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WHY ARE YOU AFRAID?

Naming the Fears Behind U.S. Security Policies

As we listen to the stories behind each other's fears, the church and the government in the United States can begin to move toward the prophets' vision of true security: a vine and fig tree per person.

Jesus' Foolish Question

BY BETHANY SPICHER

Why are you afraid?" Jesus asks his disciples in the storm-tossed boat (Mark 4:40). The question must seem senseless to the disciples. The source of fear is obvious. "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" they yell over the wind (v. 38).

Perhaps asking Jesus' question in the United States after Sept. 11, 2001 seems equally foolish. "What do you mean 'Why am I afraid?' There's plenty to be scared of!"

Jesus was fond of obvious questions. Confronted by a blind man, he queries, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51). It seems that Jesus asks people to own their answers: to understand what lies behind their wounds or fears, and to acknowledge their need for healing and help.

This year in the *Washington Memo*, we hope to explore the fears of U.S. Americans—particularly since Sept. 11—and to examine the U.S. government's response to those fears. In the past two years, the United States has dramatically increased military spending, adopted a policy of pre-emptive war and significantly reduced civil liberties. Have these tactics made us more secure?

We acknowledge that policies rooted in fear did not begin with Sept. 11. Fear of losing wealth or power has driven much

of the U.S. economic and military agenda since the country's inception. As well, fear-based policies have ripples: an increased U.S. military presence abroad, for instance, necessitates cuts in housing, health care and education at home.

We also acknowledge that it's not enough to consider the fears of U.S. Americans. In this year's *Memo* series, we aim to listen to the fears of Mennonite Central Committee partners around the world, those who have been affected by U.S. security strategies, and whose voices are rarely heard when policies are drafted. In this issue, our "Partner Stories" feature a farmer in El Salvador, a woman on the U.S./Mexico border, an Iraqi in Baghdad and a community in Bolivia.

This *Memo* attempts to paint current U.S. security strategies in broad brushstrokes; subsequent issues will focus on particular policies, and the final *Memo* will lay out an alternative approach based on the Biblical vision of shalom.

As we look together for answers to Jesus' question, as we listen to the stories behind each other's fears, the church and the government in the United States can begin to move toward the prophets' vision of true security: a vine and fig tree per person. Only then, as Micah promises, "No one shall make [us] afraid" (Micah 4:4). ■

IN THIS MEMO

God's Gracious Hand	2
Stranger Danger?	3
Global Warming	4
North Korea	4
Fear and Free Trade	5
Guns or Whistles?	6
Occupational Hazards	7
Sound the Trumpet!	8

The Gracious Hand of God

Personal security. Airport security. Homeland security. National security. Global security. Security concerns dominate daily life today—especially since Sept. 11. Even Atlanta 2003—the Mennonite Church USA Assembly—was dotted with security officials who kept a watchful eye on the crowd and checked name tags before admitting attendees into the convention’s corridors.

On a personal level, many of us are now more careful about where and how we travel, and pay closer attention to our surroundings when we are in public. On a national level, we have seen striking changes in U.S. policy and practice.

Military spending—less than \$300 billion before Sept. 11—will balloon to more than \$450 billion in 2004 including the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Bush administration’s preemptive war policy would have been unthinkable only three years ago. But in late 2002 and early 2003, it garnered substantial majorities of support in both houses of Congress and in U.S. public opinion polls. Greater restrictions on immigration and significant curbs on civil liberties have had particularly harsh impact on Arab-Americans and other communities of color.

At a gut level, these U.S. government responses may seem natural to many. Terrorism is a terrible thing. It calls for a serious response. But have such responses been effective? Have they stopped terrorist attacks against the United States and its

allies? Have they made us more secure? The answer to all these questions appears to be “no.”

Christians must ask still deeper questions. Are such responses consistent with God’s vision of security? Do they reflect our trust in God? Do they exhibit a concern for acting justly and with compassion?

Saying that we trust God for our security is the easy part. Expressing this trust when we are afraid is a different matter entirely! When the priest Ezra was ready to lead a group of Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem in 458 B.C., he came face-to-face with this challenge. Ezra’s party would be carrying valuable silver and gold vessels and offerings for use at the temple. The journey to Jerusalem from Babylon could well be filled with hostile forces.

