

# Is Opposing the War An LGBT Issue?


A F S C L G B T I S S U E B R I E F

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

**The grief we continue to feel for those who were killed and whose lives were shattered on September 11, 2001, also extends to those who have been harmed by U.S. military violence and economic sanctions.**

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.”<sup>3</sup>

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

### ■ 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

### ■ 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> See Open Letter to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, and Transgender Communities Opposing War,” released by the Audre Lorde Project and the National LGBT Program of AFSC January 27, 2003, and endorsed by more than 50 organizations. To view the letter, visit the websites of AFSC-LGBT, Audre Lorde Project, NYAC, and Out Against the War Coalition listed in the resources section of this brief.

<sup>2</sup> “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” Sept. 2002, may be found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>

<sup>3</sup> See full IGLHRC anti-war statement at <http://www.iglhrc.org>

<sup>4</sup> See “‘Special Registration’ of Immigrants: Trampling Rights, Spreading Fear,” a statement by AFSC Immigration Concentration Network, at <http://www.afsc.org/cru/specregistr.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> See “After September 11: Standing on the Brink of a Brave New World,” AFSC Justice Visions Issue Brief, at <http://www.afsc.org/JusticeVisions.htm>

<sup>6</sup> See “Out Against War,” an ad published in selected LGBT newspapers, coordinated by the Chicago Anti-Bashing Network and signed by a group of Chicago-area LGBT people and allies opposing war on Iraq. (<http://www.cabn.org/press/antiwarad.html>)

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, *Collateral Damage, The Health & Environmental Costs of War on Iraq*, from Medact at <http://www.Medact.org/tbx.pages/> and “Don't Mention the War in Afghanistan,” by Robert Fisk, posted on Znet at <http://www.zmag.org>



**Fear, Intimidation and Self-Censorship Within LGBT Communities**

Many LGBT groups describe divisiveness, dissension, and anxiety within their own organizations and communities. That there are differences of opinion is not surprising. What is striking, however, is the level of fear that accompanies discussion about the war and the possibility of taking a stand against it.

Many people in immigrant and people-of-color communities, for example, fear racial profiling and its consequences, including possible police brutality, detention, and deportation. Some LGBT organizations fear loss of funding from donors, foundations, or local, state, or federal funding sources—or being “blacklisted” by other LGBT organizations. Many are afraid of wrongly being branded (sometimes by other LGBT activists) as “unpatriotic” at a time of heightened war fever. At the same time, some LGBT organizations that have not taken a stand against the war or are exploring the possibility report feeling harshly accused of inaction and denounced by other LGBT activists.

This climate of polarization, intimidation, and fear sometimes creates the mistaken impression that LGBT anti-war activism is not widespread. In fact, a groundswell of LGBT anti-war organizing unites us with majorities in this country and throughout the world who have serious doubts about the wisdom of war on Iraq or believe it is wrong.

**Decreased Funding for Human Needs and LGBT Programs**

In 2002, AFSC’s Seattle-based GLBTQ Youth Program received notice of severe cutbacks in municipal funding for the following fiscal year as city officials shifted more resources from an increasingly strained budget into policing and transportation. Simultaneously, other Seattle organizations providing advocacy and services for women, homeless people, immigrants, and refugees were also targeted for funding cuts.

Chicago-area LGBT activists note, “Just this year we’ve seen huge cutbacks at Horizons Community Services and the Howard Brown Health Center, while three AIDS service agencies collapsed into one in order to save money, and the entire \$2.5 million State of Illinois budget for AIDS minority outreach was wiped out. Even without war, looming budget deficits at the city, state and federal levels will mean further attacks on our social services.”<sup>6</sup>

Many more LGBT programs and organizations providing basic education and services are experiencing or expecting similar debilitating cutbacks and reductions in donor and foundation income. The “War on Terror,” coupled with increasing privatization of government services and resources, and tax reductions favoring the wealthy, accelerates a fiscal shift that was already well underway prior to 9/11: redirection of public investment from human needs—schools, health care and other human services, child care, job training, housing—to prisons, policing, and militarization.

