

Do More to Prevent War. Reverse the Bipartisan Military Agenda

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Global Research, February 08, 2014
timesrecord.com

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Polls showed a large percentage of us in this country supporting the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and even — though somewhat reduced — the invasion of Iraq in 2003. But not long after, and ever since, a majority of us have said those were mistakes.

We've opposed attacking Iran whenever that idea has entered the news. We opposed bombing Libya in 2011 and were ignored, as was Congress. And, by the way, advocates of that happy little war are rather quiet about the chaos it created.

But last September, the word on our televisions was that missiles must be sent to strike Syria. President Barack Obama and the leaders of both big political parties said they favored it. Wall Street believed it would happen, judging by Raytheon's stock. When U.S. intelligence agencies declined to make the president's case, he released a "government" assessment without them.

Remarkably, we didn't accept that choice. A majority of us favored humanitarian aid, but no missiles, and no arming of one side in the war. We had the benefit of many people within the government and the military agreeing with us. And when Congress was pressured to demand approval power, Obama granted it.

It helped more that members of Congress were in their districts with people getting in their faces. It was with Congress indicating its refusal to support a war that Obama and Kerry accepted the pre-existing Russian offer to negotiate. In fact, the day before they made that decision, the State Department had stressed that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad would never ever give up his chemical weapons, and Kerry's remarks on that solution had been "rhetorical."

The war in Syria goes on. Washington sent guns, but refrained from air strikes. Major humanitarian aid would cost far less than missiles and guns, but hasn't materialized. The children we were supposed to care about enough to bomb their country are still suffering, and most of us still care.

But a U.S. war was prevented.

We're seeing the same thing play out in Washington right now on the question of whether to impose yet more sanctions on Iran, shred a negotiated agreement with Iran, and commit the United States to joining in any war between Israel and Iran.

In January, a bill to do all of that looked likely to pass through the Senate. Public pressure

has been one factor in, thus far, slowing it down.

Are we moving away from war?

The ongoing war in Afghanistan, and White House efforts to extend it beyond this year, might suggest otherwise. The military budget that still eats up, across various departments, roughly half of federal discretionary spending, and which is roughly the size of all other countries' military spending combined, might suggest otherwise. The failure to repeal the authorizations for war from 2001 and 2003, and the establishment of permanent practices of surveillance and detention and secrecy justified by a permanent state of war, might suggest otherwise. As might the ongoing missile strikes from drones over a number of nations.

But you'll notice that they don't ask us before launching drone strikes, and that their assurances that no innocent people are harmed have proven highly misleading.

War may be becoming acceptable only as what its advocates have long claimed it was: a last resort. Of course if we can really make that true, we'll never have a war again.

David Swanson *will be speaking at 3 p.m. Feb. 15 at Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick.*

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