Ezra worried about the group’s security. He called the people to fast and to seek from God “a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions” (Ezra 8:21). It was precisely at this fear-filled time that Ezra knew his faith was being tested: “For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and cavalry to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king that the hand of God is gracious to all who seek him . . .” (v. 22).

The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective makes a similarly bold declaration today: “As citizens of God’s kingdom, we trust in the power of God’s love for our defense. The church knows no geographical boundaries and needs no violence for its protection” (Article 23).

At a time when many are tempted to assuage their security fears by trusting military might, will the church, like Ezra, practice and proclaim an alternative security vision? Perhaps we, too, should begin by fasting and seeking God. For it takes great courage to live with trust in an age of fear. May the hand of God also be gracious to us. ■

BY J. DARYL BYLER

“As citizens of God’s kingdom, we trust in the power of God’s love for our defense. The church knows no geographical boundaries and needs no violence for its protection.”

—THE *CONFESSION OF FAITH IN A MENNONITE PERSPECTIVE*

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Stranger Danger?

BY BETHANY SPICHER

Isn't it true that immigrants steal our jobs? Don't they overrun our schools and bankrupt our hospitals? Aren't they partially responsible for low test scores, high crime rates or the recent economic downturn?

While few U.S. Americans would condone the tactics of anti-immigrant lobbies or the abuses of vigilante groups on the U.S./Mexico border, many wonder quietly if immigrants threaten their security. And since Sept. 11, many instinctively scan crowded streets or airport terminals for strangers. However "stranger" is defined, it's not far—in many minds—from "terrorist."

In recent years, the U.S. government has responded to the immigrant "threat" with fortified border patrols, more workplace raids and reduced access to public services. The flow of immigrants has only increased.

Meanwhile, millions of unauthorized workers are vulnerable to exploitation. Human trafficking has become a multi-billion dollar industry. And 2,000 people have died on U.S./Mexico border in the past five years. In the case of U.S. immigration policy, laws are breaking people rather than vice versa.

Moreover, the U.S. economy is actually dependent on the contributions of immigrants, who pay more in taxes than they use in services, and who sustain their own countries with wages sent home. Immigrants also enrich U.S. culture with their languages and traditions.

In the interest of increasing security, common sense calls us to befriend rather than alienate immigrants. And for the sake of loving neighbors as self, Jesus Christ calls us to welcome the "strangers" among us. ■

PARTNER STORY

No Papers, No Protection

Olivia was born in Mexico and, at four years old, crossed the Rio Grande River into the United States with her mother. Years later, she was raped by two high school classmates. At the hospital, she received a notice to call the police so her case could be investigated. Terrified that the police might find out that she was undocumented,* Olivia dropped the charges. Later, she found out that she had become pregnant during the assault. Now a mother at 16, she is applying for a visa for victims of crime. However, since the visa requires that victims were "helpful in the crime investigation," Olivia could be ineligible. She may face deportation.

—adapted from a story by Karen Spicher, Mennonite Voluntary Service, Harlingen, Tex.

*After Sept. 11, rumor spread through the undocumented immigrant community that any contact with police officers—even for crime victims or witnesses—could result in deportation. In fact, only immigration officers can check an immigrant's status. However, the CLEAR Act, pending in Congress, would reverse that policy and likely result in more stories like Olivia's.

CAPITAL QUOTES

"AIDS is more devastating than any terrorist attack, any conflict or any weapon of mass destruction."

—Colin Powell, U.S. Secretary of State.

"I am against the killer, whoever he is. I stand beside the murdered, whoever he is. The culture of peace is a language of civilization and the language of the future, while the war culture is for larceny and death and against anything that is connected with life."

—Hanaa Ibraheem, Iraqi journalist and writer.

"Poverty is great for the terrorism business because poverty creates humiliation and stifled aspirations and forces many people to leave their traditional farms to join the alienated urban poor in the cities—all conditions that spawn terrorists."

—Thomas Friedman, U.S. author and syndicated columnist.

Pontius' Puddle



Who's Afraid of Global Warming?

