

Choosing nonviolence over war

Mary Ann McGivern | Mar. 26, 2014 NCR Today

What would a commitment to nonviolence look like here in the United States? I've been considering how much we spend weapons and operations, and I'll have more blogs on that topic during this Lent, but the other side of the coin, which we never look at, is whether war is an effective strategy.

First, consider protecting our own U.S. borders. We are bordered by two friendly nations, two oceans and a gulf. Yes, terrorists, smugglers and economic refugees have made their way uninvited across these borders. But they are, at most, criminals, not soldiers. True invaders couldn't hold any territory. Even if they took, say, Washington state or Florida, they couldn't farm or mine or manufacture. Nonviolent resistance would be too great. The United States is too big. And what would be the point of bombing us as an act of war? Again, it is territory that can't be held.

Second, if a terrorist exploded a bomb to create terror or if a nation dropped a bomb by mistake, going to war would not be a remedy. We tried that in Afghanistan. It only makes things worse.

Yes, local militias, cults and anarchist communities have taken over small areas. American Indians live on their own nation-states. And we absorb these anomalies with simplicity and grace, except for outbreaks of violence that always end badly. In fact, all our efforts to conduct war since Vietnam have ended badly. There are many lessons, some conflicting, to be drawn from our attacks on Vietnam, Guatemala, Grenada, Afghanistan, Iraq, Cambodia, Panama -- the list goes on and on. But everyone would agree that our use of force never came out well. It didn't benefit our economic interests and it didn't benefit the people in whose interest we thought we were acting.

"What about World War II?" you ask. And I answer that we have to look at the outcome of World War I. We were not willing to make a just treaty. We weren't willing to spend a little money to make peace, so we spent a lot of money and lives fighting the next war.

And what about Kosovo and Serbia and Czechoslovakia? We ignored a strong peace movement and pleas to support it. Instead, we sent in arms and bombers. Upheaval in the region continues.

I suggest we cut \$250 billion from our military budget, put \$100 billion into our general fund for domestic spending and paying down the debt and spend the rest on humanitarian aid, clean water around the world, and support of democratic institutions like the judiciary, police and fair trade.

We don't have to renounce violence today in order to begin the process of making peace. But we could take a couple of giant steps forward.