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# OPINION

## On Violent Conflict: We Can Do Better

### Countering the emphasis on militarization

BY GLEN GERSMEHL

President Obama's speech on dealing with ISIL -- the violent Islamic movement in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere -- was front page news. Headlines quoted Obama's assertion that "we will degrade, and ultimately destroy ISIL." Now Congress is backing him.

The president's military focus echoes our nation's accustomed response in numerous situations deemed threatening: from the coups we engineered in Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, the Vietnam War, to Nicaragua in the 80s, and war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

That few experts consider any of these violent responses "successful" should encourage skepticism regarding a new campaign that is almost entirely military focused.

It's time for fresh perspectives

and alternatives. Here's a start:

A few weeks after 9-11, in a major foreign policy address at the Naval Academy, President George W. Bush asserted there are three pillars to US security: Defense, Diplomacy, and Development.

Now imagine sitting on a three-legged stool with one leg roughly the size of a baseball bat -- that's defense -- and each of the other two legs the size of a pencil! Yes, defense receives 50 times as much funding as either diplomacy or development. Sadly, this imbalance undermines how effectively we can respond to conflict.

We've spent \$2 trillion on war in Afghanistan and Iraq, offering a small percent of that as building roads, schools, and hospitals -- "Development" activities.

What if from the beginning, we had worked with other countries to focus on underlying issues like poverty, ethnic conflicts, government corruption... while also strengthening underdeveloped international institutions?

There are also untapped insights from nonviolent movements that include and go beyond diplomatic and development strategies. Unfortunately for many people, "nonviolence" is caught in crippling stereotypes -- that it is weak, passive, and ineffective.

The truth is nonviolent movements have been more successful in more places than military force. They've been effective against ruthless regimes like apartheid in South Africa, Marcos in the Philippines, the widespread Velvet Revolution in Eastern and Central Europe, the Nazis in Denmark and Norway, to name a few. Why has the most effective response to violent opponents been absent from public debate on ISIL?

In fact, the tradition of nonviolence offers very useful insights to counter the tendency to emphasize military options and downplay diplomatic and development strategies.

Nonviolence encourages us to seek to interrupt, not feed the cycle

of violence. Recognize that military responses more often than not backfire, often provoking a counterproductive violent response. Nonviolent movements in contrast are grounded in respect for the opponent while organizing large numbers of people to withdraw support for and resist violent behavior.

Nonviolence encourages us to limit the ability of terrorists or dictators to obtain arms, recruit adherents, or rally citizens whose real interest is throwing off their shackles, not defending their oppressors. And nonviolence means we must understand that political leaders derive their power from the people and there are more ways for nonviolent movements to withdraw that power than for leaders to command it.

There is also significant overlap between development strategies and what nonviolent movements emphasize to achieve what military action cannot seek broad international support and strengthen inter-

national institutions to work for large-scale, sustainable, enduring change that prevents violence by addressing root causes.

Such insights have undergirded effective movements around the globe and throughout history. They embody the practical as well as ethical superiority of diplomacy, development, and nonviolence.

Americans are ready for change. Campaign Nonviolence groups in more than 200 communities in every state have stepped up with activities bringing together and addressing climate change, violent conflict, and poverty!

The discussion regarding ISIL urgently needs to be broadened to include diplomatic, development and nonviolence alternatives. We owe it to the people of the Middle East, and any soldiers we put into harm's way, to work with other nations to plan and implement such alternatives.

Glen Gersmehl serves as national coordinator of Lutheran Peace Fellowship.

## High Moral and Economic Cost of Child Poverty

### Destroying dreams, hopes and opportunities

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Just released U.S. Census Bureau data reveal 45.3 million people were poor in America in 2013. One in three of those who are poor is a child. Children remain our poorest age group and children of color and those under five are the poorest.

More than one in five infants, toddlers, and preschoolers were poor during their years of greatest brain development and vulnerability. Black children saw no decrease and continue to have the highest child poverty rates in the nation. In 20 states more than 40 percent of black children were poor and nearly one in five black children were living in extreme poverty with an annual income of less than half of the poverty level or \$33 a day for a family of four.

Although the percentage of poor children dropped in 2013 for the first time since 2000, from 21.8 percent (16.1 million) in 2012 to 19.9 percent (14.7 million), there were still 1.3 million more poor children than in 2007 before the recession began.

It is a moral disgrace that child poverty in the U.S. is higher than



adult poverty, higher than for children in almost all other competitor nations, and higher than our country with the world's largest economy should ever allow.

Wealth and income inequality are still at record high levels and opportunity gaps are widening. What values and priorities do these unjust realities reflect? Isn't it time to reset our moral and economic compass? If we want to build a strong workforce, military, and economy and ensure the most basic tenets of opportunity for the most vulnerable, we must and can end child poverty now.

Poverty hurts children and destroys their dreams, hopes, and opportunities. Poor children are more likely to go hungry, which is associated with lower reading and math scores, greater physical and mental health problems, higher incidence of emotional and behavioral problems, and a greater chance of obesity.

Poor children are less likely to have access to affordable quality health coverage, have more se-

vere health problems, and fare worse than higher income children with the same problems. A poor child with asthma is more likely to be reported in poor health, spend more days in bed, and have more hospital episodes than a high-income child with asthma.

Poor children suffer a 30 million word interaction gap by age 3 and are less likely to enter school ready to learn and to graduate from high school. One study found children who were poor for half of their childhood were nearly 90 percent more likely to enter their 20s without completing high school than never poor children.

Child poverty increases the risk of unemployment and economic hardship in adulthood. Those who experienced poverty at any point during their childhood were more than three times as likely to be poor at age 30 as those who were never poor as children. The longer a child is poor, the greater the risk of poverty in adulthood and experiencing poverty as a child also increases the likelihood of lifelong health problems and involvement in the criminal justice system. Child poverty scars some

children for life.

Child Poverty has huge economic costs for the nation. Year after year the lost productivity and extra health and criminal justice costs associated with it add up to roughly half a trillion dollars, or 3.8 percent of our nation's gross domestic product. What we can never measure though are the countless innovations and discoveries and contributions that did not occur for our nation because children's potentials were stunted by poverty.

It does not have to be this way. Child poverty is not an act of God. It is the choices of men and women and we can change it. Child poverty can be ended and prevented if we want to.

Poverty rates change over time with the economy and with changes in government policies. The U.S. has made substantial progress in reducing poverty over the past 50 years despite worsening inequality and increased unemployment. Child poverty dropped 36 percent between 1967 and 2012 when income from tax credits and in-kind benefits like nutrition and housing assistance are counted. Ending child poverty would save lives and money

and increase productivity.

For example, eliminating child poverty between the prenatal years and age 5 would increase lifetime earnings between \$53,000 and \$100,000 per child, for a total lifetime benefit of \$20 to \$36 billion for children born in a given year. When are we going to gain enough moral, common and economic sense to treat our children justly and give all of them a level playing field upon which to grow?

Children have only one childhood and it is today. Chilean Nobel laureate Gabriela Mistral said, "We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow.' His name is today."

Given that the U.S. has been blessed with great wealth and high ideals which we need to live up to and given the high costs we incur from child poverty every year, how can our country not act to end child poverty now?

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund.