



Nothing to fear but fear itself

In today's U.S. news coverage, entertainment media, literature, and politics, we're told time and again that we are surrounded by threats to our security. An endless parade of stories feature people who supposedly wish us harm, with immigrants, "criminals" (mostly presented as people of color), and "extremists" (mostly presented as Muslims) lined up to threaten "our" way of life. In the flawed logic that supports our militarized society, the needed responses to these "threats" are clear: more fences, more guards, harsher policing, increased military spending and military intervention.

This threat narrative has been used to justify a host of unsound practices throughout our society—and we all pay the consequences. Our personal lives are increasingly isolated and influenced by fear. Communities of color and poor communities are policed as if under occupation, not part of a democratic nation. Our justice systems reinforce white supremacy and justify violence against people of color, while the public ignores the cost and continues to reward public servants who compete to appear "tough on crime." The fruits of militarism show up in our nation's budget priorities, as well, where a lion's share of our nation's wealth is invested in weapons systems, troops, and so-called Homeland Security, with little left for developing human potential. Our engagement with the broader world is also overwhelmingly militarised, mostly comprised of military and security intervention or assistance.

All of this harmful waste is justified by an argument that it is necessary to make us more secure. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), with almost a century's experience addressing the roots of violence, poverty, and oppression worldwide, has always rejected this approach to security. And now, in the early phase of a newly effective movement for civil and human rights, AFSC is playing a vital role in revealing and challenging militaristic approaches that actually undermine security—at disproportionate cost to the lives and rights of people of color and oppressed communities globally.

To counter the flawed logic of militarism, AFSC has brought forward a framework called shared security. The concept of shared security was first developed in partnership with the FCNL in the context of rethinking U.S. foreign policy. But the principles can just as easily provide a new blueprint for our individual, community, economic, and national security needs.

Shared security is built on four core principles, each of which is vital to true, sustainable, and shared security or well-being:

- **Commitment to building peaceful and just ends through peaceful and just means.** At every level of society, we should pursue approaches that create more of what we want to reap. At the root of this approach is a concept that runs through virtually every world religion and societal code as variations on the “golden rule”—treat others as you wish to be treated. Societies built on violence reap more of the same.
- **Shared access to fair and accountable public institutions and supports.** Our electoral, judicial, educational, health, public safety, and other shared systems should be designed to protect and welcome those most vulnerable, not just those who are most vocal and powerful.
- **Commitment to healing the breach caused by a destructive act.** Whether an act of violence is perpetrated by a person, group, or state, steps need to be taken to ensure that root causes and impacts are addressed to prevent repeated violence and destruction. Restorative approaches to justice have been proven more effective than our current punitive, retributive approaches.
- **Recognition of our shared communities, regions, and planet.** We’re all affected by degradation of our shared environment, infrastructure, and social systems in today’s increasingly interconnected world. We are all in it together, and no one can afford to act for their own interests alone.

Can a “shared security” approach work in the real world?

These principles, when put into action, have achieved demonstrated success across the world for generations. From the successful integration of traditional peacemaking into the Navajo court system to the lasting effects of the Marshall Plan, these concepts are well proven as effective grounds for reducing conflict and ending cycles of violence. Studies on nonviolent movements, reconciliation, criminal justice, and the lasting effects of inequality show the cost of militarized approaches and the long-term value of pursuing shared security.

Militarized thinking—with clear “good guys” triumphing over “bad guys” through decisive violence—runs deep in our society, but the weakness of this model is getting more and more attention. We are in a moment where the human and financial costs of militarized policing; harsh, xenophobic immigration practices; and over a decade of military action against ‘extremists’ are readily apparent.

Change is possible. It’s time to tell a new story about violent conflict, militarized policing, and the world we all belong to. Our shared security depends on it.

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