

Peace Movements and Policy: Understanding Success

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Introduction

In December 2011, as the last US troops were leaving Iraq, I received a phone call from the White House. It was the first and only time in my career I've been called by the White House. On the line that day was the director of the Office of Public Engagement, a small bureau created by the Obama administration as a means of exchanging views with progressive civil society groups. "We just want to say thank you," the director of the office said, "to you and other activists in the antiwar movement. What the President accomplished today would not have been possible without the work you and many others did over the past few years." He was calling because of my role in helping to create Win Without War, a national network opposed to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. I was speechless and humbled, and grateful to realize that what he said was probably true. We, the global antiwar movement of tens of millions of people, had resisted the invasion on an unprecedented scale. In the United States we organized politically to turn Congress against the occupation and helped to elect a President who promised to withdraw the troops and was now fulfilling that pledge. It felt like a rare moment of success for the peace movement.

Few activists paid much attention to the withdrawal from Iraq and no celebrations were organized. The mood among activists was solemn, sadness at the immense loss of life caused by the war and regret that we had not been able to stop the invasion in 2003. Few recognized their hand in helping to change US policy and end the occupation.

That episode reminded me of a similar experience in 1987 when I was invited to a conference by the Green Party in Germany to evaluate the recently signed INF treaty eliminating intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe. The German Greens and European disarmament movement had battled NATO and Warsaw Pact missiles for a decade, organizing in the early 1980s the largest peace demonstrations in modern European history. NATO officials ignored the protests and proceeded with the deployment of the new missiles in 1983. Now they were signing a treaty with the Soviet Union to eliminate all of them. They were enacting the zero option the movement demanded. The placards carried through the streets of London and Bonn had read "no to Cruise and Pershing, no to SS-20," protesting both NATO and Soviet missiles.

The Greens were unexpectedly glum and uncertain about how to interpret the landmark INF treaty. Because the movement had failed to prevent the initial NATO deployment, activists believed their struggle had been a failure. The surprisingly positive agreement was not anticipated but was certainly welcome. I told the gathering we should celebrate the treaty and claim it as our own. We may have lost the battle against initial deployment, but we won the larger struggle to rid Europe of these menacing missiles.

Overview

I offer these stories as examples of the challenge activists often have in recognizing success. Too often activists feel powerless or believe that their protests and political actions have failed. My purpose in this work is to examine how citizen activists have been effective at times in helping to end war and reduce nuclear weapons, and to explore the factors that account for success. The focus is on questions of agency, to understand the requirements of effective mobilization and social advocacy and identify strategies and methods that contribute to constructive policy change.

I address these questions today at a time of severe challenges to peace. The Hamas terror attack, Israel's massive military assault and siege of Gaza, and the ongoing war in Ukraine—all pose grave threats to international security. Rarely has it been more difficult to talk about peace and the role of peace movements, but never has it been more urgent to do so.

Some peace scholars and activists prefer not to think about the raging wars. In late September I attended the annual conference of the Peace and Justice Studies association and found not a single panel or speaker addressing the war in Ukraine. At some campuses today attempts to organize dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian voices are met with protest, as civil conversation about ending the war in Gaza becomes increasingly difficult.

If we want peace, we have to address the challenges of war and try to understand those with whom we disagree. If we believe that nonviolence is superior to violence, we must show that it provides solutions to the problems violence

purports to address, but in a less costly and more sustainable manner, even in the most intractable conflicts.

In these reflections I draw from my experiences as an engaged participant in many peace movements and campaigns over the decades, but also as a peace studies scholar. I examine research on peace history, the study of social movement theory and practice, and the literature on nonviolent action and civil resistance. I look primarily at the global campaign against the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in the 2000s, and also at the nuclear freeze and disarmament movements of the 1980s, while also reviewing the opposition to war in Gaza . My purpose is to examine examples of activist influence on policy making and assess lessons to be learned for peace advocacy today and in the future. At the conclusion of the paper, I offer a few observations, drawn from experience and research, on the understandings and practices that can guide more effective peace movement practice.

Why Movements Matter

History shows that peace movements are able to shape policy if they can build large coalitions, employ wise strategies, have compelling and unifying narratives, and are persistent in applying pressure for change.

The ways in which social movements influence policy are not always apparent. They often emerge in unexpected ways, or have effects far into the future. “It is always too early to calculate effect,” writer Rebecca Solnit observed.¹ We can never know how our actions today may influence events tomorrow. When we apply pressure, we can’t predict how political establishments will respond. Movements may win even as they appear to lose.

The Iraq antiwar movement was unable to stop the invasion, despite more than 10 million people demonstrating in hundreds of cities around the world on February 15, 2003, the largest single day of antiwar protest in history. George W.

¹ Rebecca Solnit, “Acts of Hope: Challenging Empire on the World Stage,” *Mother Jones*, 14 June 2005, www.motherjones.com.

Bush ignored the global outcry, saying he would not be influenced by “a focus group,” and pushed ahead with his ill-fated invasion.²

The protests and widespread public opposition to the war had multiple political impacts, however. They prevented Germany, Canada, Turkey and other countries from joining the so-called coalition of the willing, and the UN Security Council twice rebuffed US and British attempts to gain authorization for the use of force in Iraq, as citizens of the member states actively opposed military intervention.

In the US opposition to the war and occupation became electoral issues, helping Democrats win control of Congress in 2006 and adopt a legislative mandate for the withdrawal of troops, although Republicans rebuffed the effort. Barack Obama won the Democratic nomination on the basis of his opposition to the war and as President followed through on his pledge to withdraw the troops.

The nuclear freeze movement was one of the largest disarmament mobilizations in US history. A million people marched to New York’s Central Park in June 1982 to call for freezing and reversing the arms race. More than 11 million Americans voted in favor of nuclear freeze referenda that year. The US Catholic bishops and many other religious bodies issued public appeals for nuclear arms reduction. In Europe millions of people marched in waves of protests to halt the deployment of US and Soviet intermediate range missiles on the continent.

The White House rejected the freeze proposal, and NATO leaders dismissed the opposition to new missiles in Europe, but the protests influenced the political culture and had important impacts. Ronald Reagan responded to the popularity of the freeze by toning down his bellicose rhetoric and promising to negotiate for peace with the Soviets. He followed through on those pledges when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and the two leaders negotiated agreements for unprecedented nuclear weapons reductions, beginning with the INF treaty eliminating intermediate range missiles in Europe.

In the US, activists groups applied grassroots pressure and mounted effective legislative lobbying campaigns to reduce funding for the MX missile, the Strategic Defense Initiative and other weapons programs. They succeeded in convincing

² Pres. Bush Not Swayed by Anti-war Protests,” National Public Radio, February 18, 2003, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/middle_east-jan-june03-iraq_02-18

Congress to cut off funding for nuclear testing, which led to negotiations for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Political change often occurs in unexpected and sometimes unrecognized ways, amidst ambiguity and competing claims for credit. Change rarely comes quickly enough for activists or in the manner they intend. Those who campaign against war and nuclear weapons are rarely satisfied with modest victories such as gradual troop withdrawals or limits on specific weapons. Yet partial steps can be significant and may lead to more substantive change. The Iraq and nuclear freeze movements had political impacts that deserve to be acknowledged, and that can provide guidance for addressing the challenges of today.

Movements and Politics

Many on the left and within the peace movement consider the embrace of institutional politics a mistake. They believe the role of the movement is to criticize politicians from the outside, not to support candidates for office or lobby for legislation on the inside. Social movement scholars share the critique of activist involvement in conventional politics. In their important book, *Party in the Street*, Michael Heaney and Fabio Rojas acknowledge the role of the Iraq antiwar movement in the 2006 congressional elections and the candidacy of Barack Obama in 2008, but they interpret this as the “demobilization” of protest and the “collapse” of the movement. They assert that the election of Obama “spelled doom for the antiwar movement.”³

These assessments are too pessimistic, I believe. They fail to acknowledge the significant impact of antiwar activists in turning Congress against the war and helping to elect a president who campaigned on a promise to end the conflict and followed through on that pledge. Demonstrations and protests became less frequent, but the antiwar movement continued and took different form. Rather than spelling doom, the election of Obama was an indication of partial success for the peace movement.

³ Michael T. Heaney and Fabio Rojas, *Party in the Street: The Antiwar Movement and the Democratic Party after 9/11* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 229, 9.

Similar debates emerged during the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign of the 1980s.⁴ The original strategy of the Freeze Campaign was to build a base of grassroots support in states and local congressional districts before engaging in national political campaigns. This reflected the essential grassroots nature of the movement. Activists argued that the political power necessary to stem the arms race would have to flow from the bottom up. Attempting to enter national politics prematurely would do more harm than good, the original Freeze Campaign strategy document argued.⁵ When members of Congress began to endorse the freeze and introduced legislation on its behalf, however, the movement could not sit on the sidelines and allow politicians to speak for their issue.

Nor could the movement ignore the 1984 presidential primaries when Democratic Party candidates supported the freeze, including nominee Walter Mondale. When Reagan trounced Mondale in the November election, some interpreted this as a defeat for the freeze movement. Historian Henry Maar claimed that Reagan's victory caused "irreparable damage" to the Freeze Campaign, which was left "smoldering in the ashes" of Mondale's defeat.⁶ Yet the freeze movement remained active and subsequently achieved important policy gains.

Those who criticize activist involvement in conventional politics have a truncated view of social movements. As Tom Hayden wrote, the peace movement cannot be defined solely on the basis of action in the streets.⁷ Movements are forms of social contestation that sometimes overlap with electoral or legislative activity. Most activists are pragmatic about their choice of methods, demonstrating in the streets but also engaging in electoral organizing and legislative lobbying. Sharp boundaries between street protest and conventional politics are rare.

