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Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy

DISCUSSION GUIDE — MAY 2022

By Diana Ohlbaum

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Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy

DISCUSSION GUIDE — MAY 2022

WRITTEN BY

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Photo by Eric Bond/FCNL

“To ignore evil is
to become an
accomplice to it.”

– Martin Luther King Jr.

Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?



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**“I am no longer accepting the
things I cannot change.
I am changing the things
I cannot accept.”**

– Angela Davis



Introduction

Many people think U.S. foreign policy is one of those things they can't change and, therefore, can safely ignore. But we are all impacted in different ways and to different degrees by endless wars, excessive Pentagon spending, a growing climate crisis, global pandemics, and systemic racism. All of these are exacerbated by the role the United States plays in the world. And the reason the U.S. role hasn't changed is that most of us tend to ignore it or accept it.

A more ethical and effective U.S. approach to the world will only be possible if an informed, organized, and vocal multitude of Americans demands it. Elected leaders need to feel strong and persistent pressure from their constituents to offset the powerful political and economic incentives to perpetuate the status quo.

This guide is designed to be used in conjunction with the discussion paper [Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy](#). By holding small group discussions about the issues raised in that paper, ordinary Americans can expand awareness of the harmful impacts of current U.S. foreign policy and the need for a more just and peaceful alternative. Working together at the local level, we can start building a groundswell for change.

Elected leaders need to feel strong and persistent pressure from their constituents

Start building a groundswell for change.

How to Organize a Dialogue

Small group discussions are a good way to examine and challenge the beliefs and assumptions we all hold about how the world works and our role in it, individually and collectively. This section provides recommendations for how to organize and facilitate a discussion group.

Getting started

Before beginning a small group discussion, **it may be helpful to organize a preliminary workshop or seminar to introduce the subject matter.** Your FCNL Advocacy Team, Quaker Yearly Meeting or other faith congregation, community center, campus organization, social club, or other gathering may be willing to host such a session.

Who should be included?

If you began with a workshop or seminar, it should be easy to poll the attendees to see who would like to continue discussing these issues. **The ideal size of a discussion group is 6-8 people:** small enough to get to know each other and give everyone a chance to speak, large enough to avoid putting anyone on the spot. Larger groups can still have good discussions, but participants may have a harder time opening up or feeling connected. If more than ten people are interested in participating in discussions, you can split them into multiple groups.

Another way of assembling a group is to start by inviting one or two friends, who each invite one or two of their own acquaintances, and so forth. In this virtual era, it's easy to bring people together through social media platforms.

It's not necessary that everyone knows each other at first—in fact, it's better to reach beyond familiar circles—but you may want to **start with people who are concerned about racism and militarism** or who have been politically active in your community. This discussion is probably not the place to begin with individuals who are diametrically opposed to your views and with whom you share little agreement on basic facts and principles.

Seek to **include participants who have directly experienced the harms of racism and militarism** and can draw clear connections between domestic and foreign policy. However, it's important not to pressure anyone to tell their personal stories and not to use anyone else's story without their explicit permission.

Your discussions will be more meaningful and productive if they are held among the same group of people each time.

People who have been directly affected by U.S. foreign policy—including veterans, refugees, nuclear downwinders, war resisters, survivors of state-supported violence—must be asked for their policy views and recommendations, not just their stories.

Ideally, you will establish a set of expectations up front about how often, for how long, where, and how the group will meet, and participants will commit to returning for multiple sessions. Your discussions will be more meaningful and productive if they are held among the **same group of people each time**, rather than a constantly changing set of participants.

How should the discussions be structured?

Most of us are familiar with the teacher-pupil or speaker-audience model in which an expert seeks to impart knowledge to the listeners. That’s not what we want here.

Sadly, foreign policy insiders—sometimes referred to as “The Blob”—have led our country down a path of folly for many decades. Change begins by thinking for ourselves.

Participants should be encouraged to **contribute their own ideas and experiences and explore their own values and assumptions**. People are more likely to do the deep thinking and self-examination if they are welcomed as equals.

Depending on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic, the locations of the participants, and their mobility status, you may want to meet in person or online. Either way is fine, but hybrid meetings—with some attending in person and others virtually—are very difficult to get right.

