American Anti War Activism and Peace Movements

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Introduction

From the beginning of civilization, men have shown a great ability to exterminate each other. Tribes have fought tribes to extinction, and kingdoms, empires, and nations have attempted to do the same to one another. Still, there have always been those that have opposed war, even to the point of imprisonment and/or death. These anti-war elements have generally been minorities, as opposed to the greater numbers within specific populations. Military diplomacy has been found to be the political solution more often than not. This is not to assume that military necessity does not occur, nor that in more than a few circumstances it has not been the only option – it has. However, time and again military action has been resorted to, or carried forward, even when there have been political or economic options that remained unexplored.

When the United States was little more than a group of interdependent colonies struggling to gain independence, there were those that questioned and were even against the Revolution. As would happen again and again in the future history of the nation, these people would for the most part find reticule and scorn, being labeled as disloyal and unpatriotic. In extreme cases, some would be branded as traitors.

The great majority of anti-war activists have been sincere and steadfast citizens. At the beginning of the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln was against opening warfare with the newly established Confederacy. No one in the country was more opposed to war than the new president. Lincoln would explore several options in an attempt to avoid war. His attempts were justified in the name of peace, but in the end, even he was unsuccessful and the American Civil War resulted.

Anti-war activism in the United States has a long history of distinguished names to its credit. As war clouds gathered leading into the Mexican-American war, David Thoreau would oppose the war and write his renowned *Civil Disobedience*, as a direct affront against the war. Others would later use his writings to advocate peace over military solutions. Still, history has shown that more often than not, military action has been the road more often taken. When this has been the case, there have always been those that have stood up and raised their voices in protest and opposition to war.
19th Century American Foreign Policy

In the 19th century, the United States began to move onto the international stage. The country had attempted to establish “democratic sovereignty” in the western hemisphere with the “Monroe Doctrine” in 1823. The proclamation had forbidden any further European colonization in the western hemisphere. This had been mostly disregarded by Europe, but it had also gone unopposed. The country had none-the-less soon established itself as a regional power by the end of the century.

With the growing tensions in Cuba in the late 1890’s, the United States became involved in Spain’s dispute with its colony of Cuba. At stake were American business interests on the island, and a growing “American” desire to force Spain out of the western hemisphere. With this came the question of what action to take as the situation in Cuba worsened. Many in the country were apprehensive of the United States becoming an “imperial power”. This was based on the history of the nation having fought against the British Empire for its independence. The idea of the United States becoming an imperial power itself did not sit well with most Americans, and seemed alien to a nation built on freedom. The question of what action to take in Cuba was thus perplexing for the United States.

The general feeling within the American public was at first one of apathy. But, as the “yellow press” of the day reported more and growing atrocities by the Spanish toward the Cuban population, this started to change. There was a mixed desire to drive Spain out of the hemisphere and liberate Cuba, and also a large discouragement to taking Cuba as a possession. Particularly in the South, there was a fear of Cuba coming under American control and possibly entering the Union as a “colored” state. This was even after the United States had attempted to previously buy Cuba from Spain in the decades before.

In 1898, the United States and Spain went to war after the USS Maine exploded in Havana Harbor. The war lasted but four months, with Spain being driven out of the western hemisphere, and the United States taking possession of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippine Islands. The question of the United States taking Cuba as a possession had been resolved as hostilities began. The Teller Amendment, stating that the United States would recognize the independence of Cuba, and make no territorial claims to the island seemed to absolve the country of the “imperialist issue”.

The American Anti-Imperialist League

In the Philippine Islands, pro-independence forces had been at work well before the Spanish-American War. When war was declared with Spain, American forces struck at the Philippines to open hostilities. Philippine independence forces joined with elements of the American Navy and Marines to liberate the islands from Spain. The Philippines then fully expected to gain their independence and establish their own nation. Many in the United States expected the same, and when this did not happen, there was a growing movement against what was quickly being recognized as “American imperialism”.
While Cuban independence had been recognized early on, the United States government and military saw a completely different scenario for the Philippines. Here was a chance to establish a permanent American presence in the Far East. When the United States quickly moved to create a standing military occupancy of the islands, Philippine independence activists revolted. A war against the “insurgents” soon resulted. For over two years, the United States military would fight a second war against “Philippine insurgents” bent on seeing the island’s independence.

In the United States, emotions were mixed. Many saw the taking of the islands as the “spoils of war”, especially after the Peace of Paris of 1898 had required the monetary payment of $20 million dollars to Spain for her lost territory. Others saw the move as nothing less than “American imperialism”, and contrary to everything the United States stood for. This would lead to the establishment of the American Anti-Imperialist League.

The Anti-Imperialist League was formed in 1898, and opposed any and all American imperialism on the grounds of legal, economic, political, and moral grounds. The “League” felt that annexation of territories outside of the United States was opposed to the very basic ideals of a country that had founded its very existence on the overthrow of control by an imperial empire.

As the election of 1900 approached, the League stood behind the anti-imperialist William Jennings Bryan, who was firmly opposed to the annexation of the Philippines. The “National Party” was also formed in opposition to annexation of territories. The Republican Party nominated William McKinley for reelection as the “protectionist candidate”. When the National Party folded during the election campaign, this left Bryan as the lone anti-imperialist candidate. Once again, an election turned on economic matters, and McKinley won reelection. The country would continue upon its course of establishing territorial control in the Philippines and elsewhere.

By this time the Anti-Imperialist League had grown to include members such as social activist Jane Adams, industrialist Andrew Carnegie, former president Grover Cleveland, union leader Samuel Gompers, psychologist John Dewey, and author Samuel Clements (Mark Twain). The League would also begin to attract editorial interest, and several newspapers would come to support the movement, such as the Springfield Republican. The New York Herald would publish the views of Mark Twain concerning the Philippine question:

It should . . . be our pleasure and duty to make those people (Philippines) free, and let them deal with their own domestic questions in their own way.
And so, I am anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the “eagle” put its talons on any other land.

