

Amnesty's Shilling for US Wars

For decades, Amnesty International has been a respected name in the cause of human rights, but its recent hiring of Suzanne Nossel, a longtime U.S. "humanitarian interventionist," has swung the organization more behind the Afghan War and the use of U.S. military force, Ann Wright and Coleen Rowley write.

By Ann Wright and Coleen Rowley

The new Executive Director of Amnesty International USA Suzanne Nossel is a recent U.S. government insider. So it's a safe bet that AI's decision to seize upon a topic that dovetailed with American foreign policy interests, "women's rights in Afghanistan," at the NATO Conference last month in Chicago came directly from her.

Nossel was hired by AI in January 2012. In her early career, Nossel worked for Ambassador Richard Holbrooke under the Clinton Administration at the United Nations. Most recently, she served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Organizations at the U.S. Department of State, where she was responsible for multilateral human rights, humanitarian affairs, women's issues, public diplomacy, press and congressional relations.

She also played a leading role in U.S. engagement at the U.N. Human Rights Council (where her views about the original Goldstone Report on behalf of Palestinian women did not quite rise to the same level of concerns for the women in countries that U.S.-NATO has attacked militarily).

Nossel would have worked for and with Hillary Clinton, Madeleine Albright, Samantha Power and Susan Rice, and undoubtedly helped them successfully implement their "Right to Protect (R2P)" otherwise known as "humanitarian intervention" as well as the newly created "Atrocity Prevention Board."

This cornerstone of President Barack Obama's foreign policy (which has served mainly to rationalize the launching of war on Libya) is now being hauled out to call for U.S.-NATO military intervention in Syria.

"Smart Power" = smart wars?

In fact, Nossel is herself credited as having coined the term "Smart Power," which embraces the United States' use of military power as well as other forms of "soft power," an approach which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced at her confirmation as the new basis of State Department policy.

An excerpt from Nossel's 2004 paper on "Smart Power" published in the Council on Foreign Relations' *Foreign Affairs* magazine sounds a lot like Samantha Power's (and also traces back to Madeleine Albright's) theories:

"To advance from a nuanced dissent to a compelling vision, progressive policymakers should turn to the great mainstay of twentieth-century U.S. foreign policy: liberal internationalism, which posits that a global system of stable liberal democracies would be less prone to war.

"Washington, the theory goes, should thus offer assertive leadership, diplomatic, economic, **and not least, military** [our emphasis], to advance a broad array of goals: self-determination, human rights, free trade, the rule of law, economic development, and the quarantine and elimination of dictators and weapons of mass destruction (WMD)."

Perhaps the AI's hiring of a State Department shill as executive director of its U.S. affiliate was merely coincidental to how/why its "NATO Shadow Summit " so closely mimicked the CIA's latest propaganda assault, but.

The "CIA Red Cell," a group of analysts assigned to think "outside the box" to anticipate emerging challenges, was right to worry in March 2010 when the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) found that 80 percent of French and German citizens were opposed to continued deployment of their countries' militaries in the U.S.-NATO war in Afghanistan.

Even though public apathy had, up to that point, enabled French and German politicians to "ignore their voters" and steadily increase their governments' troop contributions to Afghanistan, the CIA's newly-created think tank was concerned that a forecasted increase in NATO casualties in the upcoming "bloody summer could become a tipping point in converting passive opposition into active calls for immediate withdrawal."

In a "confidential" memo, the "Red Cell" wrote: "The Afghanistan mission's low public salience has allowed French and German leaders to disregard popular opposition and steadily increase their troop contributions to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Berlin and Paris currently maintain the third and fourth highest ISAF troop levels, despite the opposition of 80 percent of German and French respondents to increased ISAF deployments, according to INR polling in fall 2009.

"Public Apathy Enables Leaders To Ignore Voters

"Only a fraction (0.1-1.3 percent) of French and German respondents identified 'Afghanistan' as the most urgent issue facing their nation in an open-ended question, according to the same polling. These publics ranked 'stabilizing

Afghanistan' as among the lowest priorities for US and European leaders, according to polls by the German Marshall Fund (GMF) over the past two years.

