



## Breaking the Addiction to Weapons and War

By Diana Ohlbaum



At FCNL's 2019 Annual Meeting, I asked the following: "Why is the U.S. government so reliant on the use of threats, coercion, and military force around the globe, and why can't our policymakers admit it's not working? Why are we so stuck in this way of relating to the world, and what do we have to do to change it?"

Without understanding what motivates U.S. policymakers to seek global military domination, we will have trouble convincing them to abandon this counterproductive and morally repugnant course.

Like addicts, foreign policy elites resort to the drug of violence to avoid dealing with the fundamental causes of conflict and end up making the situation far worse. They won't be ready to hear our policy solutions until they admit they have a problem.

Over the past year, FCNL has been working with the Center for International Policy, a progressive research and advocacy organization, to understand why the U.S. foreign policy establishment clings so stubbornly to a

course that is so harmful to so many people, particularly people of color.

With the support of several foundations and individual donors, we convened a high-level working group that met virtually for two hours, twice a month, for six months, from October 2020 through April 2021.

The diverse group included a cross-section of advocates, activists, organizers, faith community leaders, and scholars in the fields of U.S. foreign policy and national security; racial, economic, and environmental justice; peacebuilding; migration; labor; human rights; feminism; and constitutional law. From our various perches, we explored the underlying reasons for such an aggressive, bullying approach to the world.

What we found may come as little surprise to many: there are deep-rooted economic, political, and ideological forces that are very difficult to dislodge and disentangle.

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The Washington, D.C., Advocacy Team gathers in front of the White House to call for repeal of the 2002 AUMF. Photo: Matthew D'Agostino/FCNL.

## Breaking the Addiction *(from page 1)*

On the economic side, there are the millions of jobs—some in practically every congressional district—that depend on the Pentagon and its contractors. The arms industry and military installations not only provide employment that can be highly lucrative, often with union protection and good benefits, but also make investments that can be lifelines for local economies.

Corporate welfare through the Pentagon budget is further entrenched by political contributions and lobbying, which are subject to few limitations and minimal transparency. Given the vast racial wealth gap and the commanding role of money in U.S. politics, it is extremely difficult for those who are most harmed by a bloated Pentagon budget and forever wars to challenge the overwhelmingly white power structure and its revolving door of influence-peddling.

The political forces are equally daunting. Institutions that have long been considered essential to the functioning of American democracy are, in fact, responsible for many of its failings. The Senate, which gives every state two votes regardless of population, privileges rural states with largely white populations over larger and more ethnically and racially diverse states.

To make matters worse, the filibuster allows a minority of these small states to dictate or impede nationwide legislative and policy decisions. The Electoral College, which was designed to boost the weight of slaveholding southern states, has twice in recent years resulted in the election of presidents who lost the popular vote. Through the mushrooming efforts in nearly every state to suppress Black, Latino/a, Native American, and other voters, our system prevents massive numbers of voices from being heard.

Finally, and in some ways most importantly, most white Americans and many others accept the notion that the United States has the right, the responsibility, and the power to set the rules for everyone else. They hold America to different standards than other countries, ascribing only good intentions to U.S. nuclear threats, economic coercion, shows of force, and armed invasion, while assuming the worst motives in the actions of others.

This sense of American exceptionalism and national superiority is based on the poisonous belief, often



*The cornerstones of FCNL's mission are the We Seeks. They are literally written in stone on Capitol Hill outside of the office at 245 C Street.*

subconscious, that American lives—and specifically white lives—are more valuable than others. And it relies on the militarist myth that violence is both necessary and effective as a tool of foreign policy.

Our group had little difficulty developing a vision for a human-centered U.S. foreign policy rooted in peaceful cooperation, global solidarity, and adherence to international law. But we struggled with finding ways to break through the barriers that keep policymakers hooked on the status quo.

Ultimately, we agreed that the path forward starts with unmasking the false narratives about U.S. conduct and acknowledging our country's history of genocide, slavery, and imperialist expansion.

It requires showing that there are more ethical and more effective ways to address the real challenges that face our nation. It demands that we connect with campaigns and movements around the country and around the globe, using our combined power to seek positive change.

