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**Women's Political Leadership:  
Promoting Idealistic Realism in a Changing  
World**

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2. *Co-editor of Crossroads Magazine, Volume I Issue I.*
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4. “Youth, and their votes, hold the key to nation’s future,” *The Myanmar Times*, July 30–August 05, 2012.
5. Co-authored with Sanchita Basu Das, “The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP): Economic and Strategic Implications for the Asia-Pacific,” *ISEAS Perspective* (23 July 2012).
6. Book review, *Where China Meets India: Burma and the New Crossroads of Asia*, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Vol. 34/1 (April 2012).

# Women's Political Leadership: Promoting Idealistic Realism in a Changing World

## Executive Summary

There is some evidence suggesting that women may lead differently than men. Leadership style differences between women and men can be more prominent in the realm of politics than elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> A political life is led under public scrutiny, making it easy to spot differences between women and men's leadership styles.

The year 2016 was expected to be "the year of women" in politics.<sup>2</sup> It did not quite happen, and many were especially disappointed when Hillary Clinton lost the U.S. presidential election to Donald Trump, a man who had absolutely zero experience in politics. Some people wondered if the bar was really that low for men entering politics. But more importantly, many people questioned whether the left everywhere had been too idealistic. Pure idealism will certainly fail in the concrete practice of politics. Nor will Machiavellian realism win against populist movements; it will simply be outdone in conservatism by the populists. However, a hybrid ideology and practice of idealistic realism appears to be the only way to combat the extreme right movements that have gained ground at such a rapid pace this year.

Some well-known modern day women in politics have been observed to practice idealistic realism. Realism as pragmatism in politics is required of female politicians, as it is of their male counterparts. The question to be asked is whether some women in politics practice idealism (along with realism) by choice, or through the gendering of political issues. Author Luminita Ionescu presents the behavior of women "within gendered institutions," citing leadership style differences between women and men.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Kathleen A. Bratton studies the behavior and success of token women in legislatures and argues that these women's behavior remains unchanged regardless of whether the number of women in their legislatures has reached "critical mass"—as legislators, they continue to

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<sup>1</sup>Ionescu, L. (2012). The Role of Women in Bureaucracies: Leadership, Democracy, and Politics. *Economics, Management, and Financial Markets*. Volume 7(1), pp. 138–143.

<sup>2</sup>Sonenshine, T. (2016, July 11) Is 2016 the Year of the Woman? *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tara-sonenshine/is-2016-the-year-of-the-w\\_b\\_10934068.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tara-sonenshine/is-2016-the-year-of-the-w_b_10934068.html)

<sup>3</sup>Ionescu, L. (2012). The Role of Women in Bureaucracies: Leadership, Democracy, and Politics. *Economics, Management, and Financial Markets*. Volume 7(1), pp. 138–143.

focus on idealistic issues of human development, particularly gender issues.<sup>4</sup>Perhaps the most telling account of some female politicians' inclination toward idealistic goals is a United Nations Development Program report, published in 2000, demonstrating how women in politics across the world have used their legislative and executive authority to successfully push through issues of gender and development in their countries.<sup>5</sup>

The hybrid approach of idealistic realism in politics is apparent when studying the principles and policies of three notable female politicians: former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Myanmar's de facto leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. As is the case with other politicians, female political leaders are constrained by political systems and realities to be practical in decision making. At the same time, they have the tendency to be idealistic due to their own personal values and those of their supporters—mostly women and progressive men. They also tend to gravitate towards soft power and give priority to idealistic domains of governance such as human development – issues which affect women more than men.<sup>6</sup>

This is exactly what the world needs at the moment: a hybrid ideology and approach that finds an equilibrium between realism and idealism by formulating policies based on progressive ideals while implementing them using the strong-arm tactics of realist politics. Women's participation in politics must be encouraged to further the practice of idealistic realism, which is the global community's last resort in the stand against the growing extreme right.

## Introduction

Whether one considers it owing to nature or to nurture—i.e., social conditioning of the genders—there is some evidence to suggest that women lead differently than men. Leadership style differences between women and men can be more prominent in the realm of politics than elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>In politics, parties are built on ideological platforms and policies are mainly based on party principles. In politics, too, both women and men must work under constant public scrutiny,

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<sup>4</sup>Bratton, K. (2005).Critical Mass Theory Revisited: The Behavior and Success of Token Women in State Legislatures. *Politics and Gender*1(1), pp. 97–125.

