



The Peace Alliance
Campaign to Establish a

U.S. Department of Peace



Student Peace Alliance

Frequently Asked Questions

Why should Americans support a Department of Peace?

We live in a culture saturated with violence—youth violence, school and prison violence, domestic violence, child abuse, rape and sexual assault as well as war in many countries around the world. New solutions to these problems are being developed all over this country and around the world, yet they are underutilized and under-funded. We need a commitment to the science of peacebuilding. Building on successful interventions that are measurable and replicable, we can take violence prevention and reduction to scale on a national and international level.

Above all else the Department of Peace will focus on reducing violence here in the United States, with 85 percent of Department funds dedicated to this end. Funding successful programs will reduce violence, saving not only the inestimable human costs, but also our national and state prison, court, education, and medical costs, and more.

In addition, a violent response to violence should always be our last resort, which is difficult without a smart, sophisticated, and well-funded strategy for peace. Even in circumstances where the use of brute force is arguably needed, it is inherently limited and requires peacebuilding and peacekeeping skills and strategies after military or police operations end.

A Department of Peace will provide the institutional framework within which to research, analyze and create nonviolent solutions to both domestic and international conflict. With this capability, the President and Congress will have immediate access to the expertise so deeply needed in our post-9/11 world; we can make the study, creation and use of nonviolent solutions to conflicts a national priority; and expand our ability to address the root causes of violence. Peace then becomes a tangible goal and strategic objective as opposed to a lofty ideal.

Won't a Department of Peace duplicate efforts of the Departments of State and Defense?

No. The Departments of State and Defense play important and pivotal roles in American international policy and this legislation won't change that. The State Department interfaces with heads of state, implements the United States' foreign policy, and advocates for the rights of U.S. citizens abroad. The Defense Department provides the military forces needed to deter war and to protect the security of our country. While both include functions addressing nonviolent conflict resolution, they are subservient to these Departments' main missions. In addition, both work exclusively in the international domain.

The sole focus of a U.S. Department of Peace will be to reduce and prevent violence. Thus it will augment and support other Departments' efforts by working proactively to provide nonviolent strategies and solutions to the many complex issues we face—both domestically and internationally.

While addressing the federal government's responsibility to adequately meet our national security needs in today's world, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, in a November 2007 speech at Kansas State

University, said that “[n]ew institutions are needed for the 21st Century, new organizations with a 21st Century mind-set.” A Department of Peace is part of this new mind-set.

We have a huge deficit now. How will the Department of Peace be funded?

The present bill calls for it to be funded at \$10 billion annually. We currently spend more than that in one month on our efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nonviolent strategies properly applied help build stable civil society structures that reduce the need for such activities, thus saving money making bringing our soldiers a real possibility. Successful application of programs that reduce juvenile delinquency and prison recidivism rates are expected to save us more than the entire Department will cost. If we can avoid one war, end any war even one month sooner, or reduce our need for criminal adjudication, this investment will save the nation and the tax payers money. We have solutions; now we must take them to scale. This is an economic stimulus and a tax payer savings measure.

What is the US Institute of Peace (USIP) and how is it related to the Department of Peace?

USIP is an excellent organization doing powerful work internationally to expand the effective application of nonviolent conflict resolution. It was established by law in 1984 and is funded by the government at about \$30 million annually. Unlike the plan for a Department of Peace, USIP has no mandate to do violence prevention work domestically, nor is it seeking to. Although funded by the government, it operates much like any other nongovernmental organization (NGO) and thus has no voice in policy creation. We highly encourage all members of Congress to support the good work of USIP, and encourage citizens to learn more about it. We also believe that for the United States to truly master nonviolent alternatives to dealing with conflict and crises, we must have a cabinet-level position with the institutional heft of a full department behind it.

Given human nature, isn't violence inevitable?

Conflict is inevitable; violence is not. Violence is one way to respond to conflict, and like virtually all behavior, is learned. Just as we learn to be violent, we are equally able to learn to use nonviolent tools and techniques. We do not lack the ability, but the systems and structures to teach those tools. A Department of Peace will fill this void. Over the last decade we have spent trillions in developing our capacity to fight by developing new weapons, and the strategic plans for using them. History shows that the human species has a violent streak, but human beings also have a compassionate streak as well. It is time for us to invest time, attention and resources to cultivate this capacity, save lives and reduce human suffering at every level of society.

Isn't "peace" an ideal rather than a strategy?

Peace is far from a utopian ideal. It is a possibility that becomes ever more likely as we invest time, energy and resources into its strategic use. There are about 400 colleges and universities worldwide that offer courses in Peace Studies, and the majority of them are here in the United States. Experts consider "peace" a concrete strategy that provides measurable results rather than an unattainable ideal.

The strategic pursuit of that considered "ideal" can also create significant results. For example, while American automakers in the 1970's and 1980's were busy making cars with "acceptable" levels of defects, the Japanese worked with visionary industrialists (many of whom were from the United States) under the philosophy of "Zero Defects." While many dismissed this as naïve, unrealistic, and impossible, the Japanese quietly and swiftly proved that you get much closer to zero defects if you strive for it, and build systems of problem analysis and resolution toward that end. The same is true for peace.

We have no illusion that having a Department of Peace will be the panacea that brings forth a violence-free society. What is certain is that if we don't try, we will never even get close.

Additional Resources

1. United States Institute of Peace (USIP): www.usip.org
2. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation: www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/conflict/
3. United States Department of State (USDS), Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Post-Conflict Stabilization: www.state.gov/s/crs/