Scholars David Meyer and Catherine Corrigan-Brown explain that movements are composed of broad coalitions that "straddle the boundaries between institutional

⁴ The Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign was a specific organization formed by activists who initiated the nuclear freeze movement. References to the former are with first letter caps, while the use of freeze in lower case refers to the broader social movement of which the Campaign was a part. The Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign merged with SANE in 1987 and became SANE/Freeze, which in the 1990s was renamed Peace Action.

⁵ Pam Solo, *From Protest to Policy: Beyond the Freeze to Common Security* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing, 1988), 74-76.

⁶ Henry Richard Maar III, *Freeze! The Grassroots Movement to Halt the Arms Race and End the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 207-08.

⁷ Tom Hayden, *Ending the War in Iraq* (New York: Akashic Books, 2007), 17 and 119.

and the extra-institutional politics.”⁸ They involve rallies and demonstrations, but also the mobilization of voters and citizen lobbying, action in the streets and in the suites. To evaluate peace movement impact, we need to widen our scope of analysis and examine not only protests and grassroots activism but also involvement in political activities such as lobbying and electoral campaigning.

Movement Dynamics

Movements inevitably experience waves of ebb and flow. Occasionally they grow to massive scale in response to particularly outrageous events or policies—such as the invasion of Iraq, and an escalating threat of nuclear war—and they rise or fall in relation to events that affect that policy. Eventually all movements go through periods of decline and fade away. The process of forming and disbanding groups is an inherent part of movement organizing. Movements often change shape as new challenges arise, and they tend to shift toward institutional forms of action as opportunities for political engagement materialize.

The degree to which activists emphasize street protest or conventional politics depends on multiple variables. Social movement scholars emphasize the importance of political opportunity structures, which can be defined as the presence or absence of avenues for engaging politically.⁹ One of those opportunities is access to the established political system. If there are viable legislative options for ending or constraining war, or if there are electable candidates who are committed to working for peace and disarmament, activists will be encouraged by these opportunities and will devote more of their time, energy, and money to working within the system and engaging in conventional forms of political action.¹⁰

On the other hand, if options for legislative or electoral approaches are closed or absent, people will participate more often in protest demonstrations. When

⁸ David S. Meyer and Catherine Corrigan-Brown, "Coalitions and Political Context: U.S. Movements Against Wars in Iraq," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 10, no. 3 (June 2005), 329.

⁹ Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ McAdam, Doug, and Sidney G. Tarrow, "Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010): 529–542.

political leaders refuse to listen and established institutions fail to respond, protest rallies become a necessary means for citizens to demand political change. Activists join the “party in the street” and demand change from the outside. Often both forms of action occur during the same period. Many activists participate in street action and institutional politics and move seamlessly back and forth between the two.

Effective protest action helps to create conditions for instrumental politics. When rallies and demonstrations generate social pressure, they can create opportunities for conventional political action. Activists initially turn toward protest when conventional legislative or electoral approaches are unresponsive or unavailable. As movements grow and exert more effective pressure, new opportunities may emerge for lobbying and electoral campaigns.

Opponents of the Iraq war mobilized in the streets to stop the invasion. When that did not happen some continued to gather in vigils and protests against the occupation, although in diminished numbers. Many opponents of the war began to engage in institutional politics, helping to turn Congress in 2006 and elect Obama in 2008.

Nuclear freeze activists organized national demonstrations and grassroots actions, and they employed an electoral form—non-binding local referenda—to mobilize mass support. They also engaged in lobbying on legislative proposals in Congress to constrain the weapons build up and stop nuclear testing. They participated in electoral campaigns for candidates who promised to enact a freeze.

Perceptions of success can influence these choices. In the latter stages of the Iraq antiwar movement, as public discontent with the war deepened and elected officials became more openly critical, activists saw the political odds shifting in their favor. They devoted more of their energy to lobbying and electoral work rather than marching and protesting. In that sense, the movement in the streets did indeed diminish and fade away. Activism continued, however, and as opportunities emerged for electing members of Congress and a presidential candidate committed to withdrawing troops, institutional politics became the primary focus.

A similar pattern is evident in the freeze movement. After the massive Central Park rally and referenda campaigns of 1982, activists focused mostly on local

events. They also participated in election campaigns and were actively engaged in grassroots lobbying against the MX missile and other weapons programs. Later in the decade, when Gorbachev came to power and announced a unilateral initiative to halt nuclear testing, freeze organizers launched a successful campaign to cut off funding for further tests.

In the sections below I examine the trajectories of the Iraq antiwar and nuclear freeze movements. I review how each influenced public opinion and identify their specific impacts on policy. In the third section I offer comments on the war in Gaza.

Part I. Organizing against the Iraq War and Occupation

The movement against the invasion of Iraq was a battle for public opinion. Polls showed a majority of Americans favoring the use of force to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Traumatized by the horrors of the 9/11 attacks, Americans were fearful and angry, and they were susceptible to manipulation and demands for revenge. The Bush administration took advantage of this public trauma to foment fear and hatred of Saddam Hussein as the embodiment of the evil forces that had attacked the US. The White House constantly repeated and flooded the airwaves with messages demonizing the Iraqi dictator, claiming that he possessed and would use weapons of mass destruction (WMD). They espoused the fiction that the invasion would be a short, simple military operation welcomed by the Iraqi people.

In response the antiwar movement challenged the evidence for such claims and argued for alternatives to war. Activists warned that military intervention would cause the deaths of many innocent civilians and lead to more terrorism not less. The movement's message, delivered at protest actions and in media events, was to give UN inspectors more time to search for WMDs. Antiwar messaging also emphasized the lack of UN authorization for the use of force.

The constant questioning of the justifications for war was accompanied by a shift in public opinion. A Gallup poll for CNN and USA Today found approval of an invasion declining from 74 per cent in November 2001 to 53 per cent in August

2002.¹¹ President Bush was frustrated by the lack of international support and worried about the erosion in public opinion. In January 2003 he confided to National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice that “we are not winning” in the debate to oust Hussein. “Time is not on our side here.”¹² On the eve of the invasion he told the prime ministers of Spain and Portugal that it was necessary to launch the invasion immediately because “public opinion won't get better, and it will get worse in some countries like America.”¹³

The February 2003 rallies were evidence of the widespread public opposition that worried Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Despite their constant efforts at public persuasion, the two leaders were unable to win the argument for war. A Gallup poll in late February showed support for military action drifting downward again after a brief bump in approval following Secretary of State Colin Powell's infamous presentation at the UN.¹⁴ Surveys showed majorities in favor of giving UN inspectors more time and opposed to an invasion without UN approval.¹⁵ In the UK Blair managed to win parliamentary approval, but he was never able to gain a public majority for waging war without UN approval.¹⁶

The widespread global opposition had a curious unintended effect, prompting the Bush administration to rush to war, leading to what a US Army War College history of the war termed “strategic defeat.”¹⁷ To maintain the claim of a short military operation, the administration went to war without proper planning or sufficient force. To plan for the invasion and occupation properly and send the number of troops requested by military commanders would have been to admit that a major war was likely, which would have fueled the growing public opposition.

¹¹ Michael Mazarr, *Leap of Faith: Hubris, Negligence, and America's Greatest Foreign Policy Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019), 224; David W. Moore, “Majority of Americans Favor Attacking Iraq to Oust Saddam Hussein,” Gallup News Service, 23 August 2002, gallup.com

¹² Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack: The Definitive Account of the Decision to Invade Iraq* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 253-54.

¹³ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 357.

¹⁴ David W. Moore and Frank Newport, “Powell ‘Bounce’ Fades, But Majority of Americans Still Open to War with Iraq,” Gallup News Service, 21 February 2003, gallup.com.

¹⁵ Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay and Evan Lewis, “Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War,” *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 118, No. 4 (Winter, 2003/2004), 569; Jane Kellest Cramer, “Militarized Patriotism: Why the U.S. Marketplace of Ideas Failed Before the Iraq War,” *Security Studies* 16, no. 3 (2007): 521.

¹⁶ James Strong, *Public Opinion, Legitimacy and Tony Blair's War in Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁷ Colonel Joel D. Rayburn and Colonel Frank K. Sobchak, eds., *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War, Volume 2: Surge and Withdrawal* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute/U.S. Army War College Press, 2019), 619, 622, 627.

From 2002 through 2007 there were eight antiwar demonstrations in the United States that attracted estimated crowds of 100,000 or more participants, ranking the Iraq movement as among the largest peace campaigns in US history. Noam Chomsky observed that protests against the Iraq war were “at a far higher level than they were with regard to Vietnam at comparable stages of the invasions.”¹⁸

The public skepticism fanned by the antiwar movement deepened after the invasion when US forces found no WMDs in Iraq, and as the war became a costly military fiasco.¹⁹ As the war dragged on demands for withdrawing troops gained political traction, dominating the 2006 electoral debate and serving as a springboard for Obama’s candidacy.

Peace movement arguments against the war were proven correct. The meme “ending endless war” entered public consciousness. It began as a movement bumper sticker but over time became a slogan of political candidates and a basis for policy. When military strikes were proposed against Syria for its use of chemical weapons in August 2013, the House of Commons in Britain denied the request to use force, and opposition in Congress and public skepticism convinced the Obama administration to refrain from military action—the shadow of Iraq looming large over the debate.²⁰ Reluctance to put boots on the ground in foreign conflicts became a hallmark of national security policy. Through multiple threads of influence the antiwar mobilization helped to shape public consciousness and had far-reaching policy consequences.

To the Ballot Box

When activists were unsuccessful at preventing the invasion, they turned to the use of electoral and legislative levers of power and achieved notable successes in generating pressure to end the occupation and bring US troops home. Although the results of the movement’s political engagement were uneven and ultimately

¹⁸ Quoted in Brad Knickerbocker, “Wither All the War Protesters?” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 19, 2007.