In the end, this kind of long-term, large-scale paradigm change will come not from political elites or Washington insiders, but from a higher power: a broad groundswell of ordinary people who take extraordinary action to shift our country to a more peaceful, just, and sustainable course.

*Diana Ohlbaum is FCNL's senior strategist and legislative director for foreign policy. The report *Dismantling the Racism-Militarism Paradigm* by Diana Ohlbaum and Salih Booker will be available online in September at [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org).*

# How Can Quakers Dismantle the Racism-Militarism Paradigm?



By Diane Randall

**"Take heed, dear Friends,  
to the promptings of love  
and truth in your hearts."  
— George Fox, 1656**

For many of us who are Quakers, we have held the peace testimony as an article of faith. It is a basic tenet of our approach to the world—to shun violent conflict and war, to pursue peace, and to order our lives based on the promptings of love and truth in our hearts.

It's not only Quakers or the historic peace churches that shun war. We are joined by millions of people who see the devastation of war and violence and the fallacies of the very foundation of militarism that perpetuates the myth of military might as security.

Quakers also practice a testimony of equality—to answer that of God in every person. We shun racism, antisemitism, sexism, and homophobia. Many of us who are European-Americans struggle to see how white supremacy is baked into our society—into policies that affect our health, education, housing, and public safety and the U.S. approach to international policy.

As Quakers, as people of a faith, how do we regard the racism-militarism paradigm that undergirds our country's foreign and domestic policies? Is this a spiritual concern or an activist concern? How have we adapted our lives in ways that accept militarism and tolerate racism?

Over the past year, as I participated in the discussion group on Dismantling the Racism-Militarism Paradigm

*White, pro-gun activists and Boogaloo-affiliated militia members gathered in Richmond, VA, on January 18, 2021, for a pro-gun rally.  
Photo: Brian Feinzimer/FCNL.*



project, the idea of prophetic witness was foremost in my mind. It was not a religious or spiritual discussion group—even though some of us are led by faith to confront these twin evils.

But the discussions opened up truths about our history, systems, and the stories we perpetuate about what makes us secure. Yet the reality of the pandemic, climate change, and violence, which wreak havoc among people, demonstrates a different reality of security.

We are in a time when each one of us is challenged with naming and confronting the broken social, political, and economic systems that deny basic humanity and that deny God's love for every human being.

The paper Dismantling the Racism-Militarism Paradigm by Diana Ohlbaum and Salih Booker is a result of the dynamic discussions among the dozen people on the front lines of confronting militarism and racism.

It offers a prophetic call to confront the root causes of war, policing, immigration policies, and environmental policies. It questions the narrative of security and the trust and acceptance our society and political system has consented to.

These are not only policy or political problems looking for solutions, but they must also be considered and

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# Tax Credits Keep Families Out of Poverty

By Kristen Archer



As Congress negotiates economic recovery legislation, the country is presented with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the economy and address the systemic social inequities laid bare by the Covid-19 pandemic. FCNL advocates are focused on two tax programs that have prevented millions of people—especially in communities of color and other vulnerable groups—from falling into poverty.

Food justice and anti-hunger activist Barbie Izquierdo understands the value of programs like the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). She is a well-known voice for food justice, regularly speaking at workshops and conferences, with top media outlets, and even at the White House.

Yet, despite all these and despite her work with Hunger Free America, Barbie says she “would still come home to an empty fridge.”

Tax credits like the EITC remain one of her primary barriers from falling back into poverty, especially while raising her 14- and 16-year-old children as a single mother.

“[These programs] help you catch up, and it alleviates some of the burden of being reminded that you're poor. They've definitely helped me on many occasions,” said Barbie. “I'm someone who has been through domestic violence. So a lot of my EITC credits have gone towards moving when I've had to run away. Who knows if I would be here today if I didn't have that help?”

Outside of Social Security, the EITC and CTC prevent more people from falling into poverty than any other federal program. Despite their tremendous value, these tax credits are at constant risk of being reduced or dismantled since Congress has not made them permanent.

Lifting oneself out of poverty is not a one-time, clear-cut occurrence. Nor can it be trivialized as a “bootstrap” story. It can be a murky, extended process riddled with challenges and social stigma.

