

Hague and Jolie jointly launched a campaign called Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, the [goal](#) of which was “to address the culture of impunity, ensure more perpetrators are brought to justice and ensure better support for survivors. We’re campaigning to raise awareness, rally global action, promote international coherence and increase the political will and capacity of states to do more.”

Hague earnestly explained,

“I started this campaign with Angelina Jolie because foreign policy has got to be about more than just dealing with urgent crises—it has to be about improving the condition of humanity.”

Then Hague [warmed](#) to his theme:

“Tens of thousands of women, girls and men were raped during the war in Bosnia. We are visiting to draw the world’s attention to their search for justice, and to call for global action to end the use of rape as a weapon of war once and for all.”

In a [BBC interview](#) Hague claimed that sexual violence in conflict was “one of the great mass crimes of the 20th century and the 21st century....If anything, this is getting worse—war zone rape as a weapon of war, used systematically and deliberately against civilian populations.”

Hague was of course British foreign secretary during NATO’s 2011 Libyan bombing campaign. It hardly needs to be said that NATO did nothing to help Libya’s women. To the

contrary: Thousands of women lost their lives as a direct result of NATO and Hague's humanitarian bombs. NATO destroyed government, law and public order, institutions that before its intervention had protected the women of Libya from sexual crimes. Most striking of all, NATO helped deliver perhaps millions of women into the hands of ISIS. Here is an account of the record of ISIS rule in Libya from Human Rights Watch (a reliably pro-interventionist outfit) in its 2017 [country report](#) on Libya:

"In the first half of 2016, fighters loyal to ISIS controlled the central coastal town of Sirte and subjected residents to a rigid interpretation of Sharia law that included public floggings, amputation of limbs, and public lynchings, often leaving the victims' corpses on display."

Not to worry: In June 2014, Hague and Jolie co-hosted in London a grand three-day Global Summit to End Sexual Violence. Participants included Secretary of State John Kerry and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. According to [one report](#), the summit cost £5.2 million to host. The food bill alone was more than £299,000, while total expenditure on taxis, hotels and transport reached £576,000. Jolie [declared](#):

We need to shatter that culture of impunity and make justice the norm, not the exception, for these crimes. We need political will, replicated across the world, and we need to treat this subject as a priority. We need to see real commitment and go after the worst perpetrators, to fund proper protection for vulnerable people, and to step in to help the worst-affected countries. We need all armies, peacekeeping troops and police forces to have prevention of sexual violence in conflict as part of their training.

Punishing the perpetrators of sexual violence sounds laudable enough. The trouble is that NATO's record of making incendiary charges and then failing to back them up with serious evidence is not one that inspires confidence. During the Bosnian war, for example, the media reported obsessively on the use of rape as an instrument of war. In 1992, Dame Ann Warburton's European parliamentary delegation estimated that 20,000 rapes had already taken place in Bosnia. In January 1993, *Newsweek* carried a lengthy cover-story charging Serbs with the rape of as many as 50,000 women, mostly Muslim, as part of "deliberate programs to impregnate Muslim women with unwanted Serb babies."

Systematic research on the subject however resulted in findings that were insufficiently dramatic to make it into the papers. On Jan. 29, 1994, the U.N. secretary-general issued a report on rapes in the former Yugoslavia, including Bosnia and Croatia, based on a study by the U.N. Commission of Experts. The [report](#) found "126 victims, 113 incidents, 252 alleged perpetrators, 73 witnesses." The report also stated "some of the rape cases" were "clearly the result of individual or small-group conduct without evidence of command responsibility. Others may be part of an overall pattern. Because of a variety of factors, such a pattern may lead to a conclusion that a systematic rape policy existed, but this remains to be proved."

Allegations of mass rape were a key component of NATO's propaganda campaign during the 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia. British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook regaled the public with lurid tales of Serbs forcing women "to endure 'systematic rape' at an army camp at Djakovica." Clare Short, Britain's international development secretary, added that the rapes were "deliberately performed in front of children, fathers and brothers." The British Foreign

Office followed up with claims of having discovered three more rape camps: “Refugees reported orchestrated rapes at Globocica, Urosevac and an unidentified point on the Kosovo-Albania border.” Subsequently, when it was too late to matter, the media sheepishly admitted that the rape-camp stories, like most of NATO’s allegations, were a fabrication. The *Washington Post* reported that

“Western accusations that there were Serb-run rape camps in the cities of Djakovica and Pec, and poorly sourced allegations in some publications that the Serbs were engaging in the mutilation of the living and the dead—including castration and decapitation—all proved to be false.”

Even Human Rights Watch’s Fred Abrahams, who had worked as an investigator for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, [admitted](#) in testimony that he had found no evidence to support the incendiary rape-camp allegations.

Still, NATO remained undeterred. During NATO’s next campaign, the one directed against Libya, rape stories made their appearance within days of the launch of the first bombs. Susan Rice, the U.S. Permanent Representative at the U.N., [informed](#) the Security Council that Libya’s leader, Muammar Qaddafi, was supplying his troops with Viagra in order to help them commit mass rape. Though Rice offered no evidence to support her claims, her charge was sufficient for the International Criminal Court prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, to announce that he had “information to confirm that it was a policy in Libya to rape those who were against the Government. Rape is a new aspect of the repression.” Moreno-Ocampo even [accepted](#) as confirmed Rice’s Viagra story:

“We are finding some elements confirming this issue of acquisition of Viagra-type of medicaments to show a policy. They were buying containers with products to enhance the possibility to rape, and we are getting the information in detail confirming the policy.”

In the end, predictably enough, NATO’s rape allegations turned out to have been made up out of whole cloth. Donatella Rovera, a senior crisis response adviser for Amnesty International, [reported](#) that the organization had “not found any evidence or a single victim of rape or a doctor who knew about somebody being raped.” Rovera also dismissed the Viagra story. She said that

“rebels dealing with the foreign media in Benghazi started showing journalists packets of Viagra, claiming they came from burned-out tanks, though it is unclear why the packets were not charred.”

Though one allegation after another has proved to be false, NATO will continue to make them, seizing on whatever is the hot-button issue of the moment. NATO does nothing for women and does nothing to stop sexual crimes, whether in NATO member-states or anywhere else in the world. What NATO does do well, thanks to its multimillion dollar sophisticated PR machinery, is seizing on highly emotional issues such as rape and turning them into justifications for bigger budgets, more weaponry, more expansion, more deployments in more countries and, in the end, military action.

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