



U.S. Department of Peace

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why should the American public support the Department of Peace?

A: There is currently no organized approach by the U.S. government that aims at creating nonviolent solutions to domestic and international conflict. A violent response to violence should always be our last resort, which is difficult in the absence of a sophisticated, well-funded strategy for peace.

While certain applications of brute force, from prisons to war, are arguably necessary, as a nation we should still be actively involved in a search for their ultimate end.

By giving the interests of peace a full cabinet position, we make it a national priority. Peace becomes a national goal to which we aspire, as we analyze all domestic and foreign policy in light of its dictates. While the President and Congress remain the ultimate arbiters of our laws, with the Department of Peace they will have a higher level of consultation regarding nonviolent options to brute force.

Q: Does a Department of Peace duplicate the Department of State?

A: No.

First, the Department of State handles only international matters, while the Department of Peace will operate both domestically and abroad. Second, the State Department deals exclusively with other "States," i.e. recognized governmental entities. While such an approach was adequate throughout most of the post WWII era, there is obviously now a greater need to deal creatively, if not diplomatically, with non-state agents. The Department of State plays an important and pivotal role in American diplomacy, and nothing in this legislation would change that. The Dept. of Peace, however, will augment the efforts of the Department of State, as well as the Department of Defense. Its work will go beyond "intelligence-gathering" to a full-scale, pro-active search for non-violent solutions.

We should be as sophisticated in the ways we wage peace as we are in the ways we wage war. Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, speaking of his leadership during the Viet Nam War, said, "We knew nothing about Vietnamese religion, psychology or culture and we had no one to tell us." With a Department of Peace, that would never be the case. This Department would be actively involved in studying the most human aspects of conflict, and applying ways to resolve them peacefully.

Q: There are so many departments not getting the funding they need. Where is the money for the Department of Peace coming from?

A: The current Bill calls for budgeting the Department of Peace at the equivalent of 2% of our defense budget. With over 400 billion dollars now spent on military-related expenditures, it should not be asking too much to spend the equivalent of two per cent of that amount on providing complementary problem-solving options. From our police departments to our schools to our fire departments to our military, we are dangerously overstretched in our capacity to respond to violence. Clearly, we should do everything possible to resolve conflict peacefully before it manifests violently.

Beyond that, we are at a point in our history when we must consider the deeper costs of violence, including the increasingly dangerous possibility of nuclear war. There should be no amount considered too much to spend for the search for a nonviolent future.

Q: People have been violent forever. Isn't that just how people are?

A: While it can be argued that people have been violent forever, we have not had the proliferation of nuclear bombs at our disposal with which to express our violence. This is not like any other time in human history. We must evolve past war, or war will end our evolution.

Today we have at our disposal highly-skilled practitioners, and proven techniques, for conflict-resolution and peace-building that should be swiftly added to our national response systems. The Department of Peace would be the agent for the integration of these techniques into our governmental functioning both domestically and abroad.

Q: Can the Department of Peace be construed as anti-war, considering the controversy surrounding the United States' involvement in the recent war in Iraq?

A: The Department of Peace is not anti-military. If anything, it is an aid to our military, providing ideas and techniques to make its work easier.

Peace-building techniques are not substitutes for war-making techniques. The two are not opposites but complements. What could be a greater aid to our military than a sophisticated effort to make active duty on the battlefield less necessary?

Q: Why can't work such as the Department of Peace legislation espouses be left to other agencies to integrate into their already existing efforts?

A: Obviously, peace work can be, and in some cases already is, a part of existing agencies. When such efforts are placed under one umbrella, however, then they attain a higher level of synergy, effective co-ordination and influence upon the thinking of American citizens. The establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency by Richard Nixon did not begin our commitment to the environment, yet it raised it to a much higher level of national priority. And so should it be with the interests of peace.