**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.<sup>7</sup>

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.

**Youth and the War**

**Young men and women serving in the armed forces of all nations face all the risks that wartime service entails, including the risk of injury, long-term illness, and death. Children and youth living in war-ravaged countries are at risk of death, injury, long-term illness, malnutrition, poverty, and the tearing apart of families. Many will become refugees. Among other impacts:**

- Severe reduction of services to queer youth, especially poor youth and youth of color because of human services and education budget cuts. Homeless youth, a disproportionate number of whom are queer, will pay a particularly steep price.
- Censorship of anti-war views in school publications and other public platforms.
- Penalties for youth who do not register for the Selective Service. In some states, these may include denial of driver’s license, denial of state employment, denial of state financial aid, and denial of admittance to public colleges and universities.
- Easy military and other governmental access to school records and other private information.
- Stepped-up military efforts to recruit Latinos and the use of fraudulent, deceptive, and coercive military recruiting techniques.
- Repressive, discriminatory, and punitive anti-LGBT military policies.

# Educational and Organizing Resources

Listed here are selected organizations, websites and listserves offering more in-depth information, commentary, resources, and assistance on the topics covered in this issue brief.

Not all organizations listed have taken a stand against the "war on terror" and war on Iraq.

Annotations are given for organizations that provide war-related legal assistance or information and support that may be needed quickly by immigrants, youth, and GI's.

**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.

**The National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC)** is the only national organization focused solely on improving the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth through advocacy, education, and information.

## 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.fpf.org>  
[http://www.arc.org/C\\_Lines/ArcColorLines.html](http://www.arc.org/C_Lines/ArcColorLines.html)

## LGBT Anti-War Information

**Al-Fatiha Foundation**  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/al-fatiha-news>  
<http://www.al-fatiha.org>  
<http://www.al-fatiha.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.nyacyouth.org>

**Out Against the War**  
[http://www.temenos.net/action\\_war.shtml](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.madeintexas.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/tbx/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](mailto:gmagpantay@aaldef.org). Tel: 1-800-966-5946 or 212-966-5932. LGBT people, ask for Glenn Magpantay or Sin Yen Ling.

**National Lawyers Guild National Immigration Project**  
<http://www.nationalimmigrationproject.org>  
**American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee**  
<http://www.adc.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: 202-244-2990

**American Immigration Lawyers Association**  
<http://www.aiala.org>

Referral to immigration attorneys and resources for immigration attorneys. Tel: 1-800-954-0254

**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](mailto:lchrbin@lchr.org). Tel: 212-845-5200 or 202-547-5692

**National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights**  
<http://www.nnirr.org>

National coalition of local and regional immigrants' rights organizations. Contact: [nnirr@nnirr.org](mailto:nnirr@nnirr.org); Tel: 510-465-1984

## Project Voice, AFSC

New nationally coordinated effort to support immigrant communities in base building, alliance building, and policy impact. Contact: [Jcampos-Rivera@afsc.org](mailto: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 [elfin925@rogers.com](mailto:elfin925@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 [vtrfugee@together.net](mailto:vtrfugee@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.nlg.org>

Updated know-your-rights brochure in a variety of languages, information and analysis for legal workers and activists. Chapters in many locations. Contact [nglno@nlg.org](mailto:nglno@nlg.org). Tel: 212-679-5100

## Selective Service/The Draft/Conscientious Objection

**AFSC Youth & Militarism Program**  
<http://www.afsc.org/militarismnews.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 chart. Contact: [youthmil@afsc.org](mailto:youthmil@afsc.org); Tel: 215-241-7176

## 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](mailto:info@objector.org); Tel: 1-888-231-2226.

**Center on Conscience & War**  
<http://www.nisbco.org>

Excellent resources on selective service, the draft, conscientious objection, and militarism. Tel: 202-483-2220

## GI Rights

**GI Rights Network**  
<http://www.girights.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](mailto: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>