Opinion

Guest Voices



Protesters demonstrate outside the White House, Jan. 3, 2026, in Washington, after the U.S. captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife in a military operation. (AP/Julia Demaree Nikhinson)

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In great contradiction, earlier this month, while responding to questions about the United States' illegal, immoral and imperial military takeover of Venezuela, Trump aide Stephen Miller explained the worldview guiding the administration: "We live in a world, in the real world … that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power." He added, "These are the iron laws of the world since the beginning of time."

As a Quaker, a peace scholar, a mother and an ordinary human being, I disagree. I do not know what "real world" Miller and the Trump administration live in or are trying to create, but people of faith know that a much deeper and more lasting power exists than the temporary victories military force and violence might provide.

This is not a naive or idealistic view of the real challenges we face as a human family. Our communities and the tribes, kingdoms and nation-states we have created have a long history of war, violence, tyranny and oppression. In the United States, militarism pervades our politics, economy, society and culture. However, that's a choice — not a destiny. We can and do make different choices all the time.

In Venezuela, the Trump administration chose to attack a sovereign country, kidnap its sitting president and forcibly take control of its oil industry. In doing so, the administration blatantly violated U.S. and international law, some experts say, tossed aside international norms and openly claimed its military imperial agenda. The administration has also bombed Iran and Nigeria, drawn up military options to take over Greenland and threatened Colombia and Cuba, among other countries. The dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development and cutting of human needs funding at home and abroad are killing thousands. And President Donald Trump wonders why the Nobel Committee has not yet called him about that peace prize.

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The administration has praised its military prowess and declared victory, but it is not successfully "running" Venezuela. It has no clear or realistic plan for the real-world disaster it has sparked, and it will certainly not bring peace, prosperity or democracy to the Venezuelan people, whose voices are not sufficiently being heard in this narrative.

Two days after Miller's remarks, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent shot an innocent woman, Renee Nicole Good, at point-blank range in her car in Minneapolis while engaged in "targeted operations" of the administration's mass deportation campaign. Trump and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem claimed the ICE agent had acted in self-defense against a "domestic terrorist." Good was the mother of three children and practicing her right to legally observe the organized disappearances of her neighbors by the U.S. government's paramilitary forces.

At home and abroad, the Trump administration has moved quickly to create its own world — one ruled by military force and shaped by lies — since assuming office. And we are all paying the price. Even as I write this, Trump is threatening military action against Iran, which would be disastrous for the people of that country and our own.

In the real world, we know that the Trump administration is destined to fail in its military escapades abroad, as have previous administrations. History has proved repeatedly that the United States' militarized approach to problems may bring swift short-term victories, but they are followed by long, painful and devastating outcomes.

From Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan to Libya and certainly across Latin America and the Caribbean, U.S. reliance on military force and disregard for human rights and international law have sown deep seeds of human suffering, destabilized the global community and fueled widespread anti-U.S. sentiment that will blow back on us. These actions have never resulted in the lasting justice and peace that most people

in the real world seek.

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After a Jan. 7 briefing to Congress on its "plan" for Venezuela, some members of Congress questioned what world the administration was living in. Jason Crow, a Colorado Democratic representative and Iraq War veteran, said, "It's like they'll wave a magic wand and things will turn out like they want." Democratic Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut said the administration's plan "is insane." Members of both parties questioned Trump's plan to sell Venezuela's oil on the market without congressional approval.

Here in the U.S., the White House's militarized deportation campaign is also failing to address any real problems related to immigration. As Minnesota Democratic Sen. Tina Smith explained after the killing of Good, ICE is only creating chaos and making our communities less safe. Good was not the first person killed by a federal agent and will likely not be the last. The Supreme Court has rejected the administration's efforts to deploy National Guard troops to some cities, and Congress should put a stop to the national terror campaign against civilians that ICE represents.

As the White House kicks off another year by ramping up its reliance on militarized violence, Republican and Democratic members of Congress have the opportunity and the responsibility to remind the president how our country is meant to be governed. In the real world, we have three equal branches of government that provide checks and balances to ensure our country is not ruled by corrupt dictators or dragged into endless wars. In the real world, only Congress can authorize military action, and only Congress can decide how to spend taxpayer dollars.

This month, the Senate and House are voting on war powers resolutions to halt military action against Venezuela. Congress should pass these resolutions urgently. As the continuing resolution funding the government expires later this month, Congress will also have the chance to reassert its power of the purse and pass a budget that reflects the values and needs of the American people, not the desires of billionaires and a militarized, corporate oligarchy.

People of faith and all concerned citizens have the opportunity and responsibility to help our members of Congress make those choices and shape the real world we

believe in. We must keep speaking up and showing up, standing in solidarity, bridging divides and building relationships.

Contrary to Miller's narrow vision of an iron law of violence, the real world is one where most of the people, most of the time, in most of the places, take care of one another and want to make the world a little better for our children and grandchildren. In this real world, we want peace and safety for our families, our communities and ourselves. My real world is governed by the unyielding power of love and unending pursuit of justice. In this real world, we understand that our security is inextricably connected to the security of others, that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, that war is not the answer, and peace is possible — if we choose it.

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