¹⁹ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

²⁰ Paul Singer, “Opposition to Syria Attack Emerges in Congress,” *USA Today*, 2 September 2013, www.usatoday.com; Pew Research Center, “Opposition to Syrian Airstrikes Surges,” 9 September 2013, www.pewresearch.org.

fell short of what activists aspired to achieve, the cumulative impacts were significant.

The antiwar movement's first foray into electoral politics came in June 2003 when former Vermont Governor Howard Dean raised a stir during a meeting of the Democratic National Committee by asking party officials why they had not taken a position opposing the invasion of Iraq. Dean had no organizational connection to the antiwar movement, but he understood the political salience of the Iraq issue and urged Democrats to take advantage of it. His question was an uncomfortable one for party leaders who had voted for the October 2002 congressional resolution authorizing the use of force in Iraq.

Until that time Dean's plan to enter the Democratic Party primaries in 2004 seemed a quixotic and forlorn cause. As soon as he raised the Iraq question, his campaign came alive and was flooded with volunteers and contributions. Dean ultimately raised \$50 million from 600,000 supporters, and his Meetup.com site grew to 190,000 members.²¹ Dean suddenly rose to number one in the presidential polls, although he did poorly in the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary, and his campaign quickly faded.

The force driving this sudden surge of support for Dean and interest in the 2004 election was MoveOn, which was and still is closely aligned with the Democratic Party. The network grew into an internet powerhouse through its opposition to the war and support for Win Without War. MoveOn activists pointed to the Dean campaign as an early indication of the potential impact of the antiwar issue for mobilizing support within the Democratic Party.

The 2004 presidential campaign of Senator John Kerry was a grave disappointment for antiwar Democrats. Kerry's 2002 Senate vote to authorize the use of force in Iraq haunted him at every turn. He was critical of Bush's handling of the war but did not campaign as an antiwar candidate or advocate the withdrawal of troops as activists wanted. As late as August 2004, Kerry said that he stood by his vote on the war. His ambivalent stance on the war was like an albatross that dragged down and ultimately doomed his candidacy.

²¹ Joe Trippi, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Democracy, the Internet and the Overthrow of Everything* (Regan Books, 2004), 131, 86.

Turning Congress

The 2004 presidential election generated disillusionment among antiwar activists. For MoveOn, the shock of Bush’s reelection was a wake-up call. The organization doubled down on its strategy of harnessing antiwar sentiment at the ballot box. Polling results showed that the Iraq issue had the strongest influence in motivating a political commitment from MoveOn supporters and, more importantly, from likely voters.²² The result was an “intense flow of antiwar energy during the 2006 electoral season,” as the congressional elections became an antiwar battleground.²³

The opening skirmish in the 2006 campaign came in Connecticut when local activists mounted a challenge to pro-war Senator Joe Lieberman in the Democratic primary. MoveOn and other groups threw their support behind antiwar critic and Connecticut business executive Ned Lamont who challenged Lieberman on the war issue. Lamont scored an upset victory in the early August primary vote. As the *New York Times* reported, Lamont “soared from nowhere on a fierce antiwar message [and] won a narrow but decisive victory.”²⁴ The outcome in Connecticut sent shockwaves through Washington and showed Democratic candidates across the country the power of the antiwar message in motivating voters. Although Lieberman held on to his seat in the November election by running as an Independent and winning Republican support, the lesson of the Lamont campaign was clear. Democratic candidates could win on an antiwar message.

Activists were heavily involved in many local races that year and played a significant role in the election of dozens of candidates who were committed to withdrawing troops from Iraq. MoveOn launched a nationwide independent expenditure campaign which targeted fifty-five House campaigns and twelve Senate races, focusing on vulnerable Republicans in suburban districts. Campaign activities included raising money for candidates, polling voters in local districts, placing television ads, and hiring dozens of local organizers to work in targeted

²² Tom Matzzie, interview by author, 12 July 2021.

²³ Hayden, *Ending the War in Iraq*, 147–48, 158–59.

²⁴ Patrick Healy, “Lamont Defeats Lieberman in Primary,” *New York Times*, 8 August 2006, www.nytimes.com

districts to mobilize thousands of campaign volunteers for voter education and turnout.

The November vote was a decisive victory for the Democratic Party and a turning point in the politics of the war. Democrats picked up thirty-one seats in the House of Representatives and six in the Senate. Republicans failed to win any seats held by Democrats in either the Senate or the House.²⁵ For the first time in twelve years, the Democrats controlled both houses of Congress, a result widely seen as swayed by antiwar sentiment.²⁶ Other issues also influenced the vote that fall, but the dominant concern was Iraq. Gallup polls prior to the election showed “the war in Iraq” as the most important issue for likely voters, selected as the top government priority by 61 percent of Democrats and 52 percent of Independents. Editorial page punditry and exit-poll surveys agreed, Iraq was the “Archimedean lever” that shifted independent voters massively toward the Democrats.²⁷ The results of the 2006 election sent a clear message that antiwar activists were a force to be reckoned with in the Democratic Party—a message not lost on the junior senator from Illinois.

The Antiwar Lobby

The Democratic victory in 2006 dramatically improved the prospects for legislative action to end the war. Antiwar lobbying efforts began a couple of years before, as an Out-of-Iraq caucus emerged within the House of Representatives.²⁸ Initial legislative efforts were unsuccessful in the Republican-controlled Congress, but the situation changed in 2007. MoveOn, Win Without War, United for Peace and Justice and other groups mounted a major lobbying effort to win congressional support for establishing a timetable for the withdrawal of troops. Bush ignored demands for withdrawal and doubled down on the war by ordering a “surge” of additional troops to Iraq. Activists were infuriated, as were many Democratic Party

²⁵ Ole R. Holsti, *American Public Opinion on the Iraq War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 145.

²⁶ Michael T. Heaney and Fabio Rojas, “The Partisan Dynamics of Contention: Demobilization of the Antiwar Movement in the United States, 2007–2009,” *Mobilization: An International Journal* 16, no. 1 (2011): 45–64. See also Michael Grunwald, “Opposition to War Buys Democrats,” *The Washington Post*, 8 November 2006, A31.

²⁷ Mike Davis, “The Democrats After November,” *New Left Review* 43 (January–February 2007), 5–31.

²⁸ Heaney and Rojas, *Party in the Street*, 175.

officials. The House voted 246-182 for a nonbinding resolution opposing the surge.²⁹ A majority in the Senate also disapproved, but Bush pushed ahead.

In response to Bush's policy, MoveOn brought together the Service Employees International Union, Win Without War, US Action and other organizations in a new coalition, Americans Against Escalation in Iraq (AAEI). The purpose of the new grouping was to mobilize political opposition to the war through a focused legislative campaign for the withdrawal of troops. Its aim was to build opposition to the war in the local districts of vulnerable Republicans in a dozen states. The campaign organized hundreds of local events and meetings with legislators, integrating the mobilization of grassroots activism in local districts with lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill.

Opponents of the war scored three legislative victories in 2007 as Congress approved binding language establishing a timeline for troop withdrawal. The first vote was in March when the House of Representatives voted 218-212 to approve the measure.³⁰ The Senate followed suit, but the victory was short-lived when President Bush exercised a presidential veto in May to kill the measure. In July, the House voted again to set a timeline for withdrawal, this time by a slightly wider margin, 223-201. In the fall, congressional leaders introduced a new bill, the Orderly and Responsible Iraq Redeployment Appropriations Act, directing the president to commence an immediate removal of troops from Iraq. The House of Representatives approved the bill by a vote of 218 to 203 in November. The Senate voted in favor by a 53 to 45 margin in December, but under filibuster voting rules in force at the time, sixty votes were needed for Senate passage, and the measure failed.³¹ Despite majority backing from both houses of Congress, Republicans blocked the issue and a mandate for troop withdrawal did not become law.

Majority support for the bills in the House and Senate was nonetheless significant in demonstrating a congressional consensus against the occupation and in favor of a timetable for withdrawal. The Bush administration began removing troops

²⁹ Peter Baker, *Days of Fire: Bush and Cheney in the White House* (New York: Anchor Books, 2014), 542.

³⁰ Martha Angle, "Defying Bush, House Passes New Deadline for Withdrawal from Iraq," *New York Times*, 12 July 2007, www.nytimes.com.

³¹ The legislative record for these votes is recounted in Jennifer K. Elsea, Michael John Garcia, and Thomas J. Nicola, CRS Report to Congress, "Congressional Authority to Limit U.S. Military Operations in Iraq," *Congressional Research Service*, updated 27 February 2008, RL 33837, <https://sgp.fas.org>.

sooner and more completely than military planners wanted.³² The White House hoped to keep a residual American force in Iraq for an extended period, but political leaders in Baghdad refused and insisted on a timeline for complete US withdrawal. In July 2008, Bush yielded to Iraqi demands, and after further haggling the two sides signed a security agreement in November for the status of US forces that called for complete withdrawal by the end of 2011.³³

Electing a President

From the very beginning of the presidential race, Barack Obama won the support of many antiwar activists. The principal distinction of his candidacy was his forthright stance against the war. Obama writes in his memoir that the Iraq war was the biggest issue for his campaign.³⁴ Hilary Clinton was heavily favored going into the Democratic primaries, with substantial financial backing and the support of many Democratic Party leaders, but she waffled on ending the war and was burdened by her Senate vote in favor of the use of force. Obama by contrast had spoken against the invasion at an October 2002 antiwar rally in Chicago, and he remained unequivocally opposed to the war, vowing to end it if elected. His campaign expressed “an unapologetic antiwar boldness,” writes journalist Spencer Ackerman.³⁵

The Obama candidacy was a political opportunity for the movement, and many activists embraced it. When MoveOn conducted an internal poll of its online members to determine which candidate the organization should support in the primaries, 70 percent of respondents endorsed Obama.³⁶ This brought with it a massive wave of volunteer and financial support from antiwar activists.