Regardless of its efforts and the distinguished names in its support, the Anti-Imperialist League would have little success in its efforts to liberate the Philippine Islands. The insurgent revolt would carry on for several years, and cost the lives of over 4,000 of American soldiers, while over 15,000 Philippine independence fighters that were killed. The Philippines would remain under American control well into the 20th century.

The Anti-Imperialist League would be only a shadow of its former self leading into the second decade of the 20th century. The League did not formally oppose the United States entry into World War One, as it was not seen as an effort to advance imperialist aims. Still, several of its leading activists did oppose American entry into the war. By 1921, the Anti-Imperialist
League had ceased to exist. The new issue of American involvement in the European war was now the question facing the country.

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World War One and American Isolationism

As World War One unfolded in Europe, the United States realized an economic opportunity to provide the combatants with supplies and war materials. World War One would be a battle between the imperialist powers in Europe for power, superiority, and territory. Neither side in the conflict could claim or justify its war efforts as being in the “right”, or for a “higher cause”. The war was typical of past European conflicts in that it was a struggle over European dominance and jingoistic ends.

In 1915, the United States Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) was founded. FOR looked to support programs and projects that emphasized nonviolent alternatives to war and supported the rights of “conscious objectors”. Mainly an interfaith organization with religious roots, FOR attempted to steer public opinion and government policy in a non-interventionist direction. In opposition to American militarism, the organization used the tactic of people-to-people exchanges, bringing and sending delegates to and from various countries to meet in harmony. Its pacifist tactics had success in that it was able to promote anti-war attitudes between citizens of countries, but the organization was never effective in swaying government officials in that direction. The organization was active well into the 1990’s.

As the war moved through its first year and into the second, the attitude of the general public in the United States was one of “neutrality”. The great majority of Americans felt that the country should remain neutral and not involve itself in the war. There was nothing to be gained militarily, and the country was profiting economically from the war. The sale of supplies and war materials, and financial aid to the belligerents was bolstering the American economy. By the second year of the war however, this had begun to move decidedly in the favor of England, France, and their allies. While this did not directly determine American support for England, France, and Russia, it did begin to tie the country’s economic interests to those members of the “Triple Entente”.

As American shipping and citizens came into the “line of fire”, confrontation between Germany and the United States escalated. The sinking of the “Lusitania” in 1915, which cost the lives of over one-hundred Americans, began to shift public opinion. Originally to avoid direct confrontation with the United States, Germany rescinded its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. For a time, this removed the threat of American entry into the war. In 1917, Germany reversed its policy and confrontation with the United States was eminent. The release of the “Zimmerman Telegram”, revealing German treachery, steeled American public opinion against Germany.

The United States was not led to support or favor either side in the conflict at its beginning. There was no national, or ethical reason to do so. Cultural and ethnic reasons did not exist either, as the United States held those ties to almost every nation that was involved in the conflict. The country’s demographics were composed of major populations from across Europe. The great majority of Americans were decidedly in favor of “isolationism” from the beginning. In 1916, a bill was introduced into Congress that would require a “national referendum” to allow the United States to enter into warfare. This would require a majority of the country’s citizens to vote for going to war. The bill also required that anyone voting in favor of war, would then be required to
register for military service. The legislation was killed on the grounds that American citizens elected their representative Congress to make those decisions, which Congress was much more prepared to make, and that such vital decisions had to take place in a more timely manner for “national defense”.

William Jennings Bryan led the call for the neutrality of the United States as Wilson’s Secretary of State. As President Wilson began to move toward a more belligerent attitude toward Germany, Bryan resigned and fully aligned himself with the “isolationist echelon”. By 1917, the country was divided between “pro” and “anti” war advocates. Anti-war advocates would begin to organize and eventually the Socialist Party of America would move to the forefront of isolationist and anti-war activism.

The ideals of American “non-interventionism” were well established. Thomas Paine had said as much in *Common Sense*, and both Washington and Jefferson had reiterated that ideal in the former’s “farewell address”, and the latter’s “inaugurate address”. In the interim, John Adam’s presidency had carried this out through his administration’s policy. By the advent of World War One, non-intervention was considered the normal policy for the United States in its dealings with Europe. The “Monroe Doctrine” of 1823 had clearly stated that the United States would not interfere with the “affairs or wars” in Europe.

In 1915, the Women’s Peace Party was formed in opposition to United States participation in war. The organization looked to advance feminist involvement in national activities to promote peace. Jane Adams was active in the party’s efforts and eventually became the chairperson and then president of the party’s international counterpart. While the organization was able to instigate female activism, it would always face “gender barriers” and never received widespread support in the United States.

Anti-war activism became more prominent as the United States moved closer to, and then entered the war. The Socialist Party of America, which represented a growing portion of the labor force in the country, soon took up the mantle of isolationism. The party would both benefit and suffer from its support of “anti-war” activism. In the end, socialist support of anti-war activity would lead to its demise as a viable political entity in the United States. The Russian Revolution wouldblur the lines between socialism and communism, and most Americans would soon define the two as inseparable. Even now, socialism and communism are for the most part inaccurately considered to be one and the same by most Americans.

As leader of the Socialist Party, Eugene Debs would captain the “anti-war movement”, after the United States declared war. With the country’s entry into World War One, Congress passed the “Espionage Act of 1918”. This forbade anyone to speak out against the government, or its war policy. In direct relation to the “Alien and Sedition Acts” passed during the administration of the second president, John Adams, the “Acts” looked to limit any opposition to the American government’s war efforts. These were both affronts to the “freedom of speech” guaranteed by the Constitution, yet curtailed by the “direct actions” of Congress. Debs decried and opposed conscription (draft) of soldiers, and urged citizens not to respond to the government’s “call to duty”. Hundreds of people were arrested and jailed for refusing military service. Debs was arrested, tried, and sentenced to ten years imprisonment in 1918, for “un-American activity”, even while exercising his right to “free speech”. In the decades to follow, Congress would again move to limit the Constitutional rights of American citizens.

