

# How to End Wars

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Around the United States, peace groups are engaged in effective campaigns against proposed new military installations, local funding of weapons companies, and the routine destruction of the environment and of workers' health by such companies. Activists are building better media outlets, educating young people, educating old people, keeping military testing and recruiting out of schools, and discouraging the Army from building real-weapon video arcades in shopping malls. But when it comes to stopping our wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, our citizens are less clear how to go about it.

The peace movement was defunded and demobilized by the absurd belief that an election alone would make a difference, and now there is widespread desire to tell everyone that it didn't. Certainly, it didn't. We have a larger military budget, bases in more nations, and more troops and mercenaries on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq combined now than before the election. We need to understand that this was entirely predictable and predicted. Those who expected something from an election alone need to be clear that such expectation was entirely – not just partially – misguided. Disappointment with a president needs to be replaced with acknowledgement of strategic error. The latter generates less despair and allows clearer thinking about strategy going forward.

There is still and will always be a role for journalists, bloggers, authors, and pundits to expose the abuses of any and all government officials, including the president. But the primary role of peace activists should have nothing to do with presidents, or with senators. We have virtually no ability to influence them. When you're invited to discuss these wars on a television show, by all means expose what the president is doing.. But asking members of an activist group to spend their time writing or calling the White House is a waste of energy that could be better used. It should be directed at the House of Representatives.

And when we look at the House, we see that the easiest way to quickly generate a large list of cosponsors is to propose bills. This pleases our closest allies in the House and impresses funders and allies in Washington, D.C. But it is not the easiest way to use the House to actually end wars. A bill with no teeth to it instructing the Pentagon to produce a plan to exit Afghanistan someday is something that one could almost imagine passing the Senate and being signed by the president. At best that process might move public opinion a bit more in the right direction. But it would further enforce in the public's minds, and Congress's, the idea that when and where wars are fought should be determined by the president or the Pentagon.

Passing a bill barring the spending of any money on an escalation in Afghanistan shifts the discussion to one of opposing an escalation rather than demanding withdrawal. This has led many peace groups to self-censor their demands for withdrawal. And passing such a bill through the Senate and persuading the President to sign it, or overriding a veto is a

beautiful fantasy, but a far, far, far more difficult undertaking than a simpler and more direct approach..

If you want to stop funding wars, or even just the escalation of wars, the easiest way is to just not fund them. This can be done in the House alone. The Senate is not needed. The president is not needed. Rather than passing a bill stating that you won't fund wars, and then dreaming about getting the Senate to pass it too, you can choose to not pass bills that fund the wars. If the House makes clear that it will not fund an escalated war, then the war cannot be escalated. If the House makes clear that it will not fund a continued war, then the war cannot be continued.

The process of signing congress members onto a bill against funding or a bill requiring an exit plan is not counterproductive. It nudges them in the right direction. It creates a discussion about the possibility of including such measures in funding bills. It identifies lists of congress members to target in lobbying for stronger commitments. But when these bills are all we ask for, then they are not compromises or middle-ground. They are harder to move forward when they are all we ask for. And moving them forward without a broader vision of how we actually end the wars doesn't get us anywhere in the end.

Our primary demand must be: publicly commit to voting no on any bill that funds these wars. If unrelated measures are included in such bills, they must still be voted down and those other measures passed separately. If your representative is worried about funding a withdrawal itself, assure them that a bill to fund purely withdrawal has our support. If they are worried about abandoning foreign nations, assure them that we support diplomacy and aid. But we need them to join [the list](#) of their colleagues who have committed to voting no on bills that fund the wars. And we need them to lobby their colleagues to join them on that list.

By moving our focus to Congress we do something else useful. We allow people to protest wars who refuse to protest a president. By identifying wars with a president, we grant all future presidents the power to make wars, and we discourage participation in citizen activism by people who fantasize about the president being their friend or who think it's not wise to protest a popular president.

Our focus on Congress should include their responsibility on Iraq as well as Afghanistan and Pakistan. Congress has now required the Pentagon to provide it with monthly reports on its progress toward fully withdrawing from Iraq by the end of 2011.. When those reports are not forthcoming or do not credibly suggest progress toward that goal, congressional committees must be forced by us to subpoena Secretary of "Defense" Robert Gates. And in fact, the House Judiciary Committee must be compelled by us as soon as possible to restore the checking power of impeachment by opening an impeachment inquiry into Jay Bybee, a federal judge who, while employed by the Justice Department, signed memos purporting to legalize torture and aggressive war. At the very least, Bybee must be subpoenaed, and Congress must use the Capitol Police to enforce that subpoena rather than futilely asking the Justice Department to do it.

If Congress asserts the power to hold war criminals accountable (which, again, can be done without the Senate or the president), we will be in a far better position to deter further wars and escalations, and Congress will be in a better position to cut off funding.

In June, [32 congress members voted No](#) on war funding. They should be thanked and [rewarded](#). But they should, above all, be asked and pressured to make a commitment to join this list of members committed to voting No from here on out: <http://afterdowningstreet.org/whipwars>

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has said that he'd like to see [another \\$50 billion](#) passed in another supplemental war spending bill in the next few months. This is money to fund an escalation that we are supposed to believe has not been decided upon yet. This must be stopped. Some congress members are [speaking against it](#). Even the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee David Obey has [suggested](#) he might oppose this. He very much needs to be encouraged by people around the nation to not put our money where his mouth isn't.

I just had the privilege of speaking at [a rally](#) in Portland, Maine, where an enthusiastic crowd of Mainers demanded the actions I'm proposing here. Their two congress members voted the right way in June, and they are working to win their public commitments to continue that practice and to lobby their colleagues to join them in that commitment.

Resources to help in this effort (and a place to report your results) in your congressional district can be found at <http://afterdowningstreet.org/whipwars>. Here's a flyer on ending the war in Vietghakistan: [PDF](#). Here's how to [step up your activism](#). Here's what's needed [instead](#) of bombs and guns. Here's a way to [nonviolently resist](#).

Here's a very useful list of top targets and multiple ways to [contact them](#). You can help with that even if they are not your representative.

What I am proposing is not easy. It's just the easiest path we have. It will be easier, the more of us get involved, the more of us refrain from discouraging each other with our knowledge of how hard the struggle will be, and the more of us who are willing to go beyond lobbying to nonviolently disrupting, including by sitting in our congress members' offices and refusing to leave until they agree to leave Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. These wars, like all wars, are Congress's wars. The blood is on their hands and they represent us.

*David Swanson is the author of the new book "Daybreak: Undoing the Imperial Presidency and Forming a More Perfect Union" by Seven Stories Press. You can order it and find out when tour will be in your town: <http://davidswanson.org/book>.*

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