BY LORA STEINER

Global warming is expected to have the most impact on the world's poor, and developing countries are beginning to acknowledge global warming. One hundred twenty countries have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, committing themselves to lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

The predictions about global warming are dire. The nine warmest years on record have occurred since 1990. Over the next century, many scientists predict that the earth's temperature will rise five to ten degrees, causing shifts in seasonal lengths, and allowing infectious diseases, such as malaria, to move into new areas. Hurricanes, fueled by warmer water temperatures, could become more severe. Sea levels are predicted to rise 10 to 30 inches over the next century due to glacial melting, which will have disastrous consequences for low-lying areas.

Global warming is expected to have the most impact on the world's poor, and developing countries are beginning to acknowledge and deal with global warming. Bangladesh recently outlawed two-stroke motorcycle engines, which emit high levels of pollution. China requires a minimum level of efficiency for appliances and has funded various alternative energy sources. One hundred twenty countries have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, committing themselves to lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

Most U.S. Americans aren't worried about global warming. The United States' highly developed infrastructure means it can absorb the effects of natural disasters more easily than other countries. Technology which could increase fuel economy (currently at a 20-year low) and develop alternative sources of energy has been left untapped. U.S. Americans are afraid that making such changes might adversely affect the economy, not realizing that many other countries that are making changes share the same concern.

Taking steps to counter global warming is as easy as replacing all your light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs. Encouraging the president to support the Kyoto Protocol is also an important step, as is asking car manufacturers to use already-existing technology to make more efficient vehicles. ■

Sticks or Carrots in North Korea?

BY LORA STEINER

A bill recently introduced in Congress calls for a "verifiable halt" to North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The North Korean Freedom Act of 2003 (S.1903), sponsored by Senator Brownback (R-KS), is one of the most recent events in a year-long standoff between North Korea and the United States.

For nearly a decade, the United States has called for a nuclear-free North Korea. The Bush administration is concerned not only about North Korea's nuclear capabilities, but also about its weapons sales to "rogue states" and possibly to terrorist groups. When President Bush included North Korea as a part of the "axis of evil" in 2002, he added it to a list of countries to be feared by U.S. Americans.

North Korea, on the other hand, is convinced that the United States, which keeps 37,000 troops stationed in South Korea, is ready to invade at any moment. It is afraid that it will be the next Iraq. North Korea has argued that its main defense—and the only way to preserve its security—is building up its weapons supply.

Several countries, including China, are supporting alternatives to fear-based military action. They believe that economic development would bring stability to a country ravaged by hunger. And one analyst, Avery Goldstein of the University of Pennsylvania, suggests that such actions may ultimately diminish North Korea's need for military power. ■

Fear and Free Trade

Fear is not always a bad thing. After all, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). In this psalm “fear” refers to a reverent awe. But fear—as in *being afraid*—is also valuable. It can alert us to danger, deter us from recklessness and goad us to life-saving action. Many people have fears about global trade. Might these fears lead to wisdom?

Polling data shows that most U.S. Americans favor trade, but want it to expand cautiously and fairly. They believe global trade increases the range of consumer goods available at lower prices. At the same time, they fear the impact of “free trade” agreements on wages and jobs. Most U.S. Americans believe that global trade harms U.S. workers, and many fear that globalization will lower their standard of living. People believe that global trade agreements disproportionately benefit corporations and the wealthy.

People in the global South have similar, but more intense, fears. According to recent polls, most Latin Americans live in fear of losing their jobs, and many blame the “free market and free trade” policies of the past decade. In Mexico, for example, farmers and farm laborers have lost their livelihoods because of cheap subsidized crop imports from the United States. In Africa, cheap imports destroy national industries, while wealthy countries block meaningful access to many African products.

In the name of “free markets and free trade,” U.S. officials work aggressively to get the rest of the world to open their markets to U.S. goods, services, corporations and investment capital. But they rarely acknowledge that these efforts cause economic hardship and political instability in many countries. And they also largely ignore U.S. Americans’ own fears about globalization.

Could U.S. government trade policies also be founded on fear—an irrational, destructive fear of not having enough or not being in control? Greed and fear may have a common root in the lack of genuine faith in a God who promises to meet our every need.

The common feelings shared by people in the United States and the global South should help us see ourselves as forming a “community of interest.” We can work together to ensure that global trade policies and rules are fair and beneficial to everyone. For their part, U.S. policymakers would do well to trade their unhealthy fear for the fear that constitutes the beginning of wisdom. ■

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

The common feelings shared by people in the United States and the global South should help us see ourselves as a “community of interest.” We can work together to ensure that global trade policies are beneficial to everyone.