Obama’s electoral strategy played to the strengths of this activist constituency. His campaign created an extensive field presence in dozens of states, built on the

³² Carolyn Eisenberg, remarks, Peace History Society conference, Gwynedd Mercy University, Pennsylvania, October 27, 2023.

³³ Baker, *Days of Fire*, 601, 619–20.

³⁴ Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020), 158.

³⁵ Spencer Ackerman, *Reign of Terror: How the 9/11 Era Destabilized America and Produced Trump* (New York, Viking, 2021), 114.

³⁶ Chris Hayes, “MoveOn.Org is Not as Radical as Conservatives Think,” *The Nation*, 16 July 2008, www.thenation.com.

foundations of already existing activist networks—principally the antiwar movement, but also labor, women’s, environmentalist, African American, Latino, and other established organizing networks. Obama’s victories were concentrated in caucus states, where success is determined by the strength of local activist support rather than big name endorsements and large television advertising budgets. In Texas, Clinton won the popular vote, but Obama won more of the caucuses and ended up with the majority of the state’s delegates. The national popular vote was extremely close, but Obama held a significant margin in the thirteen caucus contests, enough to win the nomination. Obama’s victory was the result of a superior ability to mobilize tens of thousands of strongly committed loyalists from the antiwar movement and other activist networks.³⁷

That support base also propelled Obama to victory in the general election. According to researcher David Karpf, during the course of the 2008 election, MoveOn channeled almost \$100 million in campaign contributions and one million volunteers to the Obama campaign.³⁸ It was one of the most influential organizations supporting the Democratic Party in the election that year. The Obama campaign pioneered the use of social media to harness volunteer and donor support, building a network of 13 million people on its various email and Facebook lists. Many of these names were drawn from the MoveOn list (which had grown to 5 million) and other pre-existing activist networks. With 8 million visitors a month, the Obama website was used to create 35,000 volunteer groups and organize 200,000 offline events. The campaign had 3 million online donors and received a total of 6.5 million contributions, with an average gift size of \$80. Obama raised twice as much money as Republican candidate John McCain, a record \$750 million, two-thirds of which came from small contributions.³⁹

Many activists supported Obama because of his opposition to the war, but they had few illusions about his views on other foreign policy issues. In his 2002 speech

³⁷ “2008 Democratic Primary Election Results,” <http://uselectionatlas.org>; see also Jeralyn, “Caucuses vs. Primaries: A Report,” *Talk Left*, 27 May 2008, www.talkleft.com.

³⁸ David Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 29.

³⁹ Martin Walker, “The Year of the Insurgents: The 2008 US Presidential Campaign,” *International Affairs* 84 (2008): 1095–1107. See also Jose Antonio Vargas, “Obama Raised Half a Billion Online,” *The Washington Post*, 20 November 2008, http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/11/20/obama_raised_half_a_billion_on.html; see also list of candidate fundraising at “2008 Presidential Election,” www.opensecrets.org; and Monte Lutz, “The Social Pulpit: Barack Obama’s Social Media Toolkit,” (Washington, DC: Edelman.com 2009).

at the antiwar rally in Chicago, he declared, "I don't oppose all wars. What I am opposed to is a dumb war."⁴⁰ During his 2008 campaign, he reiterated his commitment to withdraw troops from Iraq, but he was equally clear in pledging to increase military involvement in Afghanistan. He vowed to use force wherever he deemed necessary to counter terrorist threats. As president he ordered a surge of troops to Afghanistan and launched hundreds of drone strikes in Pakistan, much to the chagrin of many antiwar activists who supported him. Yet on the issue that mattered most, withdrawing troops and ending the occupation of Iraq, Obama fulfilled his promise to voters. The pressure and support of the antiwar movement helped to make that possible.

In July 2008, after winning the Democratic nomination, Obama visited the troops in Iraq. He was under pressure from diplomats and many in the Pentagon to maintain a sizable troop presence in Iraq. Commanding General David Petraeus hosted Obama's visit and tried to talk him out of setting a deadline for withdrawal, urging him to maintain a residual force. Obama listened respectfully but disagreed with the general, as he recounts in his memoir. He refused to back off on the commitment to withdraw US forces.⁴¹

After taking office, Obama delayed and hesitated on withdrawing the troops as pressure for a residual force persisted, but members of the Iraqi government remained adamant in opposing further US military involvement.⁴² In December 2011, the White House announced that the last troops had left the country. Obama's decision was made easier by the fact that he was following the timeline originally established by the Bush administration.

The results of the antiwar movement's electoral and lobbying efforts were a disappointment for many activists. The movement was successful in the 2006 elections and won major congressional votes in favor of withdrawing troops in 2007, but those measures did not become law, and the occupation continued. Opponents of the war played a role in helping Obama become president in 2008, but many were impatient with the slow pace of the withdrawal timeline and frustrated by his waffling. The antiwar movement nonetheless demonstrated significant political strength in pressuring Congress to establish limits on the US

⁴⁰ Barack Obama, *A Promised Land*, 47.

⁴¹ Barack Obama, *A Promised Land*, 157–159.

⁴² Colin H. Kahl, "No, Obama Didn't Lose Iraq," *Politico Magazine*, 15 June 2014, www.politico.com.

presence in Iraq and helping to elect members of Congress and a president committed to ending the war.

Activists sometimes conflate conventional politics and the role of social movements. They tend to project their own values and goals onto politicians and become disillusioned when their demands are not met in the manner they want. In the process, Hayden observed, they “run the danger of underestimating the impact they are actually achieving.”⁴³ They fail to recognize incremental or limited policy changes as a sign of the movement’s success. The Iraq antiwar movement did not accomplish all that activists wanted, but it achieved political successes that are of historic importance, and that deserve to be acknowledged by activists, and by scholars.

Part II. Mobilizing to Freeze and Reverse the Arms Race

The proposal for a bilateral nuclear weapons freeze that emerged from arms control researchers and peace activists in the late 1970s sparked the largest US disarmament movement in modern history. The result was an unprecedented public outcry against the threat of nuclear war that had significant impact on public policy, although few recognized it at the time and political leaders publicly dismissed the movement.

The appeal of the nuclear freeze concept was its simplicity and accessibility to the average citizen. It was a succinct proposal for a bilateral halt to nuclear weapons development, testing and deployment, an idea that was easily understood and eagerly accepted by citizens worried about an accelerating arms race and the increased risk of nuclear war. By directing its appeal to the Soviet Union as well as the United States, the freeze challenged the logic of the cold war and deflected charges of being anti-American or communist-inspired. The freeze movement

⁴³ Hayden, *Ending the War in Iraq*, 170–71.

democratized the debate about international security and brought the discussion of nuclear policy to the public square.

The freeze proposal gained momentum in the fall of 1980 when it was overwhelmingly approved in nonbinding referenda in Western Massachusetts in local districts that voted for Reagan. Similar referenda in favor of the freeze were introduced and approved in nine states and dozens of cities over the next two years as the freeze movement swept the country. Resolutions in favor of the freeze were approved by more than a hundred major professional and civic organizations, from the US Conference of Mayors to the American Nurses Association, including dozens of major trade unions.⁴⁴ It was endorsed by hundreds of town meetings in New England, 11 state legislatures and more than 200 city councils. The historic Central Park rally in 1982 confirmed the movement's popular appeal.

Opinion polls consistently found overwhelming support for the freeze proposition. From the moment pollsters began asking about the idea, approval ratings stood at 70 per cent or more. This was a rare and unique experience for the peace movement. Activists introduced a bold new concept for international security that immediately became the subject of national polling and commanded broad public support. The concept itself, backed by waves of social mobilization, became a means of shaping policy.

The political effects of the freeze were evident in the government's response to the movement. The Reagan administration came into office with a determination to accelerate the arms race and expand the US nuclear arsenal. The White House condemned the freeze proposal and tried to counter the movement. As public enthusiasm for the proposition spread, however, and political support mounted on Capitol Hill, the administration recognized it had to respond.⁴⁵ The White House toned down its bellicose rhetoric and promised to negotiate with the Soviet Union for arms reduction. The administration abandoned its nuclear saber rattling and moved steadily toward moderation and arms control. All of this occurred

⁴⁴ Neal R. Peirce and William R. Anderson, "Nuclear Freeze Proponents Mobilize on Local Referendums," *National Journal*, September 18, 1982, 1062-63; Pam Solo, *From Protest to Policy: Beyond the Freeze to Common Security* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1988), 66.

⁴⁵ Henry Richard Maar III, *Freeze! The Grassroots Movement to Halt the Arms Race and End the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 126-26.

before Gorbachev came to power. The change in the Reagan administration's approach to nuclear policy was the result of the influence of the freeze movement.⁴⁶

The Freeze Goes to Washington

The Freeze Weapons Freeze Campaign was primarily a grassroots organization with a mission of supporting statewide and local freeze groups. As members of Congress and presidential candidates began to support the freeze, however, the Campaign found itself engaged in institutional politics. The Campaign was not prepared for this approach, and in 1982-83 it was drawn into an unplanned and frustrating congressional debate on a nonbinding freeze resolution.

Many freeze activists were skeptical of congressional politics and their doubts deepened as they saw the muddled language of the legislative measures being introduced in Congress. In place of the movement's original call for an immediate bilateral halt to the arms race, the language of the measures debated in Congress merely urged the President to decide "when and how" to adopt a bilateral freeze. The legislative language became steadily more confused as qualifying amendments were added and new versions of the resolution were introduced by various members of Congress.