Generally, it helps to **keep the hosting burden very low**. If hosts are expected (or will put pressure on themselves) to serve a meal, clean house, or lead the discussion, they may feel stressed about meeting and decide to drop out. Holding discussions in a library, school, church, or recreation center may be helpful. Be conscious of the fact that meeting at a café or being asked to bring food may pose a financial or dietary hurdle for some.

Sadly, foreign policy insiders—sometimes referred to as “The Blob”—have led our country down a path of folly for many decades.

We recommend holding six sessions, 60-90 minutes each, anywhere from once a week to once a month. However, we have structured this guide to allow you to *choose your own journey*, giving you an array of options but leaving the topics, order, pace, and timing of the sessions to your discretion.

To lay the groundwork for a thoughtful discussion, we recommend that participants **review the discussion questions in advance**. It may help people to keep these questions in mind as they do the reading and think about the topic.

Prior to your first session, you should **develop a community agreement** about how to hold the conversation in a respectful, open, and caring manner.

Here is a sample:

Ground rules

- Listen attentively and pause before speaking. Bring your full attention to the discussion.
- Allow everyone the opportunity to speak. If you usually speak up, make sure you leave space for others. If you don't, this is your opportunity.
- Assume good intentions. If you don't understand, ask for clarification. Affirm other people's expressed feelings. Don't make attributions about others' motives.
- Address people with respect. Avoid judging, blaming, or patronizing others.
- Take responsibility. If you accidentally say something hurtful, say "oops" and apologize. If someone says something hurtful to you, say "ouch" and let them know why.

What outcomes should we expect?

There are various ways in which the impact of these dialogues can be measured. FCNL will be gathering feedback from the first round of dialogues to develop lessons learned and best practices. As a start, we would consider any of the following outcomes to be a success:

1. Group members join existing FCNL Advocacy Teams or create new ones.
2. Group members develop new partnerships with other local or national organizations.
3. Group members develop their own narratives about the impacts of racism and militarism for use in advocacy.
4. Group members plan and participate in political actions, such as conducting lobby visits, organizing protests, speaking up at city council or school board meetings, raising funds for a political campaign, registering new voters, or recruiting candidates for office.
5. Group members create new discussion groups to bring in more people.
6. Groups hold public events to raise awareness and build political momentum around the need to change U.S. foreign policy.
7. Group members publish letters to the editor, blog posts, commentaries, or research relating to racism and militarism in U.S. foreign policy.

We welcome your ideas for how these discussions can contribute to building a broad grassroots movement that fundamentally shifts the dynamics of power!

Contact us at
fcninfo@fcnl.org

Discussion Modules

The following modules provide an overall topic for discussion, a recommended reading to be completed prior to the discussion, questions for discussion, a suggested activity that can be done during or after the discussion, and some optional readings for those interested in further exploration.

Please note that there are many excellent and important educational and informational resources on these topics, and we have tried to select those that are brief (seven pages or less) and freely available on the Internet.

Contact us at fcnlinfo@fcnl.org.

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- A. What Is the Racism-Militarism Paradigm?
 - B. What Would an Alternative Foreign Policy Look Like?
 - C. What Does It Mean to Be Secure?
 - D. Security for Whom?
 - E. The Culture of Militarism
 - F. The Power of the Military-Industrial Complex
 - G. Who Makes National Security Decisions?
 - H. Acknowledging and Redressing Harms
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A. What Is the Racism-Militarism Paradigm?

Assignment

Read Section 1 of Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy: “What Is the Problem?” (pp. 3-9)

Download reading: www.fcni.org/drm-module-a

Questions for Discussion

1. Which passages particularly resonated with you?
 2. What were the sticking points—statements you disagreed with, didn’t understand, or thought needed more evidence?
 3. In what ways do you see the Racism-Militarism Paradigm playing out in your own life?
-

Suggested Activity

Writing

Ask each participant to say how they would describe the Racism-Militarism Paradigm to someone outside the group.

Then, together, write a one or two-sentence description that you all agree upon.

