Is Opposing the War An LGBT Issue?

A debate is raging throughout the broad movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights: Is the U.S. government’s “War on Terror,” including the impending war on Iraq, an issue that the LGBT movement should address?

The National LGBT Program of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has prepared this issue brief in partnership with the National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC, informed by the experiences of many LGBT groups). Together with a rapidly growing number of LGBT organizations, we answer that opening question with an unequivocal “Yes.”

We know that some LGBT people and organizations support the war. Some say we shouldn’t even discuss the war because “It isn’t a gay issue.” Many more are not yet certain where they stand and are searching for clarity.

Although AFSC and NYAC have a clear point of view about the war, we do not seek to further polarize the discussion or demonize those who disagree with us. The corrosive politic of polarization, so ascendant in almost every aspect of U.S. political life today, threatens to overwhelm necessary exploration of the impacts of this war through dialogue, critical inquiry, and civic debate. The stakes for all of us, as individuals and as part of a larger LGBT movement for civil and human rights, are high. Silence and suppression of differences of opinion and uncertainties at such a critical time serve no one well. Our movement needs more, not less, thoughtful discussion of the impacts and consequences of the war.

We speak from our own experience

We speak from our own experience as LGBT people of color, queer women, poor and working class LGBT people, queer youth, and LGBT people of faith.

As Audre Lorde, the noted poet, activist, and writer who was both Black and lesbian, said, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”

Race, gender, culture, class, age, and the complex interrelationships of these factors are central to our LGBT experience and analysis of the impacts of the “War on Terror” here and abroad. While all of us in the LGBT movement are affected by the “War on Terror,” people of color, immigrants and refugees, women, children and youth, and poor people—including LGBT people—disproportionately bear the burden of war-related repression, violence, and harm. These are the same groups in the United States who already suffer the multiple harms of domestic and sexual violence, hate violence, poverty, and dispossession.

Why we oppose the war

Today, in the name of the “War on Terror,” the U.S. government is directing many forms of violence against vulnerable communities as well as less powerful nations.

The U.S. government’s “national security strategy” now advances a radical new doctrine of pre-emptive military strikes, which may be launched whenever the government feels they are necessary to protect vital interests, both geopolitical and economic. This doctrine of pre-emption overturns the very foundations of international law, arms reduction treaties, and diplomacy in the post–World War II era, which have sought to restrict military action to self-defense.

Our own commitment to human rights, not only to LGBT civil rights, compels us to speak out against the violence of the “War on Terror” and the repressive policies that accompany it. We speak not only for ourselves but in unity with people throughout the United States and the world who experience the daily terror of interpersonal, structural, and military violence, including poverty, hunger, homelessness, lack of adequate and appropriate health care, dispossession, and disenfranchisement.

LGBT people fight daily for our dignity, well-being, rights, and sometimes even our lives, within families, schools, faith communities, and society as a whole. LGBT people know all too well what it feels like to be singled out for hatred and violent treatment, made scapegoats, and declared expendable by others. These experiences should help shape our responses whenever violence directed against some demonized “other” is justified by public authorities and accepted without challenge by the majority.

Regardless of one’s position on the war, a cloud hangs over us all—a cloud of growing repression, surveillance of domestic civic and religious organizations against whom there is no evidence of wrongdoing, and invasive information-gathering programs used by the Pentagon and other government agencies to strengthen the war machine. The U.S.A. Patriot Act, the Homeland
A projected war cost of $100 billion would fund about four years of health expenditures to address the health needs of the world’s poorest people.

— Medact, British affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

Opposition to the War Is Both Spiritual and Political

The ethics of love, compassion, and justice resonate through every major faith and spiritual tradition, calling many of us from a broad spectrum of Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, indigenous, and other spiritual traditions to oppose this war. The violence of the “War on Terror” will not produce safety or security, but only an endless cycle of retaliatory violence and hatred. Lasting peace can only arise from a firm foundation of human rights, social justice, and economic security for all.

Security Act, the Total Information Awareness program, and other repressive measures trample rights and erode constitutional principles. The Patriot Act, for example, is vague and diffuse enough to paint LGBT people speaking out against the war, or even marching in a gay rights parade, as “terrorists” working to overthrow the government.