The result was a labyrinthine legislative process in which numerous qualifications and caveats were added to what was originally a clear call for an immediate halt to the arms race. The language in the resolution ballooned from a simple 16-line statement in the original version to a 152-line monstrosity 15 months later. The freeze resolution was approved by the House of Representatives in May 1983 by a lopsided 278-149 margin, but the legislation as adopted was practically devoid of meaning. Representative Leon Panetta (D-CA) told his colleagues during the debate, "whether you are a hawk or a dove ... you can interpret anything you want in this resolution."⁴⁷ The freeze proposition was thus sacrificed to political

⁴⁶ Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Disarmament Movement, 1971-Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 403.

⁴⁷ "Freeze Debate Founders as House Bickers," *Washington Post*, April 24, 1983.

expediency and linguistic obfuscation. The nonbinding resolution had no substantive impact on the continuing nuclear buildup.

Adoption of the freeze resolution nonetheless had symbolic political significance. News of the House approving the nuclear freeze conveyed the impression that the government was shifting its position and adopting the movement's proposal. The Reagan administration viewed the resolution as a threat to its nuclear policies and campaigned vigorously against it, which gave the freeze debate greater weight and had the unintended effect of boosting the movement's political standing. The Senate rejected the measure, and the US government never officially approved a freeze policy, but the vote brought further attention to the dangers of the arms race and attracted support for the freeze campaign. On balance House passage of the resolution was a plus for the movement.

As the 1984 presidential elections approached, the freeze was at the height of its popularity, with 70 per cent or more approval ratings and a vast network of politically active grassroots supporters across the country. The Freeze also had a proven record of attracting voter support in state and local referenda. Given that track record it was no surprise that Democratic Party candidates sought to ride the coattails of the popular movement.

All the major Democratic contenders that year endorsed the freeze. Senator Alan Cranston (D-CA) was an early favorite of freeze activists, but he dropped out early after disappointing results in the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries. The strongest peace candidate was Rev. Jesse Jackson, who placed third in both races, but his campaign did not take off that year as it did in 1988. Senator Gary Hart (D-CO) ran a strong campaign and won many primaries as a supporter of the freeze. He and Mondale jostled over who would be the strongest champion of the freeze, with the former Vice President prevailing to become the party's nominee.

Many freeze activists attended the Democratic Convention that year as delegates and won passage of a platform statement fully endorsing the freeze. It was the strongest platform statement against the nuclear arms race ever adopted by the party. The Freeze Campaign formed a political action committee, Freeze Voter,

which mobilized thousands of local volunteers to support Mondale and help pro-freeze candidates in congressional elections.⁴⁸

When Mondale went down to defeat, some interpreted it as a loss for the freeze movement as well. Certainly the results were a political setback for the Democratic Party and a disappointment for activists who worked on the presidential race, but the electoral campaign had a deeper, more hopeful meaning for the movement.

Reagan won the election in part by coopting the freeze message and portraying himself as a peace candidate. While the White House continued to oppose the freeze resolution, it also attempted to coopt the movement and appropriate parts of its message. In his 1984 State of the Union message Reagan famously declared “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” In his address to the United Nations that September he delivered a message of moderation and called for the superpowers to “approach each other” for the sake of world peace. He met for a cordial visit with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko right before the election. As Freeze Campaign coordinator Randy Kehler observed, “the Ronald Reagan elected in 1984 was quite different from the Ronald Reagan of 1980.”⁴⁹ Reagan traded his cold war posture for a promise of peace. The freeze movement helped to create a political climate conducive to arms reduction, and Reagan adjusted his sails accordingly.

Winning Legislative Victories

While the Nuclear Freeze Campaign faltered after the disappointing freeze debate in Congress and the debacle of the 1984 elections, the nuclear disarmament movement as a whole continued to grow and remained politically active. The plethora of organizations and coalitions that emerged nationally and in many states and local communities in the first half of the decade remained active. The momentum of the freeze movement continued and became more focused on

⁴⁸ Henry Richard Maar III, *Freeze! The Grassroots Movement to Halt the Arms Race and End the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 191.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Henry Richard Maar III, *Freeze! The Grassroots Movement to Halt the Arms Race and End the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 207.

achieving policy change as activists engaged in legislative campaigns to begin implementing the freeze agenda.

It was during the legislative fight for the freeze and the battle against the MX missile that the Monday Lobby Group was formed. This was a weekly gathering of peace and nuclear policy groups that became a coordinating center for disarmament and arms control legislative efforts on a range of Pentagon spending and nuclear security issues. The arms control lobby developed into a formidable presence on Capitol Hill. It had influence primarily because of its ability to activate a highly responsive network of grassroots activists in many states and hundreds of districts across the country. The impact of this national network increased and showed up in numerous legislative fights over nuclear policy and weapons systems. Arms control lobbyists would coordinate legislative advocacy messages with activists at the local level, who would use that information to apply pressure on their elected members of Congress. As a result, efforts on Capitol Hill to restrain the nuclear buildup gained momentum.

The continued impact of the freeze movement was particularly evident in legislative debates in 1986. This was the time of the high watermark in membership growth for organizations such as SANE, the Council for a Livable World and others, with tens of thousands of people across the country willing to take action to support lobbying efforts against the arms race. The House of Representatives that year adopted measures to curtail nuclear testing, limit the testing of antisatellite weapons, and cut funding requests for the Strategic Defense Initiative and the overall military budget, a string of successes described by a *Congressional Quarterly* reporter as an arms control “grand slam.”⁵⁰ Not all of these amendments made it through the legislative process to become law, but the votes reflected the impact of the movement and sent a message to the White House for more vigorous action to bring the arms race to a halt.

Arms control advocates in Congress continued to chip away at Pentagon weapons programs and funding for the SDI program.⁵¹ The impacts of grassroots activist pressure and arms control lobbying were reflected particularly in two important

⁵⁰*Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 99th Congress, 2d Session (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc, 1986, volume 42), 478.

⁵¹ Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Disarmament Movement, 1971-Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 435-36.

political fights: the campaign to stop the MX missile and the nuclear test ban campaign. Each is examined below.

Stopping the MX

The battle against the MX was one of the most significant legislative fights of the disarmament movement. The campaign had direct effects in reducing the scale of the nuclear buildup, but also had the indirect effect of motivating congressional efforts to demand progress in arms control negotiations. It spurred the creation of a diverse and highly effective coalition against the missile system and the refinement of targeted grassroots lobbying efforts.

The MX missile program was the largest weapons system in the nuclear buildup. The original plan, developed in the latter years of the Carter administration and continued as a centerpiece of the Reagan nuclear agenda, called for building 200 new MX ICBMs, each capable of carrying ten nuclear warheads, deployed in a massive mobile basing system in the Great Basin of Utah and Nevada covering 25,000 square miles, five times the size of Connecticut.⁵² While commentators mocked the preposterous scale of the mobile missile proposal, the White House, the Air Force and the arms industry were deadly serious about the plan and launched a major lobbying campaign on its behalf.

SANE and many other groups made stopping the new missile a priority. Peace advocates, environmentalists, religious groups, taxpayer organizations, Native American communities, ranchers, farmers and others came together to stop the missile deployment plan. The Church of Latter-day Saints headquartered in Utah also raised its voice, declaring its opposition to the nuclear arms race and to the deployment of a “mammoth weapons system capable of destroying much of civilization.”⁵³

⁵² Taylor Rose, “America’s Nuclear Sponge: Opposition to Militarization in Nevada,” *Perspectives*, American Historical Association, December 12, 2022, <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/december-2022/americas-nuclear-sponge-opposition-to-militarization-in-nevada>

⁵³ “First Presidency Statement on the Basing of the MX missile,” May 5, 1981, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Public Communications Department, Salt Lake City, Utah; Bill Prochnau, “Mormon Church Joins Opposition to MX Program,” *Washington Post*, May 6, 1981, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/05/06/mormon-church-joins-opposition-to-mx-program/d1402f0c-b9aa-435e-8c91-499d43bdf9a2/>

The Stop the MX coalition succeeded in stopping the basing plan, as widespread opposition developed in the region. That was only the first step, and a relatively easy one compared to the more challenging task of stopping the new missile system. The defeat of the basing system saved the Great Basin from environmental ruin, but the threat to international security posed by the new missile system remained.

The campaign against the MX shifted its focus from cooperation with local partners in Utah and Nevada to working with arms control supporters on Capitol Hill. The momentum gained in defeating the basing system carried over into the fight against the missile itself. A protracted legislative battle ensued in Washington and in legislative districts across the country as SANE, the Council for Livable World, the Coalition for a New Foreign Policy and other groups in Washington mounted a legislative fight in Congress to cut funding for the missile. When the venerable citizen lobbying organization Common Cause entered the fray, the legislative campaign acquired additional sophistication and political heft. Working closely with the leadership of the House of Representatives and senior members of the Armed Services Committee, the coalition gradually succeeded in winning passage of amendments to cut the number of missiles, first in half and ultimately to just 50 weapons, as determined in a final compromise vote in 1985.

The legislative campaign against the MX became the dominant arms control issue in Congress in the first half of the 1980s, as dozens of climactic votes occurred on amendments to cut funding. It was a classic David versus Goliath scenario, a growing but relatively small number of disarmament lobbyists aligned against legions of 'congressional liaison' officers from the Pentagon and major weapons contractors. The peace lobbyists had their own army of supporters, not in Washington but at the grassroots level, as many thousands of committed activists urged their congressional representatives and senators to vote against the missile. The anti-MX coalition lost many of the major congressional votes on missile funding, but it won often enough to stay in the legislative game and over the course of several years was able to whittle down the missile program to one-quarter its original scale. It was not a complete success, but it was a partial victory that reduced the scale of the threat posed by the new missile.