B. What Would an Alternative Foreign Policy Look Like?

Assignment

Read Section 2 of Dismantling Racism and Militarism in U.S. Foreign Policy: “A New Paradigm for the U.S. Role in the World” (pp. 11-13)

Download reading: <https://www.fcni.org/drm-module-b>

Questions for Discussion

1. What motivated you to get involved in civic and political life, and which issue(s) do you care most deeply about?
 2. Which parts of the vision did you find most compelling?
 3. Which parts of the vision do you think will be politically most difficult to achieve?
 4. Can you point to any examples of progress that has been made in recent years toward achieving this vision?
-

Suggested Activity

Storytelling

Together, create a new story about why America is unique and what Americans can be proud of. Outline a few key elements that would form the basis of this story.

Take Action

Go to FCNL’s website and take action on one of the priority issues listed, or write your own letter to Congress: www.fcni.org/congress.

B. What Would an Alternative Foreign Policy Look Like?

Optional Readings

- H.Res. 877 (117th Congress), outlining a new framework for foreign policy for the 21st century: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-resolution/877/>
- FCNL, The World We Seek: <https://www.fcnl.org/about/world-we-seek/world-we-seek-statement-legislative-policy>
- Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, MADRE, and Women Cross DMZ, “A Vision for a Feminist Peace: Building a Movement-Driven Foreign Policy,” October 2020: <https://www.feministpeaceinitiative.org/>
- World Beyond War, “How to Build a Global Security System: An Alternative to War” (summary version): <https://worldbeyondwar.org/downloads/how-to-build-a-global-security-system-an-alternative-to-war/>

C. What Does It Mean to Be Secure?

Assignment

Read “A New Vision of Security,” pp. 3-6 in FCNL and AFSC, “Shared Security: Reimagining U.S. Foreign Policy” (2013)

Download reading: www.fcnl.org/drm-module-c

Questions for Discussion

1. What does security mean to you?
 2. What do you see as the greatest threats to your security?
 3. How would you change or replace the concept of *national security*?
-

Suggested Activity

Storytelling

Have each participant tell a two-minute story about their personal alternative vision of security. Write down your own story, or record yourselves on your phones or Zoom.

D. Security for Whom?

Assignment

Read Bonnie Jenkins, “Redefining Our Concept of Security,”
Brookings blog, December 4, 2019

Download reading: www.fcni.org/drm-module-d

Questions for Discussion

1. How are the threats facing people of color and women different from and similar to those facing white men?
 2. What would security for all Americans look like?
 3. What responsibility does the United States have to protect the security of others around the world?
-

Suggested Activity

Research

Make a list of other organizations and groups in your community that are working on, or would be interested in, changing the way that U.S. policymakers define and fund *national security*.

D. Security for Whom?

Optional Readings

- Brown University, Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, Costs of War (website): <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/>
 - Asli Bali, “Defund America’s Endless Wars,” Just Security, July 29, 2020: <https://www.justsecurity.org/71723/defund-americas-endless-wars/>
 - Nick Buxton, “Securing Whose Future? Militarism in an Age of Climate Crisis,” TNI, 2016: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/securing-whose-future-militarism-in-an-age-of-climate-crisis>
 - Nima Gerami, “To Defeat Systemic Racism, America Must End Endless War,” Responsible Statecraft, July 5, 2020: <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2020/07/05/to-defeat-systemic-racism-america-must-end-endless-war/>
 - Tobita Chow, “How China Threat Narratives Feed Anti-Asian Racism and How to Fight Back”: <https://justiceisglobal.org/us-china-narrative>
 - Katlyn M. Turner, et al., “A Call for Antiracist Action and Accountability in the US Nuclear Community,” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, August 24, 2020: <https://thebulletin.org/2020/08/a-call-for-antiracist-action-and-accountability-in-the-us-nuclear-community/>
 - “Racial Bias Makes White Americans More Likely to Support Wars in Nonwhite Foreign Countries—New Study,” The Conversation, June 16, 2021: <https://theconversation.com/racial-bias-makes-white-americans-more-likely-to-support-wars-in-nonwhite-foreign-countries-new-study-157638>
 - Laila Lalami, “The Real Meaning of ‘Never Forget,’” New York Times, September 10, 2021: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/10/opinion/9-11-memorial.html>
 - William Wheeler, “How the US Helped Create El Salvador’s Bloody Gang War,” The Guardian, January 10, 2020: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2020/jan/10/how-the-us-helped-create-el-salvadors-bloody-gang-war>
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E. The Culture of Militarism