<sup>5</sup>United Nations Development Programme (2000). Women's Political Participation and Good Governance – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges.

<sup>6</sup>Bratton, K. (2005).Critical Mass Theory Revisited: The Behavior and Success of Token Women in State Legislatures. *Politics and Gender*1(1), pp. 97–125.

<sup>7</sup>Ionescu, L. (2012). The Role of Women in Bureaucracies: Leadership, Democracy, and Politics. *Economics, Management, and Financial Markets*. Volume 7(1), pp. 1 38–1 43.

and because their every move is observed and judged, it is easy to study the differences in their leadership styles.

This paper will argue that some women currently in political leadership are promoting an idealistic realist ideology, looking specifically at prominent female political leaders such as Hillary Clinton in the United States (U.S.), Angela Merkel in Germany, and Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar. Moreover, it will argue that female political leaders who adopt a hybrid approach between realism and idealism are exactly what the world needs at the moment with the rise of extreme right wing movements, an ever widening gap between the left and the right<sup>8</sup> and the growing threat of terrorism in seemingly the most secure of states.<sup>9</sup> Thus, to combat these trends and to further the practice of idealistic realism, it would be fruitful to encourage women's participation in politics.

First, by refuting that pure realist and idealist principles exist, the paper will discuss the hybrid ideology of idealistic realism and examine how some prominent women political leaders – in this case Hillary Clinton, Angela Merkel, and Aung San Suu Kyi—practice it. Second, it will argue that some women in politics tend toward idealistic realism for three reasons: The first is that political pragmatism requires realism in decision making; The second is that idealism comes from personal values and the values of a politician's supporters; The third reason is that women gravitate towards soft power politics because of male dominance in politics and their male counterparts' tendency, as privileged members of a patriarchal society, to be less focused on human security and development issues, which are considered idealistic in nature. Lastly, it will conclude that increased women's political participation should be encouraged to produce more female political leaders internationally, thereby furthering the practice of idealistic realism, which will help bring about a more balanced, secure global order.

## Overview of Women in Power Globally

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<sup>8</sup>The Economist (2016, July 30). The New Political Divide. *The Economist*. Retrieved at <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21702750-farewell-left-versus-right-contest-matters-now-open-against-closed-new>

<sup>9</sup>Arango, T. (2016, December 20). *In Turkey, a Capstone to a Violent Year. In Germany, a Realization of Fears.* *The New York Times*. Retrieved at <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/20/world/europe/in-turkey-a-capstone-to-a-violent-year-in-germany-a-realization-of-fears.html>

Women's political leadership has progressed since the famous 1995 Beijing Declaration on the rights of women and girls.<sup>10</sup> Still, progress could be quicker. Currently, the global average for women in parliament is at a disappointing 22.8 percent.<sup>11</sup> As of September 2016, the world has ten female heads of state and nine female heads of government.<sup>12</sup> To have gender equity in political representation and governance—to have the half of the world's population that is women represented in legislatures and executive bodies—remains a seemingly impossible goal.

Until it becomes a reality, there is no telling with certainty how complete gender equity in political representation and leadership would affect global governance. However, it is possible to observe the few women in political power today and, from their principles and practices, envision a different kind of global leadership, one with a different set of priorities and a different approach to policymaking and governance.

The world was hoping for 2016 to be “the year of the woman.” But the unexpected defeat of democratic presidential nominee Hillary Rodham Clinton—a self-professed champion of women and one of the most politically experienced presidential candidates in American history—crushed the hopes of many wishing to see a woman to lead one of the most powerful countries in the world and complete the global circle of powerful women in charge.<sup>13</sup>

Another highly significant election also took place in October, 2016. Nations around the world watched as former United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon's successor was elected by the UN General Assembly. Many hoped to have the first ever female UN Secretary General, as out of thirteen contenders, seven were women. However, the role of world leader went to former Prime Minister of Portugal and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres. To many, it was a well-deserved win for Mr. Guterres and a prudent choice made by the international community.<sup>14</sup> However, many others hoping for a woman to lead the UN were disappointed.

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10 UN WOMEN. (September 1995). The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women: Platform for Action. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm#statement>  
11 Inter-Parliamentary Union. (September 2016). Retrieved from <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> - accessed on 1 November 2016.

12 UN WOMEN. (August 2016). Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation. Retrieved from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures> - accessed on 6 November 2016.