"According to INR polling in the fall of 2009, the view that the Afghanistan mission is a waste of resources and 'not our problem' was cited as the most common reason for opposing ISAF by German respondents and was the second most common reason by French respondents. But the 'not our problem' sentiment also suggests that, so far, sending troops to Afghanistan is not yet on most voters' radar.

"But Casualties Could Precipitate Backlash

"If some forecasts of a bloody summer in Afghanistan come to pass, passive French and German dislike of their troop presence could turn into active and politically potent hostility. The tone of previous debate suggests that a spike in French or German casualties or in Afghan civilian casualties could become a tipping point in converting passive opposition into active calls for immediate withdrawal."

The CIA "Special Memorandum" went a step further, inviting "a CIA expert on strategic communication and analysts following public opinion" to suggest "information campaigns" that State Department polls showed likely to sway Western Europeans.

The "Red Cell" memo was quickly leaked, however, furnishing a remarkable window into how U.S. government propaganda is designed to work upon NATO citizenry to maintain public support for the euphemistically titled "International Security Assistance Force" (ISAF) waging war on Afghans. Here are some of the CIA propaganda expert's suggestions:

"Messaging that dramatizes the potential adverse consequences of an ISAF defeat for Afghan civilians could leverage French (and other European) guilt for abandoning them. The prospect of the Taliban rolling back hard-won progress on girls' education could provoke French indignation, become a rallying point for France's largely secular public, and give voters a reason to support a good and necessary cause despite casualties.

"Outreach initiatives that create media opportunities for Afghan women to share their stories with French, German, and other European women could help to overcome pervasive skepticism among women in Western Europe toward the ISAF mission. Media events that feature testimonials by Afghan women would probably be most effective if broadcast on programs that have large and disproportionately female audiences."

'NATO: Keep the Progress Going!'

Amnesty International struck similar themes in announcements posted online as well as billboard advertisements on Chicago bus stops, telling **“NATO: Keep the Progress Going!”** beckoned us to find out more on Sunday, May 20, 2012, the day thousands of activists marched in Chicago in protest of NATO’s wars.

The billboard seemed to answer a recent Huffington Post article, “Afghanistan: The First Feminist War?”

“The feminist victory may be complete in America, but on the international stage it’s not doing so well with three quarters of the world’s women still under often-severe male domination. Afghanistan is an extreme case in point in what might be termed the first feminist war ... a war that now may not be won even if Hillary Clinton dons a flack jacket and shoulders an M16 on the front lines. Still, since the Bush Administration to the present America’s top foreign policy office has been held by women ... women who have promised not to desert their Afghan sisters.”

Our curiosity was further piqued because we consider ourselves to be women’s rights and human rights proponents and also due to our own prior federal careers in intelligence and military. (Colonel Wright is retired from the State Department/US military and Rowley is from the FBI.)

So along with a few other anti-war activists, we packed into a taxi to head to the Chicago hotel where Amnesty International’s “Shadow Summit” featuring former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and other female foreign relations officials was being held. We happened to carry our “NATO bombs are not humanitarian”; “NATO Kills Girls” and anti-drone bombing posters that we had with us for the march later that day.

As we arrived, an official-looking black car dropped off Melanne Vermeer, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, who was to be a main speaker (on the first panel, along with former Secretary Albright; U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Illinois; and Afifa Azim, General Director and Co-Founder, Afghan Women’s Network; along with Moderator Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, Deputy Director of the Council on Foreign Relations’ Women and Foreign Policy Program).

Vermeer cast a cold glance at us and would not answer Ann Wright’s questions as she scurried into the hotel with her aides surrounding her and us following behind. At first the hotel security guards tried to turn us away but we reminded the registration desk the Summit was advertised as “Free Admissions” and that some of us were members of Amnesty International.