Assignment

Read Neta C. Crawford, “The Militarization of American Democracy,”
The Hill, January 20, 2021

Download reading: www.fcni.org/drm-module-e

Questions for Discussion

1. Where do you see the culture of military reverence and the glorification of violence showing up in your life and your community?
 2. Many people see military solutions as *a last resort*. This presumes that if nothing else works, the use of force will. When and where has this been true?
 3. How does militarism bolster white supremacy and male domination?
-

Suggested Activity

Connect

Organize an informal meeting or discussion with another group in your community that is working on racism and militarism-related issues.

E. The Culture of Militarism

Optional Readings

- Quil Lawrence, “NPR Podcast Examines Divide Between Civilians and Military,” NPR, May 31, 2021: <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/31/1001936405/npr-podcast-examines-divide-between-civilians-and-military>
 - Charlotte Lawrence and Cyrus J. O’Brien, “Federal Militarization of Law Enforcement Must End,” ACLU, May 12, 2021: <https://www.aclu.org/news/criminal-law-reform/federal-militarization-of-law-enforcement-must-end/?redirect=end-militarization-of-law-enforcement>
 - Kristin M. Hall, Justin Pritchard, and James LaPorta, “AP: US Military Explosives Vanish, Emerge in Civilian World,” AP News, December 2, 2021: <https://apnews.com/article/US-military-explosives-stolen-discovered-in-homes-9e72a922bfe34fa5d13e642bd12cdc35>
 - Jeremi Suri, “History Is Clear. America’s Military Is Way Too Big,” New York Times, August 30, 2021: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/30/opinion/american-military-afghanistan.html>
 - NNiRR, “Border Militarization Policy”: <https://nnirr.org/programs/seeking-border-justice/border-militarization-policy/>
 - C.J. Chivers, “Trump Didn’t ‘Send in the Troops.’ They Were Already There,” New York Times, June 23, 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/magazine/la-riots-1992.html>
 - Lindsay Koshgarian, Ashik Siddique, and Lorah Steichen, “State of Insecurity: The Cost of Militarization Since 9/11,” Institute for Policy Studies, 2021: <https://ips-dc.org/report-state-of-insecurity-cost-militarization-since-9-11/>
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F. The Power of the Military-Industrial Complex

Assignment

Watch “Eisenhower’s ‘Military-Industrial Complex’ Speech Origins and Significance,” here: www.fcni.org/drm-module-f-video

Or read the full speech transcript here: www.fcni.org/drm-module-f-transcript

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways do you directly or indirectly provide support to the Military-Industrial Complex (MIC)?
 2. How does your local community benefit from the MIC? Who is harmed, and how?
 3. What is one thing you could do to withdraw support from the MIC or mitigate its power?
-

Suggested Activity

Research

What are the major institutions (companies, universities, military installations) in your area that are funded by or otherwise dependent upon the U.S. military and the arms trade? How many people do they employ and how important are they to the local economy? How much money do your senators and representatives receive from the arms industry?