Barbie started gaining public attention more than ten years ago after taking her son several times to the emergency room. He had vision problems caused by the

lack of heat in their Philadelphia home. A meeting with a social worker led her to begin speaking publicly about her and her children's experience living in poverty.

In 2013, Barbie shared her story in the film *A Place at the Table*. The documentary exposed the widespread, interconnected, and little-understood implications of hunger and poverty in the United States—and spotlighted time-tested, practical solutions like the EITC, CTC, and other federal programs.

Without these programs, falling back into poverty is an ever-present threat, especially when combined with new challenges. Barbie recently delivered a keynote speech for which she was paid her largest honorarium to date. Before the check even hit her bank account, \$5,000 of her wages were garnished by the university she was enrolled in. Barbie left an abusive relationship earlier this year, and her ex did not forward her mail. She was unaware that this financial hit was coming.

Around the same time, another university department offered Barbie \$250 to speak at an event, oblivious to what she had just experienced.

This type of ironic tragedy is startlingly familiar to thousands of people like Barbie.

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Barbie Izquierdo on the “Faith Advocacy to Feed the Hungry” panel at FCNL Annual Meeting 2018. Photo: Jennifer Domenick/FCNL.

# Viewpoint: Failing to Connect Racism with Militarism



By Khury Petersen-Smith

Last year's Black-led uprisings in response to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others, forced a reckoning with deep, systemic racism. The resulting conversation was incendiary, involving an interrogation of racism in U.S. history—including the long overdue toppling of Confederate statues—and calls to defund and abolish police departments.

It was in this context that a group of researchers, advocates, organizers, and scholars came together for the Dismantling Racism and Militarism Working Group (DRMWG). The group, which was convened by FCNL and the Center for International Policy, included people with a range of areas of focus—U.S. wars, the oppression of immigrants, and economic inequality among them.

The group's purpose was not only to identify linkages between these injustices, but to find the subterranean roots underlying the relationship between racism and militarism—and their countless outgrowths.



*The linkages between U.S. policy abroad and domestic policy came into public focus during protests in 2020. Photo: Eric Bond/FCNL.*

The working group made an important intervention. Despite the expansive national discussion about racism, there has been too little attention to the connections between racism and militarism. This is especially true as it pertains to the many U.S. historic and contemporary wars. Indeed, perhaps the most prevalent critique of the militarization of U.S. police departments is that armored personnel carriers and officers in camouflage carrying automatic weapons are inappropriate for American cities.

This carries an acceptance—however tacit—that this kind of violence does belong in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, and other places around the world where the U.S. wields military power directly or through allies. That notion is a perfect example of the intersection of racism and militarism.

The mainstream conversation's failure to connect racism with the fullness of militarism is not accidental.

When Black Lives Matter protests raged across the country last year, then-president Trump floated the idea of deploying large numbers of troops to cities in response. His defense secretary, Mark Esper, vocally opposed the plan, along with a number of retired generals.

Seeing the crisis of credibility afflicting policing, these leaders made sure to prevent the image of the military from being contaminated in a national reckoning with racism by redrawing a hard line between the police and the military, between domestic and foreign policy.

The working group committed to months of critical discussion to identify the nature of the combination of racism and militarism—why it is so strong—and pathways to ending it. The effort included organizers from groups like 350.org and the anti-war veterans organization Common Defense. It involved activists from projects like the Poor People's Campaign and Black Alliance for Just Immigration. It also included analysts from places like the Costs of War Project, the Institute for Policy Studies, and Justice is Global.

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## Racism-Militarism Paradigm (from page 3)

confronted as moral, ethical, spiritual questions for each of us and for us as Friends.

Many Friends are activists, compelled by injustice to act for justice, motivated by devastating climate change to act for carbon reduction and environmental protections. This is how FCNL was founded—Friends gathered to create an organization to have a voice with Congress.

Today, 78 years later, we consistently use our voice to call on Congress to take steps to end militarism and racism—both in our domestic and foreign policies.

It was in an April 1967 sermon that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called us to see the triple

evils of racism, militarism, and materialism. He called for our country to be transformed “from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society.”