So they let us register and attend as long as we promised to leave our signs outside and not disrupt the speakers. The hotel conference room was about half

full. We stayed long enough to hear the opening remarks and the moderator's first questions of Albright and the other speakers on the first panel.

All generally linked the protection and participation of Afghan women in government as well as the progress made in educating Afghan women to the eventual peace and security of the country as envisioned by the new strategic "partnership" agreement that Obama had just signed with Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Ms. Verveer said Afghan women do not want to be seen as "victims" but are now rightfully nervous about their future. When we saw that audience participation was going to be limited to questions selected from the small note cards being collected, we departed, missing the second panel as well as kite-flying for women's rights.

We noted, even in that short time, however, how easy it was for these U.S. government officials to use the "good and necessary cause" of women's rights to get the audience into the palm of their collective hand, just as the CIA's "strategic communication" expert predicted!

Secretary Albright?

Not everyone was hoodwinked however. Even before the "Summit" was held, Amnesty realized it had a PR problem as a result of its billboard advertisement touting progress in Afghanistan. An Amnesty official tried to put forth a rather lame defense blaming an accidental poor choice of wording.

But many readers (and AI members) posted critical comments and questions, including concerns about Albright's involvement given her infamous defense of Iraqi sanctions in the 1990s, which were estimated to have caused the deaths of a half million Iraqi children, with the comment "we think the price is worth it."

Under the blogger's explanation: "We Get It / Human Rights Now," there were comments like these:

"Could someone from AI please explain why Madeleine Albright was invited to participate in this event? We (and especially those of us who are familiar with AI) should all be able to understand that the wording on the poster was a genuine, albeit damaging, mistake. But why Ms. Albright?"

"The posters are pro-NATO and play into prevailing tropes about so called 'humanitarian intervention' via 'think of the women & children' imagery. The posters & the forum that includes Albright are neither slight slips nor without context. AI is coping heat because they have miss-stepped dramatically. There is

NOTHING subtle about either the imagery nor the message!

“It is not a case of ‘oh sorry we didn’t realize it it could be interpreted that way!’ They used pro Nato imagery & slogans ahead of & during a controversial summit that has thousands protesting in the streets. Tell me again how that is not taking sides?

“They asked a notorious apologist for mass murder of children to speak on the right of women and children...tell me again: how is that not taking sides. So it is absolutely reasonable for past supporters (and board members like myself) to be asking how it is that Amnesty USA so lost its bearings they could make a critical SERIES of errors like this?”

Of course the defensive AI blog author never answered the numerous questions asking why Amnesty had chosen Madeleine Albright as their main speaker. So we will venture an answer that probably lies in the fact that all of the powerful feminist-war hawks who have risen to become Secretary of State (or are waiting in the wings) are now taking their lead from the ruthless Grand Dame who paved the way for them, Madeleine Albright, (see Coleen Rowley’s recent articles: “Obama’s New ‘Atrocity Prevention Board’: Reasons for Skepticism” and “Militarization of the Mothers: You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby, from Mother’s Day for Peace”).

It’s also possible the highest ranks of the feminist wing of military interventionism (i.e. Madeleine Albright, Condi Rice, Hillary Clinton, Susan Rice, Samantha Power, et al) are so passionate and hubristic about the nobility of their goal and “American exceptionalism” that some have simply succumbed to a kind of almost religious (blind faith) type fervor.

The Road to Hell

Nossel’s and Albright’s theories are flawed in many ways but suffice it to say that democracies are actually not less prone to war. A long list of “democracies” including Nazi Germany, the Roman Empire, the United Kingdom, France and the United States itself disprove this assertion.

In any event, the U.S. has been terribly hypocritical in its support of “democracies” in foreign countries, often toppling or attempting to topple them (i.e. Iran’s Mossadeqh, Guatemala’s Arbenz, Chile’s Allende) in order to gain easier control of a foreign country through an allied dictatorship.