13 Ball, M. (2016, November 15). Why Hillary Clinton Lost. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/why-hillary-clinton-lost/507704/>

14BBC. (2016, October 6). Why Wasn't A Woman Elected As UN Secretary General. *BBC*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37574307>

Still, former New York Senator and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is now reported “to have won the popular vote” with more than two million votes and counting<sup>15</sup>—the largest number in history after Barack Obama—and she retains her influence in the Democratic Party. Despite a recent surge in popularity for nationalist parties in Europe, Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel remains a powerful leader in the European Union (EU), having won three consecutive elections and being duly credited with keeping not just the EU but Europe as a whole from financial collapse during the Greek and Spanish debt crises.<sup>16</sup> Chancellor Merkel is confident enough in her status as the de facto leader of Europe that even when other world leaders sent generic congratulatory messages to U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, she reminded him that Germany was willing to cooperate on the condition that he respected and practiced the principle of equal rights for all.<sup>17</sup>

In Asia, Nobel laureate and former political dissident Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is the de facto head of government of a democratic Myanmar as State Counsellor and Foreign Minister. A year on from the general elections of November 2015, the country still occupies the limelight, with Daw Suu’s every move under global scrutiny. Many people expected Daw Suu, a pro-democracy activist and promoter of civil disobedience, to be a pure idealist. They are likely disappointed that she instead has displayed political shrewdness and, in a very pragmatic approach to governance, has chosen to focus on a list of priorities she has set for the country—a nationwide peace agreement, corruption crackdown, and economic reform.<sup>18</sup> While vocal at times in her support for gender equality, Daw Suu did not seem too preoccupied with forming a cabinet with equal representation of women and men so long as its members were capable.<sup>19</sup> Nor did she continue to ardently champion ethnic and religious minority rights when doing so would have resulted in civil unrest by further agitating the majority Bamar Buddhist citizens, many of whom are opposed to granting citizenship to Rohingya

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<sup>15</sup> Hackman, M. (2016, November 28). Hillary Clinton’s Popular Vote Lead Increases to More Than Two Million Votes. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2016/11/28/hillary-clintons-popular-vote-lead-increases-to-more-than-two-million-votes/>

<sup>16</sup> The Economist. (2015, November 7). The Indispensable European. *The Economist*. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21677643-angela-merkel-faces-her-most-serious-political-challenge-yet-europe-needs-her-more>

<sup>17</sup> Smale, A. (2016, November 12). As Obama Exit World Stage, Angela Merkel May Be The Liberal West’s Last Defender. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/13/world/europe/germany-merkel-trump-election.html>

<sup>18</sup> Rieffel, L. (2016, March 30). Aung San Suu Kyi’s New Government: What to Look for in Myanmar. *The Brookings Institution*. Retrieved at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2016/03/30/aung-san-suu-kyis-new-government-what-to-look-for-in-myanmar/>

<sup>19</sup> Ye Mon. (2016, May 6). Gender Inequality Continues to Plague Government Under NLD. *The Myanmar Times*. Retrieved at <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/20159-gender-inequality-continues-to-plague-government-under-nld.html>

Muslim minorities in Rakhine state in Myanmar's western region. Daw Suu and the National League for Democracy (NLD) government are well aware that should widespread civil unrest erupt, they may not be able to contain it, as neither the military nor law enforcement are under their control.<sup>20</sup>

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi faces a different set of challenges in political leadership than does Hillary Clinton or Angela Merkel. However, what the three politicians have in common is that while they hold idealist principles, they are realists when making decisions. Thus, we can argue that all three of these female political leaders practice the hybrid ideology of idealistic realism.

## Realism or Idealism: Idealistic Realism in Practice

Realism and idealism form a dichotomy within the discipline of international relations and the practice of statecraft that used to be starker, at least theoretically, in the immediate aftermath of the two World Wars.

In simple terms, realists attempt to—or claim to—see the world as it is while idealists see it as they would like it to be. After the Second World War, realist international relations scholars such as Edward Hallet Carr<sup>21</sup> and Hans Morgenthau<sup>22</sup> argued that international relations—and world politics in general—is best approached with the assumption that states are inherently power hungry and that the only way to succeed in maintaining world order is to ensure the balance of power between nations. Similar Machiavellian<sup>23</sup> assumptions apply to political leaders. Very simply put, the realist sees interests defined in terms of power.

Proponents of idealism in international relations believe in nation states' inherent desire for world peace and encourage the maintenance of peace through collective security arrangements. One famous example of this approach is former U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, whose "Fourteen Points" were the basis of his failed project, the League of Nations, the precursor to the UN. In more simple terms, idealists see interests defined in terms of shared values and a desire for peaceful coexistence.