Protests and riots would take place across the country in opposition to the war, mostly generated by socialists, labor activists, and anarchists. Protesters objected to a war that they saw as forcing “workingmen” on both sides, to die to protect the interests of wealthy manufacturers.
In 1920, Debs’ sentence was commuted to “time served” by President Warren Harding, who would greet him at the White House as an advocate for “world peace”. In 1924, Debs was nominated for the Noble Peace Prize for his “peace activity” during World War One. He had also run for president in every election between 1904 and 1920.

After the war, the “Nye Committee” was charged with determining how the country had moved so rapidly from a non-interventionist stance in 1916, to entry into the war in 1917. Headed by Senator Gerald Nye, the committee established that American munitions manufactures, large corporations, and financial institutions had made fortunes during the war. The “commission” determined that the billions of dollars owed by England and France to investors in the United States had made it imperative that those countries win the war in order to recoup American investments. Industrialists had then used their political clout and lobbying power to swing government official’s support behind American entry into the war. Germany had then done its part in providing the excuses necessary to move “public opinion” behind the decision to enter the war.

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**Post-War Isolationism and the Neutrality Acts**

In 1921, the Women’s Peace Union (WPU) was formed as an agency to promote peace. The “Union” looked to work within the political system and the government to outlaw war. The WPU would crusade relentlessly between 1923 and 1939 for a constitutional amendment that would outlaw American involvement in war. The union was able to gain the support of several senators and representatives to back its ideals. The organization condemned all violence and was opposed to any half-way movement toward “partial disarmament, instead insisting on a total abstention from war.

With the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928, the WPU saw its greatest success. Sixty-two nations eventually signed the agreement to “outlaw was as a means of settling international disputes.” The union continued to lobby Congress for a constitutional amendment late into the 1930’s, even as “war clouds” began to gather in Europe. They carried out letter writing campaigns to congressmen, and organized meetings, marches, and demonstrations up to the beginning of World War Two.

The “War Resisters League” was founded in 1923 by many who had protested and been jailed in the United States over entry into World War One. The organization would act as an “agent for peace” in the coming decades. Its idea was to “register” people in opposition to war, rather than register for military service. After the war, the League would become prominent in the anti-war and peace movements of the proceeding decades.

As the jubilation over victory in World War One subsided, and the realities of the facts became known to the American electorate (voters). There would be a grassroots movement in the country to setup barriers against future American involvement in foreign conflicts. Public opinion quickly moved back into an “isolationist attitude”. Congressional elections removed many in Congress held responsible for American involvement, and President Wilson would suffer a debilitating stroke. This was attributed by some to the stress of his unsuccessful national campaign to bring the United States into the “League of Nations”. The 1930’s would see a series of legislations pass, as Congress moved to address the growing demand for American “non-intervention” in foreign conflicts.

By the 1930’s fascist governments would come to power in Spain and Italy after World War One. In Germany, the National Socialist Party (Nazi) soon gained a quorum and brought
Adolph Hitler to power. The specter of war was once again rising in Europe. In Asia, Japan’s emperor was overshadowed by the military tribunals determined to establish Japan as the preeminent power in Asia. In the United States, Congress began to take steps to insure that the conditions that brought the country into the First World War, would not be allowed to present themselves once again.

The Neutrality Act of 1935 was passed placing a general embargo on the trade and sale of armaments and war materials to any country involved in armed conflict. It also stipulated that American citizens traveling on ship of “belligerent” nations did so at their own risk. When Italy invaded Ethiopia in that year, President Franklin Roosevelt invoked the law against both nations. The Neutrality Act made no distinction between aggressors or victims. Roosevelt strengthened the sanctions by disallowing general trade with the countries to contain commodities not covered under the act.

The next year, the Neutrality Act of 1936 followed. It extended the “Act of 1935” into the next year, and specified that credit and financial aid to belligerent nations was also now prohibited. Neither act covered commodities such as oil and trucks, nor did they apply to “civil wars”. When civil war broke out in Spain, American corporations used the “loophole” to aid the military efforts in Spain. Within a year, over $100 million in credit had been extended to forces fighting in Spain. That same year, the idea of a national referendum on warfare was resurrected, and a new bill was introduced into Congress, once again calling for a national vote on any move by the country to go to war. It was killed in Congress by the same arguments used in 1916.

In 1937, Congress moved to close the loopholes by passing the Neutrality Act of 1937. The Act extended the previous acts indefinitely, covered civil wars, and forbid American ships to carry passengers, materials, or commodities to belligerent nations. It also forbid American citizens from traveling on ships of belligerent nations. A “cash and carry” provision was added that allowed the president to sell armaments and materials to specified countries on a “pay first” provision. This was seen as allowing the United States to support victim countries against aggressors. Non-interventionists complained, but isolationists in Congress went along with the legislation in the belief that it would help the country to remain neutral in the long run. The added provision expired after two years.

When Japan invaded China in 1937, Roosevelt sanctioned the sale of armaments to China to allow the country to defend itself. Isolationists in Congress complained that the spirit of the Neutrality Acts was being violated. Non-interventionists in the United States also responded, fearing the country was now moving down the same road it had taken to World War One. The president argued that the country would now implement a “policy of “quarantine” in an attempt to isolate aggressor nations.