Single Issue, Multiple Impacts

Some in the broader disarmament movement questioned the value of campaigning against a single weapons system rather than challenging the entire nuclear buildup. The point of the freeze proposition was precisely to halt the development of all nuclear weapons, not just a single weapon. There was no contradiction between the two efforts, however. SANE and the other groups in the Stop MX coalition also supported the nuclear freeze. The MX campaign was a way of focusing pressure on a particularly dangerous part of the nuclear buildup, one that was also politically vulnerable because of its massive environmental footprint and the dangers it posed to international security.

The MX missile program was an example of low-hanging fruit, an easy target and potential win. It was a hugely controversial Rube Goldberg scheme that was ripe for attack and might collapse of its own weight, especially if given a push by a well-organized citizen lobby.

One of the principles of strategy as taught by Gene Sharp and others is to focus on objectives that are clear and achievable within a realistic time frame. Success on a specific campaign can motivate and empower activists and build momentum and organizational capacity to address larger strategic objectives. For the disarmament movement of the 1980s, focusing on the MX was a way of winning an important fight, strengthening coalitions and networks, and establishing the basis for a broader challenge to the entire arms race.

The MX campaign also served as a proving ground for enhanced methods of citizen lobbying in the local districts of key legislators. The ability of lobbyists from SANE and other groups to gain access to decision makers in Washington depended on the extent of constituent pressure and press attention they generated in local districts. The coalition demonstrated the ability to activate hundreds or even thousands of registered voters from a legislator's home district on short notice for a specific legislative proposal, while also attracting press coverage and media attention to these efforts in local newspapers and broadcast outlets. Backed up a formidable presence at the local level, the representatives of SANE and Common Cause were able to gain access and influence in Washington.

The campaign also had the serendipitous effect of redirecting grassroots pressure on legislators against the MX into congressional pressure on the White House to negotiate for arms control. After the Reagan administration suffered a defeat on the missile program in late 1982, Representatives Al Gore (D-TN), Senator William Cohen (R-ME) and others developed the idea of conditioning their support for the missile on a more serious White House commitment to arms control negotiation. In essence they traded the MX for arms control. It was a bizarre formulation that disarmament supporters rejected, but it had significant influence on the White House.⁵⁴ By late 1983 the administration was forced to accept congressional proposals for a new more flexible US approach to negotiations.⁵⁵

Grassroots demands on Congress against the MX generated pressure on the White House to moderate its previously hardline stance against arms control. One can argue whether the change in policy was meaningful (negotiations remained large deadlocked until Gorbachev arrived on the scene), but the process was clearly a direct response to the anti-MX campaign and the power of grassroots lobbying against the arms race. It was an example of the ways in which peace and disarmament activism can generate unintended but in this case positive effects on policy making.

Halting Nuclear Testing

In the wake of the 1983 freeze vote in the House of Representatives, activists within the freeze movement sought to go beyond merely symbolic measures to the actual implementation of a nuclear freeze. The “quick freeze” strategy, they called it, with a focus on halting nuclear weapons testing. The test ban was the priority because it was assumed that an inability to test would cut off the development and possible use of nuclear weapons. The proposed ban on nuclear weapons testing became a primary focus of activist attention over the following years.

The test ban campaign received a major boost in August 1985 when Gorbachev commemorated the 40th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima by announcing

⁵⁴ Strobe Talbott, *Deadly Gambits: The Reagan Administration and Nuclear Arms Control* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 217.

⁵⁵ Strobe Talbott, “Buildup and Breakdown,” *Foreign Affairs*, 62 (Winter 1983-84), 609-610.

a unilateral Soviet moratorium on nuclear weapons testing. SANE and the Freeze Campaign demanded that the US reciprocate the Soviet moratorium and launched a nationwide petition campaign for a bilateral US and Soviet testing moratorium. The petition drive was successful in gaining more than a million signatures in just three months, an impressive accomplishment in pre-Internet days. Boxes of the signed petitions were delivered in person to Gorbachev by a delegation of activists from SANE, the Freeze Campaign and other US and European peace groups at the first Reagan Gorbachev summit in Geneva Switzerland in November 1985.

Arms control groups also made the test ban a top legislative priority. Representative Ed Markey (D-MA) developed the concept of a “legislative reciprocal arms control initiative,” which called for an independent US action of nuclear restraint if the Soviet Union reciprocated in a verifiable manner. A US testing moratorium in response to Gorbachev’s initiative would be a way to implement the strategy. Markey introduced a resolution in 1986 to halt congressional funding of US nuclear test explosions above one kiloton. The measure won wide backing and swept through the House by a vote of 234 to 155 in August. A parallel bill was introduced in the Senate by Senators Mark Hatfield (R-OR) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA), but it failed to gain a majority.⁵⁶

The legislative fight to halt funding for nuclear explosions continued for several years. In 1987 and 1988 the House of Representatives again approved measures cutting funds for nuclear weapons testing, although the Senate failed to go along. The administration of President George H.W. Bush was adamantly against a test ban, and in 1991 the White House announced an ambitious program of additional underground nuclear testing, with several explosions planned over the following years at the Nevada Test Site.

Passing the Test

Grassroots organizers and arms control legislators in Congress kept up the pressure against further nuclear testing. In 1986 activists formed a new group, the American Peace Test (APT), which focused on mobilizing mass nonviolent civil

⁵⁶ Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Disarmament Movement, 1971-Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 387-88.

disobedience at the Test Site near Las Vegas. The goal was to bring thousands of people to Nevada to trespass at the site and physically obstruct the continuation of testing.⁵⁷

The impetus for the APT project came from Oregon Peaceworks, one of the strongest statewide peace and disarmament groups within the Freeze Campaign. Peaceworks organizers reached out to activists across the country to join the trek to Nevada and engage in civil disobedience to prevent further testing. Many people answered the call. During a series of protests at the test site from 1985 through 1988, more than 13,000 people were arrested.⁵⁸ I was one of them, along with Freeze Campaign director Jane Gruenebaum. Also participating in civil disobedience in Nevada were well known celebrities such as American top 40 radio DJ Casey Kasem and cosmologist Carl Sagan. Religious leaders Jim Wallis of Sojourners and William Sloane Coffin of SANE/Freeze also came to be arrested.

The Oregon Peaceworks strategy included working to elect members of Congress who would support the freeze and work for a test ban. When the congressional seat in their local Salem district opened up, they helped to persuade Mike Kopetski, a dovish Democratic local legislator, to run for the position. They promised to work for his election, and they also asked him to join the protests at the test site. Kopetski made the trip to Nevada and came away from the experience more knowledgeable about nuclear weapons issues and convinced of the urgency of halting nuclear tests.⁵⁹ Kopetski narrowly lost his race in 1988 but ran again in 1990 and won a solid victory, thanks in large part to the support of local environmentalists and peace activists. He vowed to go to Washington to help lead the fight against the arms race.

Kopetski had a reputation as an effective legislator and coalition builder, and he put those skills to work in assembling a broad lineup of support for an amendment, modeled on previous legislation approved in the House, mandating a 12-month moratorium on US nuclear tests. He scored a significant success when he convinced Democratic leader Richard Gephardt to cosponsor the bill, which was introduced in the fall of 1991. With SANE/Freeze and other disarmament and

⁵⁷ Interview, David Cortright with Peter Bergel, August 2023.

⁵⁸ Interview, David Cortright with James Driscoll, August 2023.

⁵⁹ Interview, David Cortright with Peter Bergel, August 2023.

religious groups mobilizing constituent pressure across the country, the bill easily won passage in the House.

Winning support in the Senate remained a challenge. Kopetski's Oregon colleague Mark Hatfield led the Senate fight in cooperation with Democratic Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME), a powerful bipartisan combination that broke the previous deadlock and helped to gain majority support. When the White House threatened to veto the measure, Senate sponsors of the bill broadened the coalition by lining up hawkish Democratic Senator James Exton from Nebraska to support the bill. A revised bill was drafted that established a nine-month moratorium rather than a year, but it called for ending all testing after 1996 and included a mandate for negotiations to achieve a test ban treaty. The measure passed by a lopsided 68-26 vote, and the House agreed to the Senate bill. For the first time both houses of Congress approved legislation to halt nuclear testing.⁶⁰

President Bush attacked the legislation, claiming it would undermine US security. He could not afford to veto it, however. Congressional sponsors had cleverly attached the measure to the energy and water appropriations bill, which included \$500 million in funding for a super collider project in Bush's home state of Texas. On October 2, the President reluctantly signed the bill, as disarmament activists and arms control legislators cheered. The fight to cut funding for nuclear testing that began within the Freeze Campaign and had been sustained through years of grassroots activism, civil disobedience and legislative lobbying had finally achieved success. It was a significant political victory, a testament to activist political clout in curtailing a key dimension of the arms race.

Nuclear testing remained a hot issue in the following years, as citizen movements and governments in many countries worked to achieve a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. In July 1993 President Bill Clinton announced that the US would extend the nine-month testing moratorium imposed by the legislation and would pursue global negotiations for a halt to all nuclear explosions. In that brief period of friendly US-Russia relations in the aftermath of the Cold War, negotiations proceeded smoothly and agreement was reached for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

⁶⁰ Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Disarmament Movement, 1971-Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 439-431.

When Clinton tried to win Senate ratification for the CTBT, however, he ran into a wall of politically motivated Republican Party opposition. The Senate defeated the agreement by a vote of 51-48, well short of the two-thirds margin needed for ratification. It was the first time in 80 years that the Senate had refused to ratify an international treaty, a reflection of the partisan divisiveness that infected American politics and has worsened since.