The LGBT movement in the United States thrives in no small measure because the legal framework of civil rights and constitutional rights, and reasonable government checks and balances, however imperfectly realized, support us in our struggle for justice. Today, however, those checks and balances are weakened, and the legal framework of rights is corroded.

LGBT people have never fared well in politically charged climates when governments say that it is necessary to sacrifice rights in order to achieve safety. The question LGBT communities must confront is this: Whose safety will be increased by erosion of rights? Whose safety will be further jeopardized?

Finally, war on Iraq and “the War on Terror” will not protect the human rights of LGBT people in war-torn countries. The International Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) says, “The U.S. policies of military aggression have served to render those who deviate from sexual and gender norms and people living with HIV/AIDS especially vulnerable to state-sanctioned violence and discrimination.”

As citizens and residents of the United States, we feel a special responsibility to join with many others worldwide to speak out when we feel that this country’s actions are immoral, unjust, and dangerous. We believe we are morally obligated to resist when particular policies lead neither to justice nor peace, but only to a widening spiral of human suffering and ecological catastrophe.

We oppose the “War on Terror” today so that tomorrow the United States could use its status as a leading world power to strengthen, rather than undermine, the values of international law, international cooperation, multilateralism, human rights, and economic security for all peoples.

Impacts on LGBT Communities

1. Racial Profiling and the War on Immigrant Communities

As a direct result of the racial profiling of all immigrants, LGBT immigrants are in jeopardy.

Al-Fatiha Foundation (LGBTQI Muslims and friends), South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA), and many other LGBT organizations serving Arab, Muslim, South and Central Asian, and Latino communities are being deluged by immigration and deportation issues and concerns. Many are reporting increased problems with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Community-based LGBT organizations serving immigrant constituencies generally operate with small budgets, and with the escalation of the “War on Terror,” resources are being stretched beyond capacity. Few immigrant and refugee rights organizations have developed a systemic capacity to help LGBT immigrants. LGBT activists of Arab and South or Central Asian descent face special obstacles and risks in traveling. Some choose not to travel outside the United States, even for religious pilgrimage, for fear of not being permitted back into the country. Some are taking refuge in Canada.

The “special registration” program of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) is spreading fear and confusion in immigrant communities and heightening war fever throughout the U.S. by stigmatizing immigrants as a threat to national security. By institutionalizing the racist presumption that immigrants are terrorists, it reinforces the drive for war. Mass roundups of immigrants, secret detentions, detention without charges, and denial of legal counsel to detainees, are now “acceptable” practices. Many people have been detained or face deportation orders because of confusion, backlog, and hopelessly complex and poorly understood procedures within the INS itself. Those who fall in the net of immigration authorities may be deported and barred from the United States for life.

The policing of the already heavily militarized U.S.-Mexico border has intensified, placing severe strains and hardship on border crossers and border communities. Human rights abuses are commonplace.

2. Increased Violence

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, a number of community-based LGBT programs serving youth, people of color, and victims of violence reported surges in instances of domestic violence and in hate violence directed against people of color, immigrants, and Muslims. The 2002 annual report of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Projects noted that attacks against Muslim/South Asian/Arab LGBTQ people had increased 155% over the previous year. This mirrors sudden post-9/11 surges of hate violence against Muslims and immigrants reported by AFSC and many other civil rights and anti-violence organizations.

Communities of color, including immigrant communities, report increases in police violence as racial profiling is re-institutionalized in the post-9/11 era. At the same time, LGBT communities of color perceive less public willingness to challenge law enforcement violence.

LGBT people of Arab and South and Central Asian descent also report that verbal violence and bigotry sometimes has been directed against them within the LGBT movement. Some LGBT media have published stereotyped, false, and inflammatory information about Islam.

