



Rapporteur: Annaleah Westerhaug

On June 17, 2021, CNA held its fourth Inclusive National Security event (@InclusiveNatSec on Twitter). This initiative provides a forum for discussions on inclusive national security. This month's event (recording [here](#)) "Deconstructing National Security" explored the question, Can the discipline of national security overcome its structural biases? The keynote speaker was Dr. Meera Sabaratnam, Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in International Relations at SOAS University of London. Dr. Sabaratnam's research interrogates colonial and postcolonial dynamics in world politics at the levels of theory and practice, particularly in the fields of development, security, and war. The event moderator was Dr. Asli Bâli, Professor of Law at the UCLA School of Law and also Faculty Director of the Promise Institute for Human Rights. Below are some takeaways from the discussion.

Reflections from Dr. Meera Sabaratnam:

- The origins of the US and its conception of national security are rooted in a racist past that relied on racial hierarchies. We need to interrogate what national security is and what it means: which communities are being served and what is being protected?
- Racism and race are historical constructs designed for social, economic, and political gain. The good news is that it is possible to deconstruct racism, just as it was possible to construct it in the first place.
- In a historical context, the very definition of the US (who we are as a nation and what nationhood entails) has been wielded against oppressed minority groups—they were, and often are still, not seen as authentically American, but rather as a threat.
- The appropriation of the language of patriotism by extremist and far-right groups, who may act as though they are speaking for the whole nation, offers a good example of an exclusive and narrow conceptualization of the people and the nation.
- National security is a top-down, hierarchal way of protecting people that does not necessarily consider the most vulnerable people. But we can do better, and we can carefully think through a decolonial and antiracist approach to protection.
- At a minimum, we need to interrogate ways in which racial biases inform the international discourse. At a maximum, we should rethink security from the perspectives of those who are the most marginalized. If national security is fundamentally about protecting people, it should extend to the most marginalized and consider how they in particular experience insecurity.
- The field of national security has always been closely linked to the state: it is defined by the state and is seen as a state business. But the state is an institution designed to protect communities, so national security professionals should work with and listen to communities to learn what *security* means for them. The people should define security.

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