The US did not become an official party to the CTBT, but the agreement gained nearly universal international support and remains functional today as a de facto global nuclear testing moratorium. The International Monitoring System established by the treaty maintains a rigorous network of 321 stations and 16 laboratories in 89 countries to detect potential violations of the treaty.⁶¹ The CTBT has been signed by 186 countries and embodies a global consensus against nuclear explosions, helping to sustain what has been described as a virtual taboo against nuclear testing.⁶²

Part III. Opposing War in Gaza

When Hamas unleashed its horrific massacre of Israeli civilians on October 7, President Joe Biden traveled immediately to Tel Aviv to express US support and sympathy for the Israeli people. He also warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to repeat the “mistake” that the United States made in the aftermath of 9/11. That mistake was not in the tactics of military operations, as some commentators suggested, but in the fundamental policy of waging a so-called Global War on Terror. The decision to rely on the use of military force proved to be a colossal strategic miscalculation.

The debate over the war in Iraq has obvious, tragic parallels with Israel’s current military assault in Gaza. It also helps to illustrate key lessons from peace history that offer guidance for advocating an end to the war and pursuing a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

⁶¹ CTBTO, The International Monitoring System, <https://www.ctbto.org/our-work/international-monitoring-system#:~:text=The%20IMS%20uses%20four%20complementary,ocean%20from%20an%20underwater%20explosion.>

⁶² Daryl Kimball, “Defending the De Facto Nuclear Test Ban,” *Arms Control Today*, September 2023, 3.

The Iraq antiwar movement was born in the debate about how to respond to 9/11. Peace, human rights and religious groups came together with a common message: war is not the answer. They warned that military intervention would increase the risk of terrorism. Many national security experts and former diplomats echoed the call for military restraint and appealed for caution. Former national security advisor Brent Scowcroft wrote an extraordinary article in the *Wall Street Journal* warning that an invasion of Iraq would generate a worldwide “explosion of outrage against us.”⁶³ Catholic ethicist Rev. H. Bryan Hehir wrote that countering terrorism is a function of police and legal networks: “War is an indiscriminate tool for this highly discriminating task.”⁶⁴

Peace researchers identified alternatives to the use of military force. Support the UN counterterrorism program for international police and intelligence cooperation, we wrote. Make greater efforts to resolve the conditions that give rise to armed conflicts, through diplomacy and peacebuilding and greater investment in equitable economic and social development.

We argued for greater reliance on the UN arms embargo and targeted sanctions to contain the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. We joined with diplomats at the UN in calling for renewed UN inspections to test the claim of weapons of mass destruction. “Inspections not war” was the slogan.

The core message was then and remains today that we can win the struggle against violent extremism without war. “Win without War” became the motto and the name of the organization we created. The group still exists as a leading voice for progressive foreign policy, advocating nonmilitary solutions in Gaza, Ukraine and beyond.

Empirical studies confirm that success against terrorist groups is not achieved through the use of military force. A 2008 study by the RAND Corporation found that most terrorist groups end through effective policing and political agreements.

⁶³ Brent Scowcroft, “Don’t Attack Saddam,” *Wall Street Journal*, 15 August 2002, www.wsj.com.

⁶⁴ J. Bryan Hehir, “What Can Be Done? What Should Be Done?” *America*, 8 October 2001, www.americamagazine.org

Military force accounted for the demise of terrorist groups in only seven percent of the cases studied.⁶⁵

Audrey Kurth Cronin's landmark investigation of hundreds of international cases comes to similar conclusions. Overly repressive policies and militarized counterterrorism strategies are often counterproductive. The impulse after a terrorist strike is to pound the enemy into the ground, but "that very pounding may be just what the terrorist campaign needs to regain the initiative with its constituents" and to mobilize new recruits.⁶⁶ We are seeing elements of this process unfolding now in Gaza.

Groups like Hamas commit atrocities and maximize civilian casualties precisely to provoke a disproportionate response from their adversary. Their goal is to increase the overall level of violence and polarization, mobilizing additional recruits and support for their cause. Waging war to counter terrorism is a fool's errand. A trap that entangles the warring state in prolonged costly and debilitating wars of counterinsurgency and military occupation. Sadly, Israel has fallen into that trap.

No one can deny a state's right to defend itself or the necessity of preventing future terrorist strikes, but Israel's grossly disproportionate bombing of densely populated urban neighborhoods and its slaughter of civilians, including thousands of innocent children, is unconscionable. The killing of noncombatants is never permissible regardless of the cause. It's immoral and illegal, and also counterproductive to the purpose of preventing violent extremism. The killing of civilians in Gaza is sowing seeds of hatred and violence that will haunt Israel's future and endanger its security.⁶⁷ It also distracts attention from the crimes committed by Hamas.

I support justice for the Palestinian people and recognize the appalling oppression and violence they have suffered over many decades of Israeli occupation and

⁶⁵ Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering al Qa'ida* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008).

⁶⁶ Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 204.

⁶⁷ Lisa Schirch, "A 5-Point Peace Plan to Protect Civilians, Address Trauma, Invest in Democracy, and Dismantle Hamas and Israeli Occupation," The Toda Peace Institute, Policy Brief 176, November 2023, 12, https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb-176_a-5-point-peace-plan-schirch.pdf

dispossession of their land,⁶⁸ but nothing can excuse the crimes Hamas has committed. Even if one accepts the right of resistance, there can be no justification for intentionally targeting unarmed civilians and the multiple war crimes committed on October 7.⁶⁹

Ceasefire

One of the central requirements for effective activism is a clear and compelling message. Movements and campaigns need narratives that encapsulate their core political analysis, and demands that are easily understood and endorsed by potential supporters.

For the Iraq antiwar movement, the core message was simply “no to war,” a call repeated endlessly in rallies and marches in the US and all over the world in the months leading up to the invasion. Many groups linked this demand to the lack of UN approval for military action in Iraq. “No to war without UN approval” became a subtheme in the political messaging of the movement. Most activists opposed war in Iraq unconditionally, with or without UN authorization, but linking the antiwar message to the lack of UN approval was important politically and analytically. It focused attention on the absence of international support for US military action in Iraq, and it appealed to those in the US who favored getting rid of Saddam Hussein but were not in favor of fighting a war without allies.⁷⁰

Today, as people around the world protest against Israel’s military assault, the demand for a ceasefire has become the core political basis for social mobilization. Many in the United States are part of the global movement and are pressuring the Biden administration to use its influence with Israel to bring a halt to the fighting. These pressures can be highly effective when they come from constituencies that are part of the administration’s political base and are crucial to the President’s re-election bid. An example is the recent statement by hundreds of pastors from

⁶⁸ Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism, 2017-2017* (New York: Metropolitan Paperback, Henry Holt and Company, 2020).

⁶⁹ Jens David Ohlin, “International Criminal Law Analysis of the Situation in Israel,” *OpinioJuris*, October 12, 2023, <https://opiniojuris.org/2023/10/12/international-criminal-law-analysis-of-the-situation-in-israel/>

⁷⁰ Ole R. Holsti, *American Public Opinion on the Iraq War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 36.

African American churches urging the White House to push for a ceasefire and the release of Israeli hostages.⁷¹

The term ceasefire is important because of its directionality in seeking to end the war and affirming that there is no military solution. Activists can be agnostic about the choice of words, however, if the purpose is to stop the killing. Any step that halts the violence is welcome. The brief pause of November 2023 allowed for an initial release of hostages and opened space for the delivery of some humanitarian assistance. Recent proposals for a phased truce would allow further release of hostages and greater humanitarian relief, although Netanyahu so far has refused. Any halt in the killing would be beneficial and would create an opening for demanding a permanent end to the fighting and a negotiated political solution.

During the debate about withdrawal from Iraq, when activists lobbied Congress in 2007 for a timetable to withdraw US troops, supportive members of Congress substituted the word “redeployment” for “withdrawal” as a tactic for winning support among moderate legislators. The new wording meant the same thing regarding the removal of troops from Iraq, but many activists were skeptical at the time. The newly worded measure was approved by both houses of Congress, and ultimately became US policy when the Bush administration negotiated a withdrawal agreement with the Iraqi government in late 2008 and Obama fulfilled his promise to end the war by implementing the deal.

Debates over words also emerged during the nuclear freeze movement when the pastoral statement of the US Catholic bishops urged a halt to the arms race but did not use the word freeze. Some argued this was a setback, but the bishops remained steadfast in supporting nuclear arms reduction and opposing the Reagan administration’s nuclear buildup.

Whether we call it a pause or ceasefire, a cessation of hostilities in Gaza is necessary. But it is not enough. Peace research tells us that ceasefires break down frequently. They are often merely a pause. The sustainability of a ceasefire

⁷¹ Maya King, “Black Pastors Pressure Biden to Call for a Cease-Fire in Gaza,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/28/us/politics/black-pastors-biden-gaza-israel.html#:~:text=Hundreds%20of%20pastors%20signed%20open,hostages%20being%20held%20in%20Gaza>.

depends upon effective third-party support, and a negotiated process for addressing underlying political and territorial disputes.⁷²

Building Broad Coalitions

In recent rallies for a ceasefire and in support of Palestinian rights, some of the messages have been one-sided and divisive. Especially troubling is the slogan “from the river to the sea.” While the chant may be intended as an aspiration for the freedom of all people in Israel and Palestine, many hear and fear it as a call for the elimination of the Israeli state and perhaps its people.⁷³ This alienates many progressive Jews and others who otherwise support the antiwar cause. Phrases that are divisive and open to conflicting interpretation are an obstacle to creating the diverse coalitions that are necessary for successful movements.

Many groups support more achievable and politically acceptable objectives: stop the killing and provide humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people. They also support the goal of a negotiated diplomatic settlement. These demands are widely supported and provide the basis for building a broadly based coalition that rejects the extremist policies of both sides— Hamas and the Netanyahu government—while advocating for peace now and over the long term.