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<sup>20</sup>Farmaner, M. (2015, November 9). Think Burma is a Democracy Now? Think Again. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-farmaner/burma-election-democracy\\_b\\_8505384.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-farmaner/burma-election-democracy_b_8505384.html)

<sup>21</sup>Carr, E.H. (1945). *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd.

<sup>22</sup>Morgenthau, H.J. (1948). *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: A.A. Knopf.

<sup>23</sup>Machiavelli, N. (circa 1530). *The Prince*.

These two opposing concepts in international relations also exist in political ideology. Whether the conceptual definitions existed first in international relations or in the realm of domestic politics and governance is a matter of philosophical history and etymology; one could argue that the concepts of idealism and realism reach as far back as the discourses of Plato and Cicero.<sup>24</sup>

The question to be raised here is not whether politicians are peer- or self-identified as realists or idealists, but whether “pure” realists and idealists exist at all in modern day, post-war politics, if they ever did.

## Realism in Practice

Defining realist ideology becomes problematic when confronted with the “conservative dilemma,” where in confusion occurs as to whether a politician or political party practices realism in response to the reality of a situation—as it is so defined—or because it is the tradition and principle (the ideal, in a sense) of the politician or the party.<sup>25</sup> If the latter, then realism ceases to be based on seeing things as they are and dealing with problems pragmatically. Perhaps then, it is because of the ambiguous and subjective nature of “reality” itself that realism in practice has turned into realpolitik and become synonymous with conservatism. Realism has evolved over time into an ideology for conservatives everywhere. It has come to be associated with power politics, nationalism, hawkishness in foreign policy making and, in many countries, a desire to preserve and perpetuate “traditional values” in the social sphere.

A political realist then can be defined as one who practices either or both of the following two principles: resorting to pragmatism instead of adhering strictly to ideology, or adhering to conservative ideology in domestic and foreign policy making. The former principle of resorting to pragmatism over idealism in decision making has led to self-professed idealists—mostly belonging to left wing parties—being considered realists at times.

## Idealism in Practice

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<sup>24</sup> Guenther, D.S. (2010). Political "Ideals" Versus Political "Realities": A Dilemma of Theory. *Inquiries*. Vol.2 No.06. 1-7.

<sup>25</sup> Guzzini, S. (2004). Enduring Dilemmas of Realism in International Relations. *European Journal of International Relations*. Vol10 Issue4. 533-568.

Idealism in its purest sense, seeing the world as it should be according to one's moral principles (i.e., shared values and a desire for peace), also does not exist—or rather, it cannot exist due to circumstances.<sup>26</sup> Problems arise when idealism is put into practice in politics, particularly when a scenario occurs that requires the use of force: the principle of idealism is founded on peace, cooperation, and a belief in the inherent goodness of human beings.<sup>27</sup> In times of armed conflict when it is necessary to declare war to resist aggression or to defend through pre-emptive measures, an idealist would have to either refuse to go to war on the principle of peace and non-violence or go to war in defense of certain ideals. If the former, the idealist's mode of life will be annihilated by the enemy, rendering the promotion of the ideals on which that mode of life was based impossible.

When idealists choose to go to war, they must find a moral justification to do so, which would require, for instance, vilifying the enemy as inhuman and deserving of death; acts of war—whether in defense or as pre-emptive measures—call for defeating an enemy by killing its forces in combat. However, in going to war, idealists conflate the moral and the political. The depiction of the enemy as evil and deserving of death corrupts the idealist principle of shared values and desire for peaceful coexistence amongst humans. This view regards members of the enemy forces as a monolith, leaving no room for consideration of the fact that dissenting individuals can be coerced by the state apparatus to participate in a conflict—in other words, that individuals among the enemy may be peace-desiring idealists themselves. This is problematic because idealism then becomes another political propaganda tool of the state—by seeking moral justification, idealism corrupts itself.

To summarize, “pure” idealism cannot withstand the test of unavoidable armed conflict. If and idealistic regime refuses to resort to violence in its own defense, it will be annihilated by its enemies and idealism will cease to exist as a way of life. Ironically, if idealism fails to be pragmatic (realistic), it fails to achieve its ideals and becomes nothing more than a philosophy that has no practical application in politics. Idealism can also be corrupted, or become “impure”, when it seeks a moral justification to use force to defend itself to continue promoting its ideals. Post-war idealism has become synonymous with liberalism (in the American sense) and forms the ideological basis for left leaning political parties everywhere. It is often associated with liberal ideals of peace and justice, the use of soft power in foreign affairs, and social and economic equality. A political idealist has come to be defined as someone who espouses those liberal ideals.

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<sup>26</sup> Guenther, D.S. (2010). *Political "Ideals" Versus Political "Realities": A Dilemma of Theory.Inquiries*. Vol.2 No.06. 1-7.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

Realism and idealism in their “pure” forms simply do not exist; once either is put into political practice, they lose their doctrinal purity due to party ideology, circumstantial necessity, or limitations in practical use. Most if not all politicians in fact practice a hybrid ideology of idealistic realism in which they espouse their party’s ideology, tailored to their individual beliefs and the preferences of their voter base’s preferences. Thus, although idealism can heavily influence their policy stances, politicians ultimately make decisions based on pragmatism.

## Why Female Leaders and Idealistic Realism?

If the majority of politicians—most of whom are men—already practice idealistic realism, then how can it be argued that women’s political participation is especially important to promote this ideology? The fact that there has not been a single female authoritarian ruler since the end of the First World War is perhaps a good starting point.

There are three main factors that lead women in politics to practice idealistic realism: first, realism requires political pragmatism; second, idealism is based on a politician’s personal values and supporters’ values; finally, women gravitate towards soft power politics because men tend to dominate politics, and as privileged members in patriarchal society, to be less focused on human security and development, which are idealistic concerns.

## Pragmatist, Realist

Women in politics, like male politicians, have to resort to realist tactics at times simply because the concrete practice of politics requires pragmatism in decision making—seeing and dealing with things as they are. The three female political leaders highlighted in this paper—Hillary Clinton, Angela Merkel, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi – are all idealistic realists who never shy away from realpolitik when the need arises.

Hillary Clinton is a self-proclaimed idealistic realist.<sup>28</sup> Her vote as a Senator for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, though she has since admitted it was a mistake, continues to be a source of confusion and

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<sup>28</sup> Clinton, H.R. (2014). *Hard Choices* (pp. 566). New York: Simon & Schuster.

controversy.<sup>29</sup> Her views on combating terrorism, both state sanctioned and by non-state actors, using military strength are uncompromising. As Secretary of State under the first term of the Obama administration, she was with President Obama in supporting the use of militarized drones against terrorists despite occasional civilian casualties. As a member of the old foreign policy establishment in Washington D.C., Secretary Clinton shares a certain camaraderie and understanding with military top brass. That is not to say that she is hawkish. It only proves her willingness to understand hard security and resort to the use of force, but only when it is the last viable option on the table.<sup>30</sup> Even before she published her memoir, *Hard Choices*, during her first presidential campaign in 2007, Hillary Clinton published a commentary in *Foreign Affairs* magazine where she promised to “draw on all aspects of American power, to inspire and attract as much as to coerce.”<sup>31</sup> In no uncertain terms, Hillary Clinton promoted pragmatism over idealism in decision making.

Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel belongs to the same school of political philosophy as her political and ideological ally Hillary Clinton. Time magazine named her “Person of the Year,” calling her the “leader of the free world.” Merkel is the “iron chancellor” and continues to be the de facto leader of not just the EU, but of Europe as a whole. Europe used to have “strong men” but today it is dominated by a “strong woman.” The Chancellor has revealed herself to be a realist on two major issues. During the euro zone crisis of 2010, a new word appeared: *Merkeling*.<sup>32</sup> It was coined by critics of Merkel who disliked her strong-arm tactic of forcing Greece to either accept austerity policies or leave the euro zone altogether. Protests broke out and the German leader’s popularity waned across the EU, but she pursued her policies with calm pragmatism and put an end to the euro crisis. Again, when Russia invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea in 2014, it was Chancellor Merkel who led Europe and the U.S. to impose sanctions against Russia and helped broker the Minsk agreement for peaceful conflict resolution.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kaplan, F. (2016, February 4). Hillary Clinton Told the Truth About Her Iraq War Vote. *Slate*. Retrieved at [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/war\\_stories/2016/02/hillary\\_clinton\\_told\\_the\\_truth\\_about\\_her\\_iraq\\_war\\_vote.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2016/02/hillary_clinton_told_the_truth_about_her_iraq_war_vote.html)