F. The Power of the Military-Industrial Complex

Optional Readings

- National Conference of State Legislatures, “Military’s Impact on State Economies”: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/military-and-veterans-affairs/military-s-impact-on-state-economies.aspx>
- “MilitaryINSTALLATIONS”: <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/view-all>
- Open Secrets, “Defense”: <https://www.opensecrets.org/industries/indus.php?Ind=D>
- Katrina vanden Heuvel, “It’s Time to Break Up the Military-Industrial Complex,” Washington Post, September 21, 2021: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/09/21/its-time-break-up-military-industrial-complex/>
- Mandy Smithberger, “Never the Pentagon: How the Military-Industrial Complex Gets Away with Murder in Contract After Contract,” Project on Government Oversight, January 21, 2020: <https://www.pogo.org/analysis/2020/01/never-the-pentagon/>
- Holly Zhang, “How Pentagon Spending Perpetuates Pentagon Spending,” Inkstick, October 14, 2020: <https://inkstickmedia.com/how-pentagon-spending-perpetuates-pentagon-spending/>
- John M. Donnelly, “Defense Contractors Bankrolled Campaigns of Election Objectors,” Roll Call, January 3, 2022: <https://rollcall.com/2022/01/03/defense-contractors-bankrolled-campaigns-of-election-objectors/>
- William Hartung, “Profits of War: Corporate Beneficiaries of the Post-9/11 Pentagon Spending Surge,” Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs, Brown University, Costs of War, September 13, 2021: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/2021/ProfitsOfWar>
- Heidi Garrett-Peltier, “Job Opportunity Cost of War,” Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs, Brown University, Costs of War, May 24, 2017: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2017/Job%20Opportunity%20Cost%20of%20War%20-%20HGP%20-%20FINAL.pdf>
- Taylor Barnes, “From Arms to Renewables: How Workers in this Southern Military Industrial Hub Are Converting the Economy,” Responsible Statecraft, October 29, 2020: <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2020/10/29/from-arms-to-renewables-how-workers-in-this-southern-military-industrial-hub-are-converting-the-economy/>
- Thuy Linh Tu, “America’s Vanishing Kingdom,” New York Times, April 5, 2022: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/05/opinion/vietnam-refugees-factories-us-military.html>

G. Who Makes National Security Decisions?

Assignment

Read Christine Ahn, Yifat Susskind, and Cindy Wiesner, “Women of Color Should Be the Ones Remaking U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Newsweek*, November 17, 2020

Download reading: www.fcni.org/drm-module-g

Questions for Discussion

1. Who do you trust more to make decisions about war and peace, the experts or the democratic majority? Why?
 2. What are some examples you’ve experienced of *groupthink*, where people in a certain group all start to think alike and fail to consider alternative ideas? When have you achieved a better outcome by having different people at the table?
 3. How many foreign policy experts or decisionmakers can you name who are female, non-binary, Black, Indigenous, or other people of color?
-

Suggested Activity

Connect

Organize a foreign policy lecture, seminar, or panel discussion featuring speakers who are female, non-binary, Black, Indigenous, and/or persons of color. Invite one or more local groups who could partner with you in future activities.

H. Acknowledging and Redressing Harms

Assignment

Read Rashawn Ray and Andre M. Perry, “Why We Need Reparations for Black Americans,” Brookings, April 15, 2020

Download reading: www.fcni.org/drm-module-h

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is it so hard for the United States to acknowledge and apologize for the harms it has caused over the course of history, both domestic and international?
 2. To what extent have you personally benefited from or been harmed by the enslavement of Africans and African-Americans and the genocide of Native Americans, even though these crimes occurred generations ago?
 3. What steps, if any, have your local institutions—colleges and universities, religious bodies, government organs—taken to atone for slavery, genocide, and/or other historical crimes?
-

Suggested Activity

Advocate

Write to your member of Congress to support H.R. 40 or H.R. 5444 (links on next page).

I. Building a Groundswell for Change

Assignment

Read David Robson, “The ‘3.5% Rule’: How a Small Minority Can Change the World,” BBC Future, May 13, 2019

Download reading: www.fcnl.org/drm-module-i

Questions for Discussion

1. On what issues has there been a major shift in public thinking in your lifetime—and how or why did that happen?
 2. What gives you hope or optimism that change is possible?
 3. What is our next step to bring about the change we seek?
-

Suggested Activity

Join

Join the June 18, 2022, Moral March on Washington led by the Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival:

<https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/june18/>

Join an FCNL Advocacy Team, or start a new one:

<https://www.fcnl.org/act/join-advocacy-team>

I. Building a Groundswell for Change

Optional Readings

- Maria J. Stephan, “How Domestic Civic Movements Could Reshape US Foreign Policy,” Just Security, February 25, 2021: <https://www.justsecurity.org/74877/how-domestic-civic-movements-could-reshape-us-foreign-policy/>
- Diana Francis, “How Can We Build an Effective Global Peace Movement?” OpenDemocracy, September 14, 2010: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/how-can-we-build-effective-global-peace-movement/>
- H.Res. 438 (117th Congress): “Third Reconstruction: Fully Addressing Poverty and Low Wages from the Bottom Up,” introduced by Rep. Barbara Lee (CA-13): <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-resolution/438/>



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