No one is going to argue that the goals of humanitarianism, preventing atrocities and furthering women’s rights around the world are not “good and necessary” (in the words of the CIA strategic communications expert). We would go so far as to say these ARE truly noble causes!

Testimonials about human rights' abuse are often true and fundamentalist regimes' treatment of women seems to vary only in degrees of horrible. But while it's true that many women lack rights in Afghanistan, some would argue that it's *conveniently* true. And that the best lies are always based on a certain amount of truth.

The devil, however, lies in the details of promoting equality and accomplishing humanitarianism. Most importantly the ends, even noble ends, never justify wrongful means. In fact, when people such as Samantha Power decide to bomb ~~the~~ village Libya, to save it, it will backfire on a pragmatic level.

It must be realized that it is the nobility of the U.S.-NATO's motivation that as CIA propaganda department has advised should be relied upon to convince otherwise good-hearted people (especially women) to support (or at least tolerate) war and military occupation (now known to encompass the worst of war crimes, massacres of women and children, torture, cutting off body parts of those killed, as well as increasing mental illness, self-destructive behavior and suicides among U.S. soldiers and the corresponding cover-ups of all such horrible means).

In the decades after Vietnam, a number of military scholars identified declining American public support for that war as the main factor responsible for the U.S. "losing" Vietnam. One lesson learned and quickly implemented was to get rid of the military draft and put the wars on a credit card so fewer citizens would pay attention.

Some control also had to be gained over the type of free media (that led to trusted TV anchor Walter Cronkite broadcasting his public souring on the Vietnam War). A whole series of war propaganda systems, from planting retired generals as "talking heads" on TV to the assistant to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld deciding to "embed the media," have worked pretty well to maintain the necessary level of war momentum in mainstream media and amongst public opinion.

But now, with American polls approaching the same problematic levels as those in Europe cited by the "CIA Red Cell," we suddenly see major human rights organizations like Amnesty International (as well as others) applauding Obama's (and the feminist war-hawks') "Atrocity Prevention Board."

Such sleight of hand seems to work to work even better amongst political partisans. By the way, it should be noted that Congress may allow these Pentagon propagandists to target American citizens through the National Defense Authorization Act of 2013. Should we connect the dots?

There are some clear lines where the laudable need to further human rights

should not be twisted into justifying harsh economic sanctions that kill hundreds of thousands of children or, even worse, “shock and awe” aerial bombing that takes the lives of the women and children the “humanitarian” propagandists say they want to help.

Madeleine Albright’s response about the deaths of a half million children on *60 Minutes*, that “the price was worth it,” illustrates the quintessential falsity of what ethicists call “act utilitarianism” or concocting fictional happy outcomes to justify the terrible wrongful means.

It also seems that a human rights NGO, in this case Amnesty International, which had gained a solid reputation and hence the trust of those it has helped through the years, will be jeopardized in aligning itself with the U.S. Secretary of State and NATO.

This is exactly how the Nobel Peace Prize got corrupted, aligning itself with the U.S. Secretary of State and NATO, which is why Nobel laureate Mairead Maguire withdrew from the Nobel Peace forum held in Chicago during NATO.

Good NGOs and non-profits that want to maintain the trust in their humanitarian work tend to be very careful to maintain their independence from any government, let alone any war-making government. When NGOs, even good ones, become entwined with the U.S./NATO war machine, don’t they risk losing their independent credibility?

Ann Wright is a 29-year U.S. Army/Army Reserve Colonel and a 16-year U.S. diplomat who served in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned in 2003 in opposition to the Iraq war. She returned to Afghanistan in 2007 and 2010 on fact-finding missions.

Coleen Rowley, a FBI special agent for almost 24 years, was legal counsel to the FBI Field Office in Minneapolis from 1990 to 2003. She wrote a “whistleblower” memo in May 2002 and testified to the Senate Judiciary on some of the FBI’s pre-9/11 failures. She retired at the end of 2004, and now writes and speaks on ethical decision-making and balancing civil liberties with the need for effective investigation.