<sup>30</sup> Cassidy, J. (2016, April 22). What Sort of Foreign Policy Hawk is Hillary Clinton. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved at <http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/what-sort-of-foreign-policy-hawk-is-hillary-clinton>

<sup>31</sup> Clinton, H.R. (2007, November/December). Security and Opportunity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Foreign Affairs Magazine*. Retrieved at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2007-11-01/security-and-opportunity-twenty-first-century>

<sup>32</sup> Vick, K. (2015, December). Person of the Year: Chancellor of the Free World. *TIME*. Retrieved at <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2015-angela-merkel/>

<sup>33</sup> Buergin, R. (2016, May 27). Merkel Allies Urge Russia Sanctions Easing as G-7 Stands Firm. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-05-27/merkel-allies-urge-russia-sanctions-easing-as-g-7-stands-firm>

Myanmar's Daw Aung San Suu Kyi espouses the same idealistic realism in Southeast Asia, going so far as to claim that her principle of non-violence in pro-democracy endeavors is rooted in pragmatism—a more stable, longer term solution and alternative to the violent overthrowing of incumbent authoritarian regimes.<sup>34</sup> Judging from the outcomes of the Arab Spring, this kind of pragmatism has been put to the test and has proven well-founded. Although she was considered a pure idealist during her years of house arrest as the leader of then military-ruled Myanmar's pro-democracy movement, Daw Suu has displayed political shrewdness even when confronted with human rights crises. Cautious not to alienate her Bamar Buddhist voters and further fuel growing nationalist sentiments and risk political instability, she has—to the dismay of the international community—remained relatively silent on the conflict in Rakhine State. She has also foregone the chance to prosecute members of the former military junta for alleged war crimes and human rights violations, choosing instead to maintain political stability.<sup>35</sup>

## Realists, but Idealists Too

These three powerful women have proven to be realists when the need arises, but do they also still hold idealist values? They do. They can also be considered idealists because of their individual values and those of their supporters.

Hillary Clinton has one idealistic cause that she has publicly promoted since her college student days at Wellesley and on which she has built a strong political platform and voter base – gender equality. She may be guilty of changing her mind on several other issues, but she has always championed the cause of women, without fail in every capacity. Clinton's emerged as a champion of women during her time as First Lady with the Beijing Declaration at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, where she famously declared that “human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights” and helped spur the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 which officially recognized the role of women in issues of peace and security.<sup>36</sup> The declaration was both bold and controversial, as it was made in Beijing at a time when the government of China was restricting women's autonomy and reproductive rights with their “one child” policy.

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<sup>34</sup> Bose, S. (2012, January 23). What Suu Kyi's Choice. *Aljazeera*. Retrieved at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/01/20121228391338848.html>

<sup>35</sup> Panduwawala, T. (2016, January 5). The Realism of Aung San Suu Kyi. *Foreign Policy Association Blog*. Retrieved at <http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2016/01/05/the-realism-of-aung-san-suu-kyi/>

<sup>36</sup> Nossel, S. (2016, March/April). A Feminist Foreign Policy. [Review of the book *The Hillary Doctrine: Sex and American Foreign Policy*, by V. M. Hudson & P. Leidl]. *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, March/April Issue.

As Secretary of State under President Obama, Clinton was more cautious about openly promoting gender equality in conservative countries. However, her position did not deter her from incorporating women's rights and equality into as many aspects of American foreign policymaking as possible, proclaiming that it was less a matter of morality and more of national security. To Clinton, it was clear that the violation of women's rights was an indication of authoritarianism, and an authoritarian state was a threat to America's security. After her one term as Secretary of State, gender mainstreaming<sup>37</sup> in American foreign policy had been successfully achieved. Despite her upsetting loss in the election, Clinton's presidential campaign against conservative Donald Trump amplified her rallying cry for women's rights and cemented her status as the champion of women everywhere, winning over liberal female voters in America.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, despite her cool pragmatism, can also be seen as an idealist. The fact that she does not boldly proclaim her ideals may have more to do with her upbringing and Germany's disdain for fiery rhetoric because of its history of Nazism and less to do with the Chancellor's lack of political ideals.<sup>38</sup> Many people were surprised when the strong-woman of Europe decided on an "open door" policy for refugees fleeing armed conflict in Syria. Yet, it makes sense that someone who lived thirty-five years trapped behind walls in East Germany would cherish freedom of movement and freedom from totalitarianism. Her most recent refugee policy focused on limiting the influx of refugees into Germany while still continuing to accept them within the EU by redistributing them to other member states.<sup>39</sup> Despite a surge in populist movements both in Germany and in the rest of Europe, Merkel is gearing up for election for a fourth term as Chancellor and intends to continue to "uphold Europe's values" of solidarity and human rights for all.<sup>40</sup>