## We call on Congress to take steps to end militarism and racism.

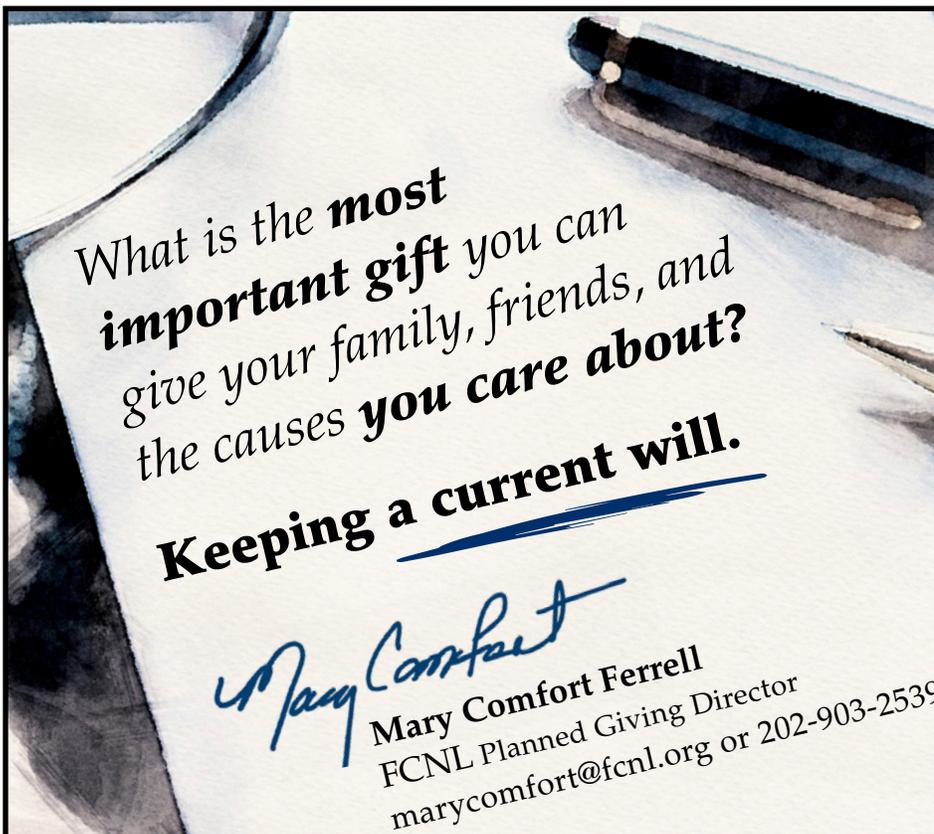
The call continues to be echoed today by the Poor People’s Campaign—led by Rev. William Barber and Rev. Liz Theoharis. The campaign is engaging thousands of people across the country in public witness for a moral revival, a Third Reconstruction.

We consistently ask ourselves: what more can we do? How can we prompt a bigger conversation

about dismantling the racism-militarism paradigm? We ask the FCNL community to join us and our colleagues who have renewed this prophetic call.

Consider the discussion paper, to be released in September, in your meeting or church. Engage in a discussion with community groups. Consider our own narrative for security and how we can change the narrative to dismantle the systems that do not put all of God’s humanity first.

*Diane Randall is FCNL general secretary.* 



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**Tax Credits** (from page 4)

“I have been battling the stigma that comes with people who use assistance programs and fighting the narratives about how people who benefit are stealing from the system, don't want to work, or are lazy,” she said.

Barbie said that by actually making these programs permanent and making them accessible, people like her will work hard to advance themselves and become great advocates for the community.

“For the past 13 years, I've not only tried to give a better quality of life to my children, after everything that we've endured, but more so tried to make sure that people in my community aren't going through the same things.

“If there are any budget cuts to any programs that will affect them, I help to raise awareness and advocate on those issues and continue to battle stigma.”

*Barbie Izquierdo spoke during the 2018 Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute. Kristen Archer is a freelance writer for FCNL. Tell your members of Congress to make Child Tax and Earned Income Tax credits permanent at [www.fcnl.org/justrecovery](http://www.fcnl.org/justrecovery).*

**Failing to** (from page 5)

Meeting bi-weekly from October 2020 through April 2021, participants were able to overcome the distance of gathering remotely. With expert facilitation, they got to know each other and dove deep, analytically, in ways that led to the growth in understanding of all involved.