Finally, the war is distorting the LGBT movement’s ability to evaluate violence. As U.S. bombs rained down on Afghanistan after 9/11, the LGBT community took note of a photograph showing “Die Fags” graffiti written on one of those bombs. A widely publicized response by a national LGBT organization expressed outrage at the homophobic graffiti, but did not comment upon the lethal intent of the bomb itself—or the effect it would surely have on the human beings in its path.
Human Rights & War on Iraq

In our fight for the human rights of LGBT people, we call on others for support. We have a reciprocal obligation to defend the human rights of others, including those of peoples severely impacted by U.S. foreign policy. 7

Twelve years of war on Iraq already have produced a human and ecological catastrophe. A pre-emptive strike launched in violation of international law is likely to produce hundreds of thousands of new short-term and long-term casualties and refugees and more long-term environmental damage. Should nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons be introduced into the conflict, the human and ecological toll will be beyond estimation.

An estimated 205,000 Iraqis died as a direct result of the Gulf War. About 110,000 were civilians who died in 1991 from the health effects of that war. 750,000 people were internally displaced. Thousands of children have been disabled by land mines. Tens of thousands of women were made war widows. Most of the military and civilian infrastructure of Iraq was destroyed.

This, combined with harsh post-war economic sanctions and bombing raids by the United States and Great Britain, has produced a human rights crisis of staggering proportions. According to Medact, the people most affected by sanctions include pregnant and lactating women, children under five years of age, older people, and people with chronic diseases. In the twelve years since the Gulf War, between 344,000 and 525,000 children under five years of age died because of those sanctions, and the UN confirms that about 1,000 such deaths per week continue to occur.

Regimes such as that of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban are brutal and despotic. The U.S. government, however, helped to arm and support these regimes for many years when it was expedient to do so, as it has supported numerous other violent, corrupt, and authoritarian regimes. In a final and grimly ironic note, the current U.S. administration actually has blocked efforts to strengthen international treaties intended to prevent the spread of biological, nuclear, and chemical weapons.

We strongly support both the people of the United States and the basic principles of democracy, constitutional rights, and human rights. Today, the U.S. government is endangering its own people and betraying those principles, and so we must speak out.
Progressive Media and Commentary
http://www.alternet.org
http://www.commondreams.org
http://www.truthout.org
http://www.zmag.org
http://www.thenation.com
http://www.fsp.org
http://www.arc.org/C_Lines/ColorLines.html

LGBT Anti-War Information
Ali-Fatihah Foundation
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/al-fatihah-news
http://www.al-fatihah.net
AFSC-LGBT
http://www.afsc.org/lgbt
http://www.afsc.org/lgbt/peace
http://www.afsc-fan.org
Audre Lorde Project
http://www.alp.org
National Youth Advocacy Coalition
http://www.nychyouth.org
Out Against the War
http://www.temenos.net/action_war.shtml
Out Against the War—UK
http://www.outagainstthewar.org.uk/
Queers for Peace & Justice
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/QueersForPeaceAndJustice

Anti-War Information and Resources
American Friends Service Committee
http://www.afsc.org
AFSC “Made in Texas” Campaign (war & military industrial complex)
http://www.madetexas.us/
Fellowship of Reconciliation
http://www.forusa.org
Incite! Women of Color Against Violence
http://www.incite-national.org
Medact (British affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War)
http://www.medact.org/bx/pages
National Youth and Student Peace Coalition
http://www.nyspc.net
United for Peace & Justice (broad-based anti-war coalition)
http://www.unitedforpeace.org
War Resisters League
http://www.warresisters.org

Human Rights
Amnesty International
http://www.amnesty.org
International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission
http://www.iglhrc.org
MADRE, international women’s human rights organization
http://www.madre.org
Women’s Human Rights Net
http://www.whrnet.org

Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund (AALDEF)
http://www.aaldef.org
Providing legal assistance to those immigrants who are investigated or detained by the FBI or INS and those subject to special registration. Has undertaken some and is willing to take on more cases from LGBT people of color. All AALDEF legal advice and representation is free. Contact: Glenn Magpantay at gmagpantay@aaldef.org. Tel: 1-800-966-5946 or 212-965-5832
LGBT people, ask for Glenn Magpantay or Sin Yin Ling.