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel laureate, winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for her work defending human rights, and author of *Freedom from Fear*, *Voice of Hope*, and *Letters from Burma*, is undoubtedly an idealist at heart.<sup>41</sup> Despite her insistence that her non-violent approach to democratization was founded in pragmatism—or "principled pragmatism" as she calls it—and the realism that she occasionally practices as a politician, she maintains her idealistic vision of

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<sup>37</sup> UN WOMEN. (2002). *Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview*. New York: United Nations.

<sup>38</sup> Vick, K. (2015, December). Person of the Year: Chancellor of the Free World. *TIME*. Retrieved at <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2015-angela-merkel/>

<sup>39</sup> The Economist. (2015, October 24). Refugee Realpolitik. *The Economist*. Retrieved at <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21676780-angela-merkels-response-migrant-crisis-less-emotional-and-more-risky-it>

<sup>40</sup> Dempsey, J. (2016, November 21). Merkel's Burden. *Carnegie Europe*. Retrieved at <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/66210>

<sup>41</sup> Retrieved at [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1991/kyi-bio.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1991/kyi-bio.html)

democracy building in Myanmar. Her campaign priority of nationwide peace and reconciliation was put into action six months after the NLD government came to power. While the first move toward nationwide peace was not perfect, it was a momentous occasion for the new government and a materialization of the Nobel laureate's ideals.<sup>42</sup> Daw Suu's hard choices in playing politics may have stopped the international community's putting her on a saintly pedestal, but to an overwhelming number of her fellow citizens she remains an icon of democracy and represents hope for a better future.

## Soft Power Politics and Human Development in a Patriarchal Society

Is the practice of idealistic realism, politics that are idealistic in mission but pragmatic in execution, exclusive to women? It is not. However, women in politics can at times gravitate towards soft power politics and they tend to prioritize human development in governance more than their male peers do. Men still dominate politics, after all,<sup>43</sup> and their status as the more privileged gender in patriarchal society grants them the luxury to give less priority to human development less priority, which encompasses issues that have the most negative impact on women.<sup>44</sup>

Even in the post-Cold War era, the patriarchal warrior state continues to exist. The patriarchal societal construct has been present since the dawn of civilization. The very concept of nations was built upon it. Men went to war and ruled<sup>45</sup> and now men go to war and run for political office.<sup>46</sup> The patriarchy, over time, established a male/female dichotomy and along with it public/private, state/family, and work/home dichotomies which still act as barriers for women already in politics or entering politics.<sup>47</sup> International politics, by consequence, is gendered and patriarchal in nature. It was after all, constructed by and remains the domain of men. Francis Fukuyama has argued that

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<sup>42</sup>Ei Ei Toe Lwin. (2016, September 5). Not Without Wrinkles, Peace Conference Lauded for Taking Landmark 'First Steps'. *The Myanmar Times*. Retrieved at <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/22313-not-without-wrinkles-peace-conference-lauded-for-taking-landmark-first-steps.html>

<sup>43</sup>UN WOMEN. (August 2016). Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation. Retrieved from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>- accessed on 6 November 2016.

<sup>44</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2000). Women's Political Participation and Good Governance – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges.

<sup>45</sup>Rajan, V.G.J. (2013). Introduction – Women and the Nation's Narrative: From Imaginations of Femininity to Violence Against Women. *Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies*. Vol. 4, No.2,

<sup>46</sup>Blanchard, E.M. (2014, Fall/Winter). Rethinking International Security: Masculinity in World Politics. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*. Vol XXI Issue I.

<sup>47</sup> Erika, S. (1986). Patriarchy and the State. *Australian Journal of Law and Society*. Vol.3. 53-62.

realist theorists who surmise that the goal of states is to maximize power are not “describing a universal human characteristic” but rather “portraying the behavior of states run by men.”<sup>48</sup> Fukuyama goes so far as to even argue that the “violent and aggressive tendencies of men have to be controlled” through international norms and arrangements and has promoted the “feminization” of world politics for a more stable global community, i.e. arguing that global politics with traditionally “feminine” characteristics of less aggression and more soft power persuasion are a safer way to maintain world peace. It is important to note here that by defining these characteristics as “feminine”, Fukuyama may be suggesting that women, and by consequence female politicians, inherently possess traits that are idealistic in nature.

