

Kouvo, Sari. University of Gothenburg. *An Alarm Clock from the 1940s? Analysing Women, Peace and Security and the Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy through the Lens of Elin Wägner.*

## **An Alarm Clock from the 1940s? Analysing Women, Peace and Security and the Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy through the Lens of Elin Wägner**

### Abstract

In 1941, Elin Wägner, a Swedish journalist, author and activist, published *Väckarklocka* (Eng. *Alarm clock*). *Väckarklocka* is best described as a collection of personal and political essays that challenge patriarchy, the war machinery and our increasing distance from food production, and that seek to open a road towards new forms of lived and heartfelt activism for troubled times. Wägner, influential in her times, provides important lessons for our times, including against the professionalization of activism and the neat categorisation of struggles under thematic headings of ‘women, peace and security’, ‘eradication of conflict-related sexual violence’, ‘women and peace mediation’ or ‘women and climate change’.

With the help of the work of Wägner, this paper will critically discuss, on the one hand, the women, peace and security agenda and, on the other hand, the Feminist Foreign Policy launched by the previous Swedish government. It will show that both policies have paid a heavy price for their ‘success’, as both policies have failed to engage with the political and economic interests of the defence industry and in the case of the Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy also with the gendered and environmental consequences of extractive industries. Taking a cup half-empty approach to the women, peace and security agenda and the Feminist Foreign Policy, this author argues that these policies have mainly been successful attempts to co-opt and domesticate feminist activism. That is, the policies have ensured that feminists and gender advisers are kept busy with the procedural aspects of ensuring women’s participation and drafting gender mainstreaming guidelines, but also making sure that they do not critically engage the macro-level political decisions that lead to war or with the massive growth of international arms’ sales (close to 100% increase since 2001).

This paper is presented as part of a nascent inter-disciplinary initiative that under the working title ‘Elin’s Era’ seeks to challenge and reframe some of the ‘inevitables’ of contemporary international politics and law.

### Bio

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Sari is assistant professor in international law at Gothenburg university, co-director of the Afghanistan Analysts Network and one of the initiators of the Elin’s Era platform. Sari has previously worked as Policy Officer for the European External Action Service, Head of Program at the International Centre for Transitional Justice, researcher at Amnesty International and Special Adviser to the EU Special Representative for Afghanistan. She had held visiting scholarships or lectured at several universities, including Birkbeck university, Kent university, Vrije Universiteit Brussels, NATO Defense College in Rome, Australian National University and Åbo Academy. Sari has published extensively on Afghanistan, international law and gender-related subjects. Sari is originally from Finland, but currently based in Brussels in Belgium.

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