Everyone involved and every organization represented in the effort are in the thick of anti-racist work and demilitarization. Members of the working group are taking the learning and richness from the gathering into all of their projects.

Moreover, the working group has produced a network of people with some shared understandings and working relationships. With the need for discussion and action to uproot racism and demilitarize only becoming more urgent, the Dismantling Racism and Militarism Working Group is an important contribution. Its full impact can only be gauged in the coming months and years.

*Khury Petersen-Smith is the Michael Ratner Middle East Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. He participated in the Dismantling Racism and Militarism Working Group.*

A Virtual Gathering » November 17–21, 2021

November 17–21, the FCNL community will **gather online** to advocate for rebuilding the U.S. economy to put **children and families at the center.**

We will reflect on the past year of **persistent work** in the face of a global pandemic.

We will celebrate Diane Randall's **decade of service** as FCNL General Secretary and what we have **achieved together.**



Choose **Hope.** Work for **Justice.**

**REGISTER NOW!**  
[fcnl.org/annualmeeting](http://fcnl.org/annualmeeting)

# Q&A: Noticing Patterns of Oppression and Faithfulness

With Polly Attwood and Becky Jones

**Q: Tell me about the New England Yearly Meeting's (NEYM) Noticing Patterns Working Group and the practices you've developed.**

**PA:** We're under a particular charge from the yearly meeting: to develop practices for appointing people to observe, name, and reflect back patterns [of oppression] and to grow the capacity of the yearly meeting to engage that process.

**BJ:** As we're meeting, we're checking in to see if we're being faithful in our practices and doing anything that's exclusionary. We've come up with workshops and developed a curriculum.

**Q: What are some examples of how you've seen these practices change people and communities?**

**BJ:** Our initial charge was to be noticing patterns of oppression. Really early on, we [realized] we have to name what we're moving into.

**PA:** We want to be lifting up the patterns of faithfulness as well. For example, lifting up the faithfulness of our clerk, who is willing to model mistake-making; to be invited to see a pattern while he's clerking a business meeting; and then to be able to acknowledge it, make a clear apology, and learn from it.

**BJ:** Over the years, I have seen that more people are willing to name something and to stop.

**Q: What connections do you see between internal anti-oppressive practice and external anti-oppressive activism?**

**PA:** Quakers are involved in a lot of different activist spaces. If I have not thought about the ways in which my identities matter, I'm going to bring that into that space. It's not about my needing to be perfect, but if I'm not understanding assumptions or patterns at play, I'm going to do harm when in those spaces. And I'm not going to be able to leverage my power because I'm not actually bringing my full self. If all I'm doing is bringing my unexamined patterns, that's not my full self, that's my socially conditioned self.

**Q: What are some obstacles you've encountered engaging Friends in the work of noticing patterns?**

**BJ:** For shorthand, I'd say white fragility. The unwillingness to listen, to take in, to hold the possibility that I might not have all the answers yet or that I might have some room to grow ends up harming one another.

**PA:** There are patterns of people from dominant identities still not valuing the experiences that people from marginalized identities express. There's that doubt, or different versions of "prove it." There's also a lot of confusion that we're judging people individually in this practice.

**Q: What does progress toward a transformed, more faithful, more inclusive Religious Society of Friends look like to you?**

**BJ:** We'd be naming more faithfulness while being honest about the patterns of oppression we're still enacting. And it would be a community of mutually held accountability, not just a few people naming patterns. And "we" would mean everybody.

**PA:** There are some markers of change for me—that we don't just say "you are welcome" but that we do things to include you and value all parts of who you are. We can pay attention to what people of different identities need. How are we willing to change to make this a place you want to be, that is a faithful community for you? We both came into Quaker spaces and found a sense of being at home. I want more people to feel that.



*Polly Attwood and Becky Jones are members of the New England Yearly Meeting's Noticing Patterns Working Group ([www.neym.org](http://www.neym.org)). Interview by Bobby Trice. *