Globalization Versus Green Beans

PARTNER STORY

Antonia Ventura hauls three large burlap sacks among potential buyers in the market at Santa Tecla. Each sack represents a long day of back-breaking labor picking green beans from the low-growing vines under the hot sun. Yet the most she is offered is twenty-five colones per sack, about \$3 US. The market is flooded, she cannot hope for more. Antonia fears that small farmers like her cannot compete. “Globalization doesn’t benefit us,” she says. “We don’t have the resources to be able to export. It’s the big producers that do. . . . We have to explain to people what globalization is doing to ordinary people. Only then can we join hands in the struggle to globalize hope rather than markets. Only then will we discover the abundance of life rather than profit.”

—adapted from a story by Tanya Chute, formerly MCC El Salvador.

Guns or Whistles for Security?

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

Embedded in the U.S. American psyche is the idolatrous notion that guns equal freedom, identity and security. There is another way.

The United States has an increasing reputation for violence. In other parts of the globe, we are known as a “cowboy society,” where lawmen carry big guns and justice is swift, where even citizens “might” be safer carrying weapons. In at least 43 states, a person can legally carry a concealed weapon.

There are about 250 million firearms in the United States—more than one for each adult and at least one handgun for every three adults. One-third of U.S. American households report owning four or more guns. We fear strangers, but do we trust even our neighbors? The ongoing suggestion of having “more guns, less crime” has been repudiated by various studies.

Yet Congress may be going in the opposite direction. Legislation granting blanket legal immunity to the gun industry has passed in the House and a similar bill is pending in the Senate. There is little attention given to renewing and improving a ban of military-like assault weapons from civilian markets. (The ban is due to expire next year.) Nor is there consensus to end the easy availability of firearms from gun shows. Even more alarming is a pending proposal to destroy the records of gun buyer background checks within 24 hours.

Oddly, while guns empower crime, many in the United States trust them to prevent it as well. Embedded in the U.S. American psyche is the idolatrous notion that guns equal freedom, identity and security. Perhaps it is not naive to humble ourselves and learn from others that there are alternatives. Even police forces in many countries do not normally carry guns. There is another way.

Crime and responses to it are serious challenges anywhere in the world. Yet we must not buy into the myths of redemptive violence. We must quell our society’s insatiable desire for weapons and seek other ways to support the safety and security of our families and communities. ■

PARTNER STORY

Trusting Neighbors, Not Guns

Here in Santa Cruz, the city has grown rapidly in the past 25 years. As population has increased, so have petty crimes and the accompanying fear of break-ins. As a result, most neighborhoods now employ guards over the nighttime hours. Most often these guards do not carry weapons. Instead they have a whistle. They blow it when they see activity in the street, as a warning to whoever is around that they are being watched. Or they blow a couple lazy tones just to let everyone know they are awake and still watching. If the whistle is blown loud and hard, neighbors will wake and come to the aid of the guard. A few years ago there was a robbery attempt in our neighborhood. The guard blew his whistle for help, neighbors appeared immediately and scared off the thieves. Neighbors feel secure with this system of protection. Even when they do not know their neighbors well, they seem to have confidence that everyone will help the guards when needed, and there is no need to rely on weapons.

—adapted from a story by Cathy Wismer,
MCC Country Co-Director in Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

Occupational Hazards

Occupation breeds resistance. That's what MCC workers in both Iraq and Israel-Palestine are learning.

"Baghdadis may not want more bombs and more killing," says MCC worker Edward Miller in reference to the swelling insurgency movement in Iraq. "But animosity against U.S. soldiers and the occupation is only growing. The resistance may represent for people here the only 'defense' of their country."

"Occupation is about making you lose hope and instilling fear and terror inside of you," says Zoughbi Zoughbi, director of the Wi'am Center for Conflict Resolution in Bethlehem—a long-term MCC partner in the West Bank. "Occupation also means not being able to move freely," Zoughbi continues, "it means skyrocketing unemployment and poverty rates."

