

The Anti-War Peace Movement Needs a Re-Start

America Needs a Patriotic, Broad-Based and Politically Independent Opposition to War

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In his first year, President Obama broke several war-making records of President George W. Bush. He passed the largest military budget in U.S. history, the largest one-year war supplementals and fired the most drone attacks on the most countries. He began 2010 asking for another \$30 billion war supplemental and with the White House indicating that the next military budget will be \$708 billion, breaking Obama's previous record.

While some commentators on MSNBC hailed Obama as the peace candidate, he has done more for war in a shorter time than many other commanders-in-chief. U.S. attacks on other countries are not challenged in any serious way even if they result in consistent loss of innocent civilian life. It is not healthy for American democracy to allow unquestioned militarism and put war budgets on a path of automatic growth despite the U.S. spending as much as the rest of the world combined on weapons and war.

Anti-war opposition has failed and needs to begin anew. The peace movement which atrophied during the election year now must re-make itself.

What would successful anti-war peace advocacy look like?

The vast majority of Americans widely opposes war and wants the U.S. to focus its resources at home. Their initial reaction to wars and escalations, before the corporate media spin propagandizes them in a different direction, is to oppose war. But, these views are not reflected in the body politic and certainly not in the DC discourse on war. Rather than anti-war opposition being broad-based, it has been a narrow. It is a leftish movement that does not include Middle America or conservatives who also see the tremendous waste of the bloated military budget and the militarism of U.S. foreign policy.

Being opposed to war is not considered mainstream in American politics. Opposition to war and support for peace needs to become a perspective that is included in political debate on the media and in the Congress. It is currently excluded. Successful anti-war advocacy needs to be credible and well organized so it cannot be ignored. This begins by recognizing the broad, legitimate opposition to war and the long-term anti-war views of Americans across the political spectrum.

There is a long history of opposition to war among traditional conservatives. Their philosophy goes back to President Washington's Farewell Address where he urged America to avoid "foreign entanglements." It has showed itself throughout American history. The Anti-Imperialist League opposed the colonialism of the Philippines in the 1890s. The largest anti-war movement in history, the America First Committee, opposed World War II and had a

strong middle America conservative foundation in its make-up. The strongest speech of an American president against militarism was President Eisenhower's 1961 final speech from the White House warning America against the growing military-industrial complex.

In recent years the militarist neo-conservative movement has become dominate of conservatism in the United States. Perhaps none decry this more than traditional conservatives who oppose massive military budgets, militarism and the American empire. Anti-war conservatives continue to exist, speak out and organize. Much of their thinking can be seen in the American Conservative magazine which has been steadfastly anti-war since its founding in 2002 where their first cover story was entitled "Iraq Folly."

Of course, the left also has a long history of opposition to war from the Civil War to early imperialism in the Philippines, World Wars I and II through Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. It includes socialists, Quakers, social justice Catholics and progressives. Indeed, the opposition to entry into World War I was led by the left including socialists, trade unionists, pacifists including people like union leader and presidential candidate Eugene Debs, Nobel Peace Prize winner Jane Addams and author and political activist Helen Keller. This movement was so strong that Woodrow Wilson ran a campaign to keep the U.S. out of the Great War (but ended up getting the U.S. into the war despite his campaign promises). Opposition to Vietnam brought together peace advocates with the civil rights movement, highlighted by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s outspoken opposition to the war.

Uniting anti-war opposition is an urgent initial step to developing strong anti-war, peace advocacy. The cost of U.S. militarism in lives and dollars has become so great that Americans who oppose U.S. militarism need to join together to create an effective opposition to the military industrial complex that profits from war. Yes, there will be disagreements on other issues but when it comes to war and American empire there is broad agreement that needs to be built on.

A successful anti-war peace movement cannot give up the flag of patriotism. It needs to grab hold of America's patriotic impulses and show the United States can be the nation many imagine us to be – leading by positive example, helping in crisis, being a force for good, rather than propagating military dominance and hegemony. A successful anti-war movement needs to be a place where veterans, from grunts to generals, can openly participate, share their stories and explain the lessons they learned from American militarism. While the left has been able to include the lower level grunts and officers, it has not been a safe haven for generals and admirals who have become opposed to extreme militarism. A safe place, a patriotic, broad-based anti-war movement, will allow more former military to speak out in a cohesive and effective manner.