In 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Czechoslovakia and Roosevelt lobbied Congress to renew the “cash and carry” provision. Isolationists in Congress had strengthened their political position and refused. When Germany invaded Poland and England and France declared war, the president called on Congress once again to reinstate the “cash and carry” provision. This time Roosevelt succeeded against the isolationists, and the Neutrality Act of 1939 was passed. The Act would allow for the sale of armaments to belligerent nations on a pay first basis, but forbid American ships to carry those goods, and prohibited any American ship from entering a “designated war zone”.

Just before American entry into World War Two, the America First Committee (AFC) was founded. The committee would merge with the Keep America Out of War Committee, to have over 800 chapters and 800,000 registered members, perhaps the largest registered membership of
any anti-war organization before or since. The Committee looked to enforce the Neutrality Acts, while pressuring President Roosevelt to honor his pledge to keep the United States out of war. The committee called for a strong homeland defense, while criticizing aid to warring countries. Future president Gerald Ford was a registered member in college at the time. The committee had wide support across the country on university and college campuses, but the events of December 7th, 1941 would completely change the future course of the United States.

The passage of the “Lend-Lease Act” in 1941, ended most of the provisions of the American neutrality policy. The Act allowed the United States to lend and or lease war materials and armaments to belligerent nations. On December 7, the United States entered World War Two after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The attack on Pearl Harbor placed the country in the position of fighting a defensive war, rather than being an aggressor, as many had viewed the country’s involvement in World War One.

American isolationism and non-intervention were now mute points as the country moved to defend itself. The Kellogg-Briand Pact had revealed itself to be nothing more than hollow “lip service” to the ideals of peace. Anti-war activity was also at a standstill in the United States, beyond those that registered as “consciences objectors” to war. This referred to those that refused to participate in military action due to religious, ethical, or moral opposition. Most of these had maintained their opposition too World War One on the same grounds. Still, support for the war was overwhelming, as there was a clear and present “evil enemy” in the form of Nazi Germany and its fascist allies. This had led to the formation of the “Axis Powers” of Germany, Italy, and Japan. Together, the Axis would start a “war against humanity” that would claim over eleven million non-combatant lives during the war. Japan was just as culpable as it led a campaign of ethnic extermination in Asia that included Chinese and other Asian races, as well as American and European “prisoners of war”. All were considered to be ethnically and culturally inferior, and therefore subject to any action Japan deemed necessary to carry forward its imperialist aims.

After World War Two, the United States and its allies would have to deal with both “Nazi and Japanese insurgents”. Both would fight on after the fall of their regimes, against the allied occupation forces. In Germany, this would see nearly a decade of allied efforts to root-out Nazi die-hards that continued to carry-out disruptive attacks, believing their activities would somehow change the results of the war.

The Cold War and Peace Movements

At the end of World War Two, the world had already moved toward a new conflict. The United States and the Soviet Union emerged from the war as the new “superpowers” in 1945. By that time, the two nations had already started actions of “posturing” in opposition to one another. The world had entered a “new age” with the United States use of nuclear weapons against Japan to end World War Two. The new conflict would be referred to as the “Cold War”. Both sides would avoid direct military confrontation for the most part, choosing instead to fight “proxy wars” by supporting smaller nations and their populations against one another. At the same time, the United States and the Soviet Union would begin to build growing “nuclear arsenals” of ever more powerful nuclear missiles that would threaten not only each other, but much of the rest of the world as well.

A new “peace movement” would begin with this nuclear element as the overall looming threat. The United States and the Soviet Union would contest each other first in Greece and
Turkey, where communist elements supported by the Soviet Union would attempt to forcibly take power. In Korea, the two superpowers would square off again in the 1950’s. There was little anti-war activity over the conflict as it was seen as a defensive measure driven by the United Nations against the aggressor nation of communist North Korea.

In this atmosphere the Progressive Party would come to the forefront of the “peace movement. Formed in 1948 as an anti-war party, it was quickly labeled as harboring communists and communist sympathizers. This would become the general practice of both Republican and Democratic presidential administration’s against any that opposed their military agendas during the Cold War. The party did in fact contain some element of communist sympathizers, but was generally made up of pacifists, consciences objectors, and anti-war activists. The party ran candidates for president in both the 1948 and 1952 elections calling for nuclear disarmament and improved relations with the Soviet Union. Unable to shake the label as a communist political tool, the party disbanded in 1955. By the 1960’s the anti-war movement would be galvanized by the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War

In 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union had come to the brink of war with the Cuban Missile Crisis, when the Soviet Union began to place nuclear missiles in Cuba to counter nuclear missiles the United States had stationed in Turkey. After several weeks of intense confrontation, the two nations stepped back and opened negotiations that removed the nuclear missiles from both of those countries. The superpowers then moved toward a “nuclear test ban treaty” and began to discuss nuclear arms limits and control. For “peace movement” advocates, these were welcome changes to the military posturing that had epitomized the Cold War up to that point.

At the end of World War Two, Asia was left in turmoil after Japan’s defeat and withdraw. The superpowers quickly moved to establish support and control of various territories and nations. In two cases, Korea and Vietnam, the nations were divided into communist and democratic regimes. The superpowers then moved to prop up and fortify their support for the opposing governments as civil wars erupted.

In the 1950’s, Vietnam was enveloped in a war against imperialism when France tried to reestablish its colonial possession of Indo-China. Nationalist forces were led by Ho Chi Minh, the prominent resistance leader against Japanese occupation during World War Two. When the French returned after the war, he then organized “the resistance” to French occupation of the country. An avowed communist, Minh was considered to be a national hero for his efforts against the Japanese. He had actually been supported in his efforts by the United States. American involvement in Vietnam began with military and financial support of the French efforts to reestablish her colony.