However, one must keep in mind that Fukuyama’s argument, although it supports increased women’s participation in politics and their supposedly inherent idealism, can reduce men and women to their biological identities without taking social conditioning by patriarchal society—namely socially and culturally shaped gender norms<sup>49</sup>—into consideration as a culprit of perpetuating those very “aggressive tendencies” that he claims are natural male characteristics.

Without diverging into a nature versus nurture debate or straying into a discussion of the patriarchy, we can safely conclude that women in politics face a different set of challenges than men do and consequently may have different approaches and priorities. Some of these priorities can be identified as idealist because they include human development issues,<sup>50</sup> thus further supporting the argument that female politicians, no matter how realist they claim to be or are considered to be, do espouse idealist values.

Idealist values include gender equality; individuals or groups normally seek political representation to improve the status of the demographics to which they belong, as in the case of Hillary Clinton’s women’s rights agenda. Interestingly, Angela Merkel’s first political post was that of Minister for Women and Youth, a post that she did not want and that held little political weight.<sup>51</sup> This is not mentioned here to prove that Merkel is a strong proponent of women’s rights, but rather to point

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<sup>48</sup> Fukuyama, F. (1998, September-October). Women and the Evolution of World Politics. *Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 77 No.5. 24-40.

<sup>49</sup> Blanchard, E.M. (2014, Fall/Winter). Rethinking International Security: Masculinity in World Politics. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*. Vol XXI Issue I.

<sup>50</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2000). Women’s Political Participation and Good Governance – 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges.

<sup>51</sup> Vick, K. (2015, December). Person of the Year: Chancellor of the Free World. *TIME*. Retrieved at <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2015-angela-merkel/>

out an instance of a female politician being given an idealist political post because male politicians often place little importance on human development issues. In the case of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the narrative of feminine idealism versus the patriarchy could not be more obvious. Throughout the years of military rule in Myanmar, and even now, it has been Daw Suu against the military junta—a stark picture of idealism against typical realpolitik authoritarianism.

Moreover, non-democratic countries are often ruled by authoritarian regimes, which tend to be primarily composed of macho strong men who use force and other means of intimidation to keep dissidence in check. Thus, it can be argued that women politicians are more prevalent in democratic countries. Moreover, democracies typically prioritize human development as a longer-term solution for national development in lieu of the centralized decision making preferred by authoritarian regimes. The corollary then is that women politicians, when participating in democratic governments, may promote the idealist values of soft power in policymaking and prioritize human development issues such as gender equality, poverty alleviation, education, etc. in governance,

## Conclusion

If having half the world's population equally represented in government is not adequate reason to promote women's participation in politics, one could argue that the benefits of the kind of idealistic realism practiced by many female politicians' provide a good reason for getting more women in political leadership.

The year 2016 has unfortunately been the year of the extreme right or "alternative right," which some, not without good reason, consider to be fascism under the guise of populism. The rise of this movement across Europe and in the U.S. has taken many by surprise. Yet, when one analyses the growing economic and social insecurities among citizens on which these extremists prey, it does not come as a shock that certain segments of the population support them—particularly in politically polarized countries.

That being said, there is no moral argument to be made in support of the extreme right anywhere. To make one would be to further fuel bigotry on a social level and nationalism and xenophobia on a political level. At one point in history, nationalist fervor plagued several powerful countries, leading to the catastrophic outbreak of the Second World War. Surely, it would be far-fetched and overly dramatic to assume that a similar event could occur. However, to give in to extreme right

movements built on distorted, misinterpreted views of conservative ideals and turn the clock of social progressivism back decades does not bode well for the future.

Extreme right movements cannot be countered with similar-right wing movements based on Machiavellian ideals. Nor can they be combated through idealism alone. Certainly, the war against extremism must be an ideological one, but its battles must also be realistic and pragmatic. On the one hand there must be an appeal to the inherent goodness of human beings through ideology, while on the other hand the aggressive tendencies of extremists – be they terrorists or vigilantes, domestic or international – must be contained using hard security measures. This battle against the rising tide of extremism must be where the idealistic realism of women political leaders fight the good fight. Since there is some evidence that women politicians are more likely to hold an idealistic realist ideology in governance, and some have been practicing idealistic realism with considerable degrees of success—including the three political leaders highlighted in this paper—more women must be encouraged and supported in pursuing political leadership roles.

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