National Lawyers Guild National Immigration Project
http://www.nationalimmigrationproject.org
American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
http://www.aadc.org
Civil rights organization for people of Arab descent; chapters nationwide. Report hate violence, harassment and discrimination against Arabs and Muslims, help for non-citizens and attorneys. Tel: 202-244-2960
American Immigration Lawyers Association
http://www.aila.org
Referral to immigration attorneys and resources for immigration attorneys. Tel: 1-800-954-0274
Lawyers Committee for Human Rights
http://www.lchr.org
Information on legal aspects of human rights for immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Contact: lchrbin@lchr.org. Tel: 212-845-5920 or 202-547-3959
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
http://www.nnirr.org
National coalition of local and regional immigrants’ rights organizations. Contact: nnirr@nnirr.org; Tel: 510-465-1984
Project Voice, AFSC
Newly coordinated effort to support immigrant communities in base building, alliance building, and policy impact. Contact: Jcampos-Rivera@afsc.org, 215-241-7134.

Other
There are immigration attorneys in Canada who are working with people who are leaving the United States and going to Canada. For immigration support in Canada, contact El-Farouk Khaki at elf629@rogers.com
Those immigrants who may wish to seek refugee status in Canada should contact Vermont Refugee Assistance for updates and help before leaving home: 802-223-6840 or vtfuge@together.net.

Civil Liberties and Legal Rights
American Civil Liberties Union
http://www.aclu.org
Information and advocacy on civil liberties, immigrants rights, and police accountability, and how they are affected by “counter-terrorism” measures. Chapters nationwide.

National Lawyers Guild
http://www.nlgl.org
Updated know-your-rights brochure in a variety of languages, information and analysis for legal workers and activists. Chapters in many locations. Contact nnglo@nlgl.org. Tel: 212-679-5100

Selective Service/The Draft/Conscientious Objectors’ Resources
AFSC Youth & Military Program
http://www.afsc.org/milp.htm
Impacts of war and military institutions on young people’s lives, including impacts on people of color, women, and LGBT people. Draft and military recruitment information, including student rights and state draft penalties chat. Contact: youthmil@afsc.org, Tel: 215-241-7179
Committee Opposed to Militarism and the Draft (COMD)
http://www.comdsd.org
http://www.comdsd.org/yano.htm
Challenges the institution of the military and its social, economic, and political impacts. Examines the racism, sexism, and homophobia that pervade the armed forces and the U.S. Selective Service System. Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities.

Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors
http://www.objector.org
Supports and promotes individual and collective resistance to war and preparations for war. Excellent resources on the selective service, the draft, and conscientious objection. Contact: info@objector.org; Tel: 1-888-231-2226.

Center on Conscience & War
http://www.nisbcce.org
Excellent resources on selective service, the draft, conscientious objection, and militarism. Tel: 202-483-2220

GI Rights
GI Rights Network
http://www.glrights.objector.org
Toll-free hotline that gives free and confidential information or legal referrals to soldiers who are being harassed, abused or discriminated against. The hotline is sponsored by seven organizations, including the American Friends Service Committee.
The Hotline’s military counselors also help soldiers get out of the military and resist being deployed. Tel: 1-800-394-9544.

Veterans for Peace
http://www.veteransforpeace.org
Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN)
http://www.sldn.org
Watchdog and policy organization dedicated to ending discrimination against and harassment of military personnel affected by “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and related forms of intolerance. Special fact sheet answering questions regarding personnel and legal assistance issues service members may face in preparation for deployment abroad. Contact: sldn@sldn.org; Tel: 202-328-3244

Budget Analysis
The National Priorities Project
http://www.nationalpriorities.org
The Center for Community Change
http://www.communitychange.org
Prison-Industrial Complex
Critical Resistance
http://www.criticalresistance.org
Public Safety and Justice Campaign
http://www.stopprivateprisons.org

LGBT People of Arab Descent
GLAS—Gay and Lesbian Arab Society
http://www.glas.org
Sehakia—The Voice of Arab Lesbians
http://www.sehakia.org
In Arabic, French and English
AHBAB, the site of Queer Arabs worldwide
http://www.glas.org/ahbab

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace, and humanitarian service. Its work is based on the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) belief in the worth of every person and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice.

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