In 1955, the “Geneva Accords” brokered a deal to reunite the country under general elections. By that time, French efforts to establish their control had failed, and the country had been partitioned. When it became apparent that Ho Chi Minh would win a general election, the United States backed a corrupt democratic government in the south. As the country fell back into warfare, American involvement escalated and led to a protracted military participation involving millions of American military personnel.
Vietnam Era Anti-War Activism

In Vietnam, the United States military would have to fight a war against the North Vietnam Army as well as against a growing number of “communist insurgents” in the South. The Viet Cong insurgents consisted of tens of thousands of communist insurgents in South Vietnam that supported the communist regime in the north. These forces existed well before American troops arrived in force, having been supporters of Ho Chi Minh in the general election that was halted after the Geneva Accords.

Opposition to American involvement in Vietnam would bring about a coalition of various groups. The first documented protest occurred in 1962, led by the Workers World Party. The party formed in 1959, and would hold rallies in the country’s larger cities in protest of American involvement in Southeast Asia. The greatest opposition to the war would begin on college and university campuses across the nation.

As the war effort intensified, the United States implemented conscription, and a draft lottery ensued. Young men turning eighteen were required to register for the draft for military service. One exemption was by entering college or university. This meant that an abnormal proportion of those entering military service were from the less advantaged in society. On the campuses of the country, there was an immediate affinity between the groups. The fact that withdrawal from college immediately made one eligible for the draft also created empathy. Another motivation was the fact that those under the age of twenty-one did not have the right to vote. Therefore, many that were drafted had no say in the very government that was sending them into combat.

Using this as a rallying point, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) formed in 1960. The SDS would first lead the drive toward “participatory democracy”, but would soon become a leading agent in the anti-war effort. On campuses across the nation, the SDS would organize student activism which soon shifted toward protest against the Vietnam War as engagement of American troops increased.

By 1965, the peace movement in the country had gained national attention. Carrying their protests from the campuses and into the streets, large rallies and protest marches began to become common occurrences in the major cities of the country. This then began to attract larger numbers of the middle-class, as well as union participation. A common practice of the SDS was to take over administration buildings and destroy academic records. This led to the stationing of growing numbers of National Guard troops on university and college campuses.

In 1967, some 35,000 protesters marched on the Pentagon in protest of the war in Vietnam. Organized by the National Mobilization Committee (NMC), the marchers were confronted by over 2,500 soldiers. In a show of peaceful spirit, some marchers carried carnations, which they summarily placed into the barrels of the soldier’s rifles. Two years later, a bomb was exploded in the Pentagon after the full scale bombing of North Vietnam was approved by President Richard Nixon. The administration stated its bombing policy in effect to “bomb the North back into the Stone Age”.

The deployment of the National Guard on college campuses would lead to direct confrontations between students and military authority on a daily basis. Colleges and universities around the country were inundated with anti-war protests and marches against what more and more Americans began to see as a growing “police state”. In 1970, tragedy struck when four student protesters and bystanders were killed by National Guardsmen in Ohio. Some sixty shots were fired at the protesters, and among the dead were nine others that were wounded. Anti-war
activists used this incident to rally support, now pointing to a government that was willing to kill its own citizens to carry forward its military aims.

Two years earlier, the military’s credibility had been brought into question with the Mia Lai Massacre, when units under the command of Lieutenant William Calley destroyed a village in Vietnam and murdered some 300 civilians, including women and children. The military’s efforts to cover up the incident, further degraded its credibility. When Calley was pardoned for the crime by President Nixon, anti-war activists then questioned the validity of the countries “justice system”.

A splinter group of the SDS had formed by that time, known as the “Weathermen”. The Weathermen resorted to bombing government buildings, and targeting officials. Having declared war on the “warmongering government” of the United States, the organization was responsible for the deaths of no less than five government officials. The country was now embroiled in a pseudo internal war over Vietnam.

The protest marches in the streets of the country were coming to resemble riots, as police forces were mobilized to maintain order. In several instances, destruction of public and private property had occurred during so-called “peaceful protests”, leading authorities to station police and even National Guardsmen along marching routes. This led to growing confrontations between the groups and “police brutality” became an increasing problem. In their defense, in more than a few instances, police forces were physically assaulted first, but both sides could equally share in the blame for the violence that soon epitomized the anti-war movement and its protests.

As the Presidential election of 1968 approached, the situation in the country was becoming grave. Responding to both sides of the issue, Richard Nixon won the Republican nomination, promising to restore order in the country, while pledging to extract the United States from the war in Vietnam. He would win the election, and move to “make good” on both of his commitments.

Before he was able to do so, the largest confrontation between anti-war activists and authorities would take place in Chicago. The Democratic Presidential Convention was scheduled to be held there to nominate the 1968 Democratic candidate. Already feeling the crushing pressure of national unrest, President Lyndon Johnson had removed himself from reelection consideration. The Youth International Party (Yippies) called for and organized a series of mass anti-war protests in Chicago. Together with the National Mobilization Committee, tens of thousands of protesters descended upon Chicago, where Mayor Richard Daley had pledged to use all force necessary to maintain order. What resulted was war in the streets. For several days, the fighting in the streets of Chicago captured national attention and news coverage, overshadowing the Democratic Convention. The Yippies would coin the term “pigs” in reference to Chicago police, and it would become a national epithet for law enforcement officers.

Before the riots and the Democratic Convention had ended in August, hundreds of protesters had been beaten and arrested, and several hundred police officers had received injuries as well. The Chicago protests did more to hurt the anti-war movement than it did to help it. On the floor of the Convention, Daley was charged with using “Gestapo like tactics”, a reference to the Nazi “death police” of World War Two. The riots also saw the arrest and conviction of the “Chicago Eight”, among them Abbey Hoffman, Tom Hayden, and Bobby Seale. All three would become household names by the end of the Vietnam War. Seale was a co-founder of the Black Panthers, and Hoffman would become a wanted fugitive as a member of the Weathermen.
Hayden would go on to become a prominent figure in California politics. All the convictions were overturned on appeal.