Indeed, there are striking parallels between the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Both occupations are "justified" on the basis of national security concerns. Both are conducted largely against the will of the occupied people. Both are sustained by the use of overwhelming force. Both involve demolition of homes and destruction of fruit trees. Both utilize barriers and checkpoints which slow the daily movement of people. Both have used or have attempted assassinations or executions without trials. But rather than improving security, both occupations have led to violent resistance movements.

"As the military campaign here has failed to comprehend," writes Edward Miller, "dignity is a hugely important facet to life in Iraq and the Middle East. A perceived lack of dignity could conceivably drive radicalism and violence."

Indeed, we will likely see continuing—and possibly, increasing—terrorist attacks until the United States ceases to occupy Iraq, and Israel withdraws from the Palestinian territories. ■

BY J. DARYL BYLER

PARTNER STORIES

Awaiting Resurrection

"In our work we try to help people address injustice rather than avenge it. The role of the churches living under occupation is to be Christians of the cross, awaiting resurrection. For Palestinian Christians, security is found in the hope and conviction that God will not be happy for injustice to continue. Security for Palestinians will not come through vengeance, but through the future of peace and justice for Palestinians and Israelis alike. We need to bring Israel to its senses, not to its knees. Part of the security of the future will involve forgiveness. An Arab proverb says: 'Write the wrongs that are done to you in sand, but write the good that is done to you in marble.'"

—Zoughbi Zoughbi, interviewed by Alain Epp Weaver,
MCC Country Co-Director in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Home Fearful Home

"My family and my community are most afraid now from the bombings going on around Baghdad. These can happen anytime and anywhere, and it is not just American soldiers or foreigners who are dying. Iraqis are being killed. So my family stays home most of the time out of fear. As well as bombings, we are worried about the children being kidnaped for ransom and about crime in the neighborhood. We can escort our children to school and back. . . . There was crime before the war, but not like this. I don't have a weapon to protect myself. I hate guns."

—Khalil Rahommi Mohammed Ali, Iraqi businessman,
interviewed by Edward Miller, MCC Iraq.



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

SOUND THE TRUMPET!

Over the past year, we asked readers to respond to a variety of issues. Here is a summary of where they stand.	
AIDS	Congress appropriated \$2.4 billion for global AIDS, TB and malaria, \$400 million more than President Bush requested, but \$600 million less than the president promised in his State of the Union message and Congress has authorized.
Civil Liberties	In Nov. 2003, news media revealed that the FBI has been monitoring war protest groups and issuing advisements to 15,000 law enforcement agencies via a weekly bulletin. José Padilla, U.S. American citizen and “dirty bomb” suspect, continues to be detained as an “enemy combatant” without access to a lawyer.
Colombia	The final version of the Foreign Operations Bill—which provides military funding for Plan Colombia—includes \$731 million, the full amount requested by the president. A final vote is expected shortly.
Debt	After receiving over 15,000 thousand postcards, Treasury Secretary Snow has still not called on the U.S. government to seek deeper World Bank and IMF debt cancellation for impoverished countries.
Energy Bill	The Senate blocked a vote on the Energy and Policy Act of 2003, but is expected to vote on it again in January. Many environmentally-friendly provisions included in previous House and Senate proposals were removed in the final bill.
Gun Violence	The assault weapons ban, still pending in Congress, includes a clear and simple definition of assault weapons, a ban on tool kits that convert guns into assault weapons, a limit on high-capacity ammunition cartridges and a proposal to make the ban permanent.
Immigration	The CLEAR Act, which would deputize police to enforce immigration laws (currently the job of immigration agents) and make undocumented victims or witnesses of crimes afraid to report to authorities, is gathering co-sponsors in the House and will likely be introduced in the Senate this spring.
Iraq	In early 2003, the U.S. military overthrew the Iraqi government. The ongoing U.S. occupation of Iraq costs more than \$4 billion per month and has led to a violent resistance movement. The London-based NGO, Medact, estimates that up to 50,000 Iraqi civilians were killed by the war and its aftermath.
TANF	The House passed a version of welfare reform reauthorization, but the Senate was unable to agree on work requirements, childcare funding and marriage promotion. For the second year in a row, Congress extended Temporary Assistance for Needy Families as is until March.
U.S. Military Spending	Congress has approved \$400 billion in military spending for FY 2004 plus an additional \$66 billion for the ongoing costs of war in Afghanistan and Iraq. The spending includes research funds for several new types of nuclear weapons.