And, a patriotic anti-war peace movement will also be able to attract the support of business leaders who recognize that war undermines the American economy as well as hurting national security, undermining national and international law and weakening the U.S. economy. When the United States is spending one million dollars per soldier in Afghanistan it is evident to anyone focused on the bottom line that a teetering U.S. economy cannot afford the cost of war.

Indeed, a well organized anti-war movement will have committees not only reaching out to military and business, but to academics, students, clergy, labor, nurses, doctors, teachers and a host of others. Outreach and organization needs to be an ongoing priority. And,

organization must be designed around congressional districts so it can have a political impact. This demonstrates one reason for the need for a right left coalition; the anti-war movement cannot allow “red” states or districts to go unorganized.

Successful anti-war advocacy will also need new tactics. The government and media have adjusted to 1960s tactics. Mass marches and disruption of Congress reached all time highs during the build up and fighting of the Iraq war but with little effect. The government has learned how to handle these tactics and avoid media attention. There certainly will continue to be roles for these tactics but they cannot be central and more is needed.

Anti-war advocates need to use voter initiatives and referenda to raise issues that legislators will not confront. This strategy is a way to break through the power of the military industrial complex and bring issues to the people. It forces a public debate and pushes voters to confront how extreme militarism affects their lives. The U.S. has already spent a trillion dollars in Iraq and Afghanistan when care for the wounded and lost productivity is included the cost is more than doubled. In a decades long “Long War” military expenditures will cripple the U.S. economy. Effective opposition to war will show how the cost of war affects every American’s life.

Around the world other tactics have been successfully deployed on issues that U.S. advocates are not well organized enough to deploy. These include general strikes where people take off work for hours or days to send a message that the people are organized in opposition to government policy. Similarly slow downs in the nation’s capitol that bring the business of government to a halt demonstrate that the people will not let the business as usual go on without interruption. We can see the beginnings of such efforts in the U.S. peace movement in Cindy Sheehan’s “Peace of the Action” that recently protested drones at the CIA and seeks to block the business of Empire in the nation’s capitol in 2010.

Finally, and of critical importance, is for the anti-war peace movement to be truly non-partisan and politically independent. Recently peace activists have been drawn into silence when John “Anybody but Bush” Kerry ran a campaign where he called for escalation of the Iraq War and expansion of the military. And, when candidate Obama promised to escalate the Afghanistan war, attack Pakistan, only partially withdraw from Iraq and expand the U.S. military – many in the peace movement remained silent or criticized his policies but promised to support him anyway. The peace movement needs to protest candidates from any party who call for more militarism, larger military budgets and more U.S. troops and demand real anti-war positions for their votes.

Movements cannot stop and start for elections, nor allow party loyalty to divide them. They must continue to build through the election. Indeed, elections can be prime opportunities to build the movement and push candidates toward the anti-war peace perspective. Peace voters must be clear in their demands: end to the current wars, no more wars of aggression and dramatic reductions in the military budget so that it is really a defense budget not a war budget. This does not mean leaving the U.S. weak and unable to defend itself, but it should not be a budget that allows aggressive misuse of the U.S. military as the primary tool of foreign policy.

Developing an effective anti-war peace movement is a big task that will take years. U.S. Empire can be traced back to the late 1800s and President Eisenhower warned America of the military industrial complex fifty years ago. The U.S. is currently engaged in a “Long War” supported by neocons, neo-liberals and corporatist politicians. The pro-militarist

establishment has deep roots in both major parties and undoing the military machine will take many years of work. Advocacy against war and militarism needs to be persistent; constantly educating the American public that war undermines national security, weakens the rule of law and contributes to the collapsing economy. We need to show how investment in militarism rather than civil society undermines livability of American communities, weakens the economy and puts basic necessities like education and health care financially out of reach.

The facts are on the side of the anti-war peace advocates, now we must build organizations that represent the patriotic, anti-militarist impulses of the American people.

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