In 1973, President Nixon completed the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords. The war had cost nearly $700 billion dollars in today’s terms. Over three million Americans served in Vietnam, and nearly 60,000 American soldiers and personnel were killed during the war. Over 125,000 Americans fled to Canada during the war to avoid the draft, later to be pardoned by President Jimmy Carter. The war is today referred to as the American War in Vietnam.

The war had the effect of steering the country clear of major armed conflict in the years to follow. For his part, President Nixon would guide the country into a policy of “détente” with the Soviet Union. The two countries would then begin to move along a path of determined cooperation and would sign several “arms agreements”. Much of the movement toward more peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union was predicated on the opening of diplomatic relations with China, also a credit to the Nixon administration.

Directly related to the peace movement and anti-war activity was the widespread printing of “underground newspapers” and “popular music”. Protest songs became the mantra of youth across the country. Groups and singers like Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, the Grateful Dead, and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young recorded songs of protest and peace. Seeger’s *The Big Muddy* became a classic decrying the conditions and leadership of the war. Neil Young wrote the song *Ohio*, immortalizing the Kent State shooting with the phrase, “four dead in Ohio”. Both songs were banned on many AM radio stations, leading to the establishment new FM stations, many of which were “underground stations” that did not hold broadcast licenses. The anti-war movement had become a social as well as a cultural development.

### The Peace Movement in the 1980’s and 90’s

The movement toward détente with the Soviet Union and the diplomatic relations with China opened a new era of transition. The superpowers still held overwhelming numbers of nuclear weapons, and the “peace movement” in the United States began to focus on “nuclear disarmament” as its battle cry. Rallies were held across the country in the next decades to promote a continuing effort it this direction. The United States and the Soviet Union would sign a series of agreements over this time to draw down the numbers of nuclear weapons they possessed. The 1988 INF Missile Treaty was the most successful of these, as both countries agreed to completely eliminate their arsenals of intermediate nuclear missiles.

In 1980, Ronald Reagan became president and took a new “hard-line” toward the Soviet Union. The United States began a program of increased military spending, which was quickly matched by the Soviet Union. The two countries had soon implemented new military build-ups, mostly along the lines of new generations of technological military equipment. The build-ups placed both countries into heavy debt, with the United States national debt tripling during the Reagan administration. The Soviet Union had also entered into a war of attrition in Afghanistan that became very expensive and was unpopular with the Soviet people. While the United States was able to sustain its military debt with matching economic growth, the Soviet Union was not as fortunate.

By the middle of the 1980’s, the Soviet Union’s economy was under severe strain. When Mikhail Gorbachev became Soviet Premier, he moved to implement economic and social
changes to reverse the economic instability. To cut military expenditures, the Soviet Union rescinded the “Brezhnev Doctrine”, and removed its troops from Eastern Europe. Still, Gorbachev’s efforts were too late to solve the country’s economic problems. By 1989, a “democracy movement” had begun in Eastern Europe and the overthrow of communist governments had begun. The Berlin Wall came down in 1989, as the last great symbol of Soviet control outside of the “Union”. Between 1989 and 1991, the majority of communist governments in Europe had been replaced by various democratically elected governments. By the end of 1991, twelve of the fifteen republics in the Soviet Union had withdrawn from the “Union”, and signed a treaty that officially ended the Soviet Union.

In the United States, the peace movement rejoiced to what it saw as the end to the greatest obstacle to world peace – the Cold War. Eastern European nations moved to joining the European Union and NATO, while the largest perceived threat to the United States had been removed with the demise of the Soviet Union. It seemed the world had entered a “new era” of cooperation and peaceful existence. Organizations such as FOR (referred to earlier) were instrumental in initiating the “Nuclear Freeze Campaign”. Peace advocates in the United States and around the world began to hold rallies, demonstrations, and protests against nuclear weapons and nuclear proliferation. The movement was mildly successful as the United States, the Soviet Union, and China moved to draw down their nuclear arsenals, while nuclear powers had by that time spread to include Britain, France, North Korea, India, Israel, and Pakistan.

The 1990’s saw the United States enter a period of peace and prosperity under the administration of President William Clinton. The country would use its military power in mostly humanitarian causes during the 1990’s. In Bosnia and Somalia, the United States would commit military forces in attempts to provide humanitarian assistance and stop ethnic cleansing. The country would also move to foster new peace negotiations concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Looming on the horizon would be new problems and threats focusing on the Middle-East.

War in the Middle East

In 1979, the United States backed regime of Reza Shah Pahlavi was overthrown by extremist Islamic elements headed by the exiled Ayatollah Rahollah Khomeini. By the end of the 20th century, the Islamic Republic of Iran had become involved in sponsoring Islamic revolutionary elements and terrorist organizations throughout the Middle-East. Terrorist organizations in the Middle-East multiplied. Iraq had also receive early military support from the United States as a check against Iran. By the end of the century, both countries would view not only each other as enemies, but also the United States in the same light.

In 1982, President Reagan had stationed American troops in the nation of Lebanon under United Nations directives as “peace keepers”. The following year, an American barracks was bombed by suicide attackers, killing 63 American soldiers. The attack brought non-interventionist elements into the streets in protest against American involvement in the growing Middle East conflict.

In Afghanistan, the extremist Taliban had seized power after the Soviet withdrawal beginning in 1988. In Iraq, the regime of Sadam Hussein had become a rogue state which then fought an extended war with Iran. In 1991, Iraq invaded Kuwait while militarism in both Iran and Iraq had been previously supported by the United States. The United States had in effect
created military elements in the Middle East that the country would eventually end up fighting in the decades to come. The most militant of these were the “Islamic mujahedeen” armed and trained to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. These would become the radical fundamentalists that would eventually make up the core of Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda.

After Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, anti-war activists in the United States mounted new efforts as the United States began to build a coalition of United Nations forces to drive Iraq out of the country. Rallies and protest marches were held in the major cities of the United States. Peace activists and organizations sent delegates to the Middle East, including religious leaders in an attempt to prevent the war. When the ground war ended after just one week, and the “coalition” did not move to invade Iraq, the protests became a mute point. A wave of patriotic sentiment and Iraq’s position as an aggressor swept over the protests before they could affect American opinion.

The Student Peace Action Network (SPAN) was formed in 1995 to bring young activists back to the forefront of the peace movement. After the Vietnam War, much of the country’s youth had become disenchanted with politics and questioned whether their voices had any “real power”. To unite and engage the youth of the nation, SPAN began to encourage young people in the United States to organize and support the peace movement. The organization had limited success in igniting any tangible response among the youth in the country.

Beyond the threats to American foreign policy in the Middle-East, a more dangerous threat had formed by the late 1990’s. Under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden, the terrorist group al-Qaeda began a rebel campaign aimed at the United States and its allies. Under a fatwa (religious permission) issued by a radical Islamic cleric, al-Qaeda began a bombing campaign across the globe aimed at destroying American interests anywhere they could strike.

When terrorist organizations supported by al-Qaeda attacked American bases in the Middle East and at embassies in Africa, the Clinton administration responded with missile strikes against terrorist camps in Afghanistan. These were now supported by the Taliban regime in that country. Republicans in Congress decried the military operations at the time, then would later claim the Clinton administration had not done enough to insure American security. As in the past, American “party politics” would drive foreign policy, as both sides would blame each other for the coming terrorist attacks in the United States. Anticipating a resurgence of American militarism, the anti-war movement in the United States was resurrected.

The New Millennium and Terrorism

The United States attitude toward terrorism would change on September 11, 2001. Up till that time, the country had deplored terrorist activity around the globe, but it was seen as a problem that did not directly affect the United States as a whole. This is not to say the United States had not been involved, or had not suffered attack. American citizens, property, and installations had been the target of numerous attacks, but nothing had occurred in the continental United States that could be linked directly to foreign terrorism.

In 1995, the Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed, killing 168 men, women, and children. In the first days after the bombing, the initial reaction was toward Arab terrorists. In was soon learned that the attack had been carried out by domestic militia terrorists. No connection with Middle East terrorists was ever proven, but there were some that reported that an
association existed. Perhaps if this had been proven to be the case, the country and government might have moved earlier to defend itself from the attacks of “9/11”.

After the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, President George W. Bush declared that the United States was under siege and pronounced a “war on terrorism” and states that supported terrorism. Afghanistan immediately fell into this category and plans were quickly implemented to take direct military action against the Taliban regime. In support of the Afghan “Northern Alliance”, United States forces led a massive bombing campaign and strategic strikes against the Taliban military and terrorist camps in the country. With the collapse of the Taliban regime, American Special Forces entered the country in an effort to wipe-out al-Qaeda forces and arrest or kill Osama bin Laden.

When President Bush moved to extend the war into Iraq, anti-war activists began to mount an attack on what they saw as American warmongering. The Bush administration began a campaign to build a new coalition to invade Iraq, falsely claiming an Iraqi connection to al-Qaeda. The administration further alleged an unsubstantiated accusation of attempted nuclear proliferation on the part of Iraq and its leader Saddam Hussein. The administration also asserted that Iraq harbored “weapons of mass destruction” (WMD’s) in the form of long range missiles and biological agents. Using false documentation and slanted interpretations of intelligence, the administration attempted to steer both government and public support toward invasion of Iraq.

American public opinion was heavily in favor of a “negotiated diplomatic solution” concerning Iraq. However, the majority of Americans were also in favor of military action if and when a United Nations resolution might render military action as a necessity. The country was once again divided over its war aims. When the Bush administration made it clear it would seek a military solution regardless of United Nations support, a growing number of Americans took an anti-war stance. Anti-war protests were held across the globe in some 800 cities. In the United States, some 350,000 protestors marched in the streets of New York City, and tens of thousands took to the streets in other American cities.

The majority of military analysts were against the invasion of Iraq, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest council of military leaders in the country. The president’s National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft also advised President Bush against invasion of Iraq. They warned that an attack upon Iraq was unnecessary. Their recommendation was that an invasion would further destabilize the region and lead to the further spread of terrorism. They also warned that an invasion of Iraq could be seen as an American attack on Islam and would allow Islamic radicals to use the war as an excuse to wage a “jihad war” to protect Islam. Warnings came from across the intelligence community and from the United States military that the country would be moving itself into a war that it would find hard to extract itself from – another Vietnam.

Regardless, the Bush administration won a majority of support for military action against Iraq in Congress. Congress authorized the attack against Iraq in 2002, with the majority of Americans now supporting such action after an intense media campaign by the administration in favor of a “preemptive strike” based on erroneous intelligence reports released by the Bush administration. The invasion went forward with the United States leading a “coalition of the willing”. The ground war lasted less than a month, and President Bush declared victory with his “Mission Accomplished” speech in 2003. In fact, exactly what the Joint Chiefs of Staff had warned about occurred. The country was now involved in a war against “Islamic insurgents”. When the administration reported that “it could not have foreseen an insurgency problem in Iraq”, the Bush administration showed a clear incompetency in regards to American military history.
Within a year, the majority of Americans had come to believe the invasion was a mistake. Two separate polls conducted by independent agencies found that fifty-seven percent of Americans now had a disfavorable opinion of the war in Iraq, and American military actions in the Middle East in general. After it became clear that Iraq neither possessed WMD’s, nor was looking to advance its efforts to gain nuclear or new biological weapons, the anti-war movement picked up steam. By 2004, the peace movement in the United States was gaining wide support.