The Iraqi antiwar and nuclear freeze movements featured diverse coalitions in which faith-based groups were a core constituency. Religiously motivated activists are often at the core of peace organizing and have helped to create and sustain many antiwar and disarmament campaigns. The endorsement of religious organizations enables the movement to reach mainstream audiences and can lend legitimacy to the cause. These dynamics were evident in both the Iraq and nuclear freeze movements.

Soon after the 9/11 attacks the National Council of Churches, the progressive evangelical community Sojourners and many other religious groups spoke out against the threat of war. The deliberative bodies of nearly all Christian

⁷² Virginia Page Fortna, *Peace Time: Cease-Fire Agreements and the Durability of Peace* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁷³ Karoun Demirjian and Liam Stack, “In Congress and on Campuses, ‘From the River to the Sea’ Inflames Debate,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/09/us/politics/river-to-the-sea-israel-gaza-palestinians.html>

denominations in the US issued statements opposing the use of force in Iraq and urging diplomatic alternatives. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops was especially active in opposing the war and released a major statement in November 2002 echoing concerns from the Vatican that the use of force in Iraq would be a humanitarian disaster and would lead to more war not less.⁷⁴

Jewish participation in the antiwar movement was more limited. Although many progressive voices spoke out against the invasion, opponents of the war were a minority within the organized rabbinical community, as some orthodox and conservative bodies expressed support for the use of force. This reflected a right-wing, pro-Likud political tendency among some influential leaders that persists today and partly accounts for the antiwar reticence that exists within the Jewish community, although that may be changing as the toll of suffering in Palestine mounts.

The role of churches and the religious community was also crucial during the freeze movement. The endorsement of religious organizations was decisive in establishing the broad social consensus that propelled the freeze to national prominence.⁷⁵ The participation of churches cast a mantle of respectability over the freeze movement. When religious leaders spoke out against the nuclear danger and urged progress toward disarmament, it became easier and more acceptable for others to do the same. The backing of the faith community gave credibility and momentum to the peace movement.

The freeze campaign was an extraordinarily diverse coalition that had support not only from faith groups but from a broad range of professional, political and social organizations, including dozens of national trade unions. The Stop MX coalition featured a unique combination of environmental, religious and peace groups, the National Taxpayers Union and the International Association of Machinists, along with cattlemen and ranchers in the Great Basin and the Western Shoshone nation. The groups opposed to the MX had diverse agendas, but they agreed to overlook their differences on other issues to focus on the overriding concern that united them, blocking deployment of the missile.

⁷⁴ Gerard F. Powers, "The U.S. Bishops and War since the Peace Pastoral," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27, no. 2 (September 2009): 89–90.

⁷⁵ Bruce Van Voorst, "The Churches and Nuclear Deterrence," *Foreign Affairs* 61 (Spring 1983), 828. 830.

Similarly broad coalitions are needed now to apply pressure for an end to the bloodshed and human suffering in Gaza. The role of the religious community is crucial for this purpose. Church groups are already active in opposing the war, and some are joining with colleagues in the Jewish community to strengthen the movement for peace. Progressive Jewish groups have been cautious about using the word ceasefire, but they oppose Netanyahu's militarized strategy and reject the wanton killing of Palestinian civilians. The J Street Lobby and Reform Judaism groups have demanded "a negotiated end to the fighting" to free the hostages and bring urgently needed humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza.⁷⁶ The basis exists for creating a broad interreligious alliance for ending the war.

The Long Haul

As activists mobilize for a ceasefire in Gaza, many also advocate for a long-term diplomatic settlement between the Israeli and Palestinian people. Some observers roll their eyes at the prospect. It can't be done, they say. It's been tried and failed. There are too many spoilers. Yes, the obstacles are many and seemingly endless, but ultimately there is no alternative to negotiations. War and violence have been tried, repeatedly, endlessly, and they are rampant now. They have not brought peace to Palestine and never will. The only hope for a lasting and just solution is through a negotiated political agreement.

We can't be naïve about the enormous difficulties all of this will entail, or the length of time required. For starters we don't have legitimate negotiating partners, on either side. Hamas has disqualified itself. Its leaders belong in the docket at the Hague not at the negotiating table. They do not want a political agreement. War is their strategy, and the destruction of Israel their goal. A new form of political representation in Palestine will be needed, although how that will occur we don't know.

In Israel, the Netanyahu government has utterly failed in its most fundamental duty of protecting its citizens from attack and has forfeited whatever diminishing political legitimacy it may have had. It must be held responsible for the killing of

⁷⁶ "J Street's Ongoing Response to the Israel-Hamas War and Israeli-Palestinian Crisis," January 22, 2024, Washington, DC, <https://jstreet.org/j-streets-response-to-hamas-attacks-israeli-palestinian-crisis/>

innocent civilians and children in Gaza. The government has adamantly opposed Palestinian statehood. Netanyahu has asserted that in any future arrangement, Israel “must have security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River,” an assertion some see as similar to the river-to-the-sea formulation of the other side.⁷⁷

Overcoming the many obstacles to peace and creating the foundations for a viable diplomatic process will likely take a very long time and an enormous amount of political pressure on the two parties. It will require large-scale external support from the international community and a major role for the United Nations. All of this needs to be backed up by sustained support from global civil society and a long-term commitment to peace activism.

The long-term horizon for pursuing a peaceful settlement in the Middle East is comparable to the experience of past efforts to achieve major structural change. Many of the great campaigns for social justice and peace in history have been prolonged, in some instances involving decades of struggle and transgenerational commitment. The battle for women’s suffrage was started in the US in the 1840s but did not achieve victory until 1920. Campaigns on behalf of internationalism and limits on interstate war began in the late 19th century and continue to this day. The Vietnam antiwar movement went on for a decade until the fighting finally came to an end. The signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in the 1990s was preceded by waves of citizen campaigning against nuclear testing that began in the 1950s.

Even the modest gains achieved in the recent Iraq antiwar and nuclear freeze movements required years of persistent pressure. Efforts to establish a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq spanned five years. The campaigns against the MX and nuclear testing each lasted five years.

We also recognize that movements often achieve only partial success and small victories. The grand visions of world peace and disarmament that inspire the

⁷⁷ “Netanyahu says he has told U.S. that he opposes Palestinian state in any scenario after Israel-Hamas war,” PBS News Hour, January 18, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/israeli-strike-kills-16-in-southern-gaza-palestinians-say-status-on-medicine-delivered-to-hamas-hostages-unknown>; “From the River to the Sea: Israel-based News Outlet Incorrectly Translates Netanyahu’s Words, Leading to Media Firestorm,” Haaretz, January 21, 2024, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-01-21/ty-article/israel-based-news-outlet-incorrectly-translates-pms-words-leading-to-media-firestorm/0000018d-2bfa-daf5-a1bf-ffa764b0000>

hopes of many activists are unlikely to be achieved, at least not in our lifetimes, although steps in that direction are possible. The goal of movements is not to create utopias or build a perfect society, but to advance human progress, to redress specific grievances and make an imperfect world more tolerable and just. When movements succeed the gains are important, but many challenges remain, and always will. The struggle continues. Campaigns for peace and justice are always necessary, and they can win, especially when activists are able to learn from and improve upon previous practice.

Movements need long distance runners, those who are committed to the struggle for justice and peace in all seasons, regardless of the success or failure of a specific action or campaign. Fundamental change is usually a gradual and long-term process and is unlikely to spring from a single action or campaign. Persistence and realistic expectations are essential to achieving effective change.

Conclusion: Recognizing Success

During the antiwar mobilizations of February 15, 2003, many organizers believed that the unprecedented tidal wave of opposition flooding the streets of New York, London and cities around the world would surely convince Bush and Blair to change course. Their hopes were dashed, of course, and the demonstrations had no evident impact. Some assumed that the movement was a failure, although as I have argued, the protests and organizing efforts had effects that altered the preparations for and conduct of the war, leading to the “strategic defeat” of the US military mission.

Similar doubts were expressed after the massive nuclear freeze rally in New York’s Central Park in 1982, when pressures for reversing the arms race seemed politically irresistible. Yet nothing changed in the weeks and months after the rally, and some activists became disillusioned, although as I argue, the movement continued and over the course of the following years scored important victories in reducing nuclear dangers.

Today activists who campaign for a ceasefire in Gaza face similar frustrations, as the violence escalates and threatens to engulf the region. Many feel helpless in

trying to stem a crisis that has existed for decades and seems without solution, but they persist.

One of the great challenges of social movement organizing is to overcome the feelings of powerlessness that many activists have when their mobilizing efforts do not achieve immediate results. When participants become demoralized and fall prey to the debilitating belief that nothing can be done, that protest and organizing are futile.

History clearly shows otherwise. Movements really matter, although progress often comes slowly and incrementally and may not be evident as it is happening. One of the challenges of activism and scholarship is to recognize positive changes when they occur, and to understand the possibilities and limitations of what movements can achieve.

From my experiences in movements and based on this analysis of the Iraq antiwar and nuclear freeze movements, several core observations stand out as essential ingredients of movement success. Among these are the following:

- The ability to mobilize mass participation and demonstrate broad public support for movement demands.
- A credible, widely-shared critique of existing policies and the articulation of constructive alternatives.
- Achievable political demands and public narratives that address both sides in a conflict where appropriate and are easily understood and supported by political majorities.
- Engagement in instrumental politics, with an emphasis on the mobilization of grassroots support for legislative and electoral action, in support of achievable policy objectives.
- Effective communication and framing strategies that are grounded in the values, symbols and beliefs of important audiences and that are likely to attract support for movement demands.
- The creation of broadly based coalitions, with significant participation from relevant religious communities and the involvement of women, people of color and affected constituencies.

- Realism in recognizing incremental policy changes as success, defending those gains when they come under attack and building on them for future achievement.
- Persistence and a commitment to the long haul.