In both our lives and our stories, war has become too easy. It’s ubiquitous on our news, in our foreign policy, and on our TV shows.

But stories that support militarization as a solution to diplomatic problems can, in effect, act as propaganda for the military industrial complex.

They don’t need our help! They’re doing great on their own!

The U.S. defense budget in 2021, $801 billion, exceeded the combined defense budgets of China, India, the United Kingdom, Russia, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and South Korea.

One of the reasons we spend so much on defense is this narrative that violence is necessary to “keep the peace.”

Violence = Peace (?!)
That’s Orwellian “Newspeak” that helps keep the machine whirring but doesn’t match reality.

Let’s try something new!

The U.S. military footprint extends to approximately 750 military installations in foreign countries and U.S. territories. By comparison, Russia has two to three dozen and China five.

Roughly two-thirds of current wars—34 out of 46—involve one or more parties armed by the United States.

The U.S. military installs bases in more than 75 countries.

In the U.S. wars since 9/11:
○ More than 929,000 people have died
○ 38 million have been turned into war refugees or displaced persons
○ The U.S. government has spent $8 trillion and is conducting counterterrorism activities in 85 countries.

The U.S. has the largest military presence in the world.

Shocking Facts About Our Global Military Footprint

U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 2020

In 2020, the United States controlled around 800 bases outside the 50 U.S. states and Washington, DC. Map reflects bases’ relative number and positioning given best available data. For ease of comparison we use contemporary borders and a Mercator projection.


Note: This 2020 map depicts approximately 800 U.S. military bases worldwide. Due to recent closures related to the end of the war in Afghanistan, the authors revised their estimate down to 750.
Diplomacy Instead of War

U.S. Has Cornered the Market as Arms Seller
2017–2021

- United States: 39%
- Russia: 19%
- France: 11%
- Germany: 4.5%
- China: 4.6%
- Other: 21.9%

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

War Profiteering

- Not everyone has paid the same price. Some have profited.
- Defense stocks outperformed the stock market by 58% during the Afghanistan War.
- $10,000 invested in weapons stocks the day President George W. Bush initiated a U.S. military response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks would now be worth $97,295.
- The Pentagon spent over $14 trillion since the start of the War on Terror. Between one-third to one-half of those tax dollars went to for-profit Pentagon contractors.

The 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal is an example of how diplomacy can prevent war. The compromise—in which both sides made significant concessions—prevented an international catastrophe and provided a model for peaceful conflict resolution that keeps countries secure without the cost of lives on either side.

Statecraft makes for great drama. And so does every one of the facts listed above.
Pro-aggression stories that are “ripped from headlines” or that mimic “real world” scenarios only act to recycle status quo ideas about the benefit of military violence.
By showing audiences alternative solutions in the stories we write, we can flip the script, help broaden the discourse and break the cycle of endless war.
Stop treating characters who push for more war as heroes. It’s equally or more heroic and interesting to prevent unnecessary death and destruction.
Let’s stop telling stories of consequence-free acts of war.
Always remember, militarization is the Molotov cocktail of solutions:

* Diplomacy!