United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) was formed in 2002 as a coalition of organizations opposed to the American government’s war policy. In 2002, the group organized “International Human Rights Day” in opposition to American military actions in Afghanistan. When the invasion of Iraq began in May of 2003, UFPJ held rallies and protests in several major American cities. Because of the various natures of the organizations within UFPJ, its efforts were divided into concerns for nuclear disarmament, anti-war campaigns, the Palestine-Israel issue, and global justice. Joining with the ANSWER Coalition, the two groups launched the largest protest to date in the United States in 2005. The “End the War on Iraq” marches in September of that year saw hundreds of thousands combine to march in the streets of the country’s major cities, protesting the war in Iraq, and demanding the immediate withdraw of American forces. In Washington D.C., 300,000 protestors marched on the capital and past the White House. Over 350 protestors were arrested for blocking the entrances to the White House.

As soldiers began to return to the country from combat, more and more of their voices clearly showed an alarming disenchantment with the American war effort in Iraq. In 2004, Iraq Veterans Against the War was formed to help former soldiers find solidarity and to speak out against the war. Further, the organization began to publish the “blogs” of soldiers still “in country” that were becoming disillusioned about the United States involvement in a war that they saw as less about fighting terrorism, and more about advancing the Bush administration’s militarism, and what some began to see as a war over “oil”.

The Bush administration launched a “U.S. Troop Surge” in 2007 in an effort to regain control of the countryside as insurgent attacks increased. The “Surge” was overall successful in reestablishing American control in the country, but was not able to maintain that control once troops moved to new areas. For the Iraqi government, the situation appeared to be one of growing American occupation. In May of that year the Iraqi Parliament signed a legislative petition calling on the United States to set a timetable for withdrawal. This and an “exit strategy” were two concerns the Bush administration had not contemplated when first instigating the war.

The “Surge” meant that more troops were now in harm’s way, and the peace movement now led by the UFPJ coalition began a new campaign of protest. As the election of 2008 approached, the demand for change in the country began to rise. The major party candidates took different stances as to the United States role in Iraq and Afghanistan. Barack Obama, the Democratic candidate called for a clear timetable of withdrawal from Iraq, and a new build-up in Afghanistan. In November of 2008 he would win election, and he begun to implement a new American strategy. Peace activists immediately began to protest, as the president had campaigned on a pledge for American withdrawal.

The Department of Peace

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan play out, the peace movement is set to take a new stand against the present Obama administration. As the administration begins to develop plans to
increase troop deployments in Afghanistan, anti-war advocates prepare for a new wave of efforts, demonstrations, and rallies in support of peace. At the same time, they are turning their efforts toward an endeavor once again try and establish a Peace Department within the United States government.

In 1792, Benjamin Rush put forth the idea of an Office of Peace, just after he signed the Declaration of Independence. He felt it was imperative that the country had this tool to offset the Department of War. In 1935, the first bill to establish a Department of Peace was introduced into Congress. Since that time, there have been over eighty bills introduced in Congress to create a Department of Peace.

The Peace Alliance and the Student Peace Alliance have both led the call nationally in the last few years for the development of a Peace Department. The idea had gained steadily growing support from local and state officials, but had been welcomed only half-heartedly in Washington. The idea for a Peace Department was listed as one of the “Top Ten Ideas for Change” by Americans in 2009. Local grassroots “chapters for change” have formed in nearly a dozen states calling for the creation of the Department for Peace, to act as a voice of governmental moderation.

In 2009, Senator Dennis Kucinich introduced the latest bill calling for the creation of a Department of Peace. The bill was first introduced by Kucinich in 2001, and he has reintroduced it every other year since. At present, some seventy senators and representatives have signed on to the bill, and it has gained support from such groups as Amnesty International and the National Organization of Women.

The bill calls for the creation of a Department of Peace to coordinate and to advance American efforts of cooperation and mediation, both domestically and internationally. Among other things, the “Department” would oversee the teaching of conflict resolution skills to be taught in public schools. It would provide support and funding for violence prevention programs nationally, and investigate and instigate better methods to deal with gang psychology and prisoner rehabilitation. The department’s more pressing directives would deal with monitoring arms production in the United States, with both domestic and military applications, and including weapons of mass destruction. Further, the Peace Department would complement military efforts and approaches to ending violence. Finally, its most critical duty would be to make recommendations to Congress and the President on the latest techniques of diplomacy, meditation, and conflict resolutions for any given international dispute.

The efforts to bring into existence the Department of Peace have been ongoing. Those efforts are gaining growing support within the peace movement, which sees the department as perhaps its best way of obtaining a lasting and credible voice in government. The efforts of various coalitions and alliances are moving in growing support for the creation of a Department of Peace, as a way to offset the authority of the Department of Defense.

**Conclusions**

American peace movements have risen nearly every time the country has moved toward war. This has been the legacy of the country, and undoubtedly the peace movement in the United States will carry forward that tradition. Every time the country has taken steps toward warfare, the United States has seen the formation of organizations and alliances in the opposite direction. This legacy dates back to the “Torries” that opposed the American Revolution.
The Department of Peace seems like the next step in that direction. The future of anti-war efforts in this country and by the government may hopefully be able to rely on a Department of Peace as a voice of reason and moderation in the near future. Anti-war advocates see the creation of the department as a “voice of reason” in a political climate that seems to see war as the only avenue of negotiation.

As the country deals with military engagements around the world, and contemplates new ones, either real or imagined, there will be those that will voice their opinion against the use of American militarism as a solution. While this will not always be possible as the nation moves to protect both its citizens and its interests, it is realistic to believe there will be instances in which the influence of anti-war and peace activists can slow and even halt the move toward military solutions, in favor of harmony and cooperation.

Further Readings and Credits