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**Waiting for Lefty:  
The State of the Peace Movement in the United States\***

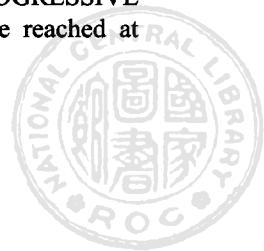
**John C. Berg\*\***

*This article seeks to explain differences between the US peace movements during the US wars in Vietnam and in Iraq. Although US public opinion has been more opposed to the Iraq war than to the Vietnam war, there has been less militant protest against the later war. In particular, there has been very little militant protest on university campuses. Several possible explanations for the difference are examined, including the absence of military conscription, disunity within the peace movement, and the end of the Cold War. The article concludes that the most significant factor has been the difference in the political situation, such that in the case of the Iraq war electoral politics seemed to most activists to offer a real hope of bringing peace.*

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\* This paper is intended as a conceptual essay, to lay out an argument to be more fully supported as data is located. The author wishes to acknowledge, with thanks, the support of Tamkang University, which provided the facilities for completing this paper, and in particular to his host, Professor Tai Wan-chin, and to Mr. Chen Wei-ting, who provided so much help in every way.

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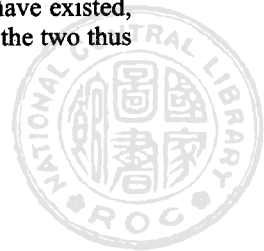
In “Waiting for Lefty,” a 1935 play by the leftist writer Clifford Odets, a group of taxi drivers at a union meeting punctuate their debates with the sell-out union leader, Fatt, with cries of “Wait until Lefty [their elected leader, Lefty Costello] gets here!” Only at the end does a veteran activist cry “Don’t wait for Lefty! Lefty may never come!” and lead them out on strike.<sup>1</sup>

The thesis of this paper is that the US peace movement is now somewhere in the middle of a similar play, with just one difference – instead of waiting for their elected leader to appear, US peace activists have been waiting to elect one, in the hope that the next US president would end the war in Iraq. More precisely, the argument is that, in comparison with the movement for peace in Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s, the US peace movement today is weaker, even while public opinion is more opposed to the war.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty, and Till the Day I Die; Two Plays* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1935).

<sup>2</sup> It might be argued that the two situations, Iraq and Vietnam, are not comparable because the Iraq war began differently from the Vietnamese one, with the invasion of the country and the overthrow of the existing government. However, after the first few months the US role in Iraq became similar to what it had been in Vietnam, ostensibly providing troops in order to support a national government that would not have existed, and would not continue to exist, without the US support. The comparison of the two thus seems appropriate.



This paper also seeks to reject a reason commonly offered for this weakness, namely that in the absence of the threat of military conscription young people lack sufficient motivation to become peace activists. Instead, it is argued that the relative lack of protest activity during the Bush administration was due to the hope of activists that the war could be ended through elections.

For the purposes of this analysis, we can regard the Tonkin Gulf resolution of 1964, with the accompanying dispatch of significantly more US troops to Vietnam, as the effective start of the US-Vietnam war, and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 as the effective start of the US-Iraq war. In each case, there had been US involvement for years earlier – in the case of Vietnam, US military “advisors” had been present (and fighting) at least since 1954;<sup>3</sup> in the case of Iraq, there had been US air strikes on Iraq, supposedly in enforcement of the “no-fly” zone, since the time of the first Gulf War in 1991. However, our concern here is with the beginning of public awareness of the war, rather than of the actual fighting, so these dates are appropriate.

The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was adopted by Congress on August 7, 1964; it declared “That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression,” and that “the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all

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<sup>3</sup> *American Military History* (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1989), 622.



necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.”<sup>4</sup> The resolution was requested by President Lyndon Johnson as a show of national unity in response to alleged attacks (later shown to have been much exaggerated) on US warships off the coast of North Vietnam. Despite a floor statement by J. William Fulbright (D-AR), the Senate floor manager of the resolution, that the resolution did not authorize an escalation of the war, it was later cited by Johnson as doing just that. The resolution passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 416-0, and the Senate by 88-2.<sup>5</sup>

The Johnson administration took little further action in Vietnam during the 1964 presidential campaign. Part of Johnson’s campaign strategy was to portray the Republican candidate, Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, as a dangerously reckless military adventurer, so that it served the campaign’s purposes to keep the war in the background. Things changed once Johnson was inaugurated for a second term, first with the launching of a bombing campaign against North Vietnam, “Operation Rolling Thunder,” in February 1965, and then, beginning in March, with the sending of additional troops, raising the number of US military forces in Vietnam from 16,000 in the summer of 1964 to 180,000 by the end of 1965.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> United States Congress, HJ Res 1145, 7 August 1964.

<sup>5</sup> See Edwin E. Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> *Vietnam: A Country Study*, Ed. Ronald J. Cima (Washington: Library of Congress, Federal Research Edition, 1989), online at <http://countrystudies.us/vietnam/>.



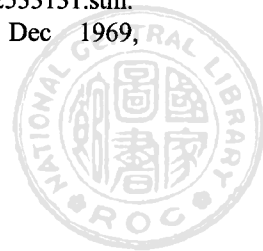
A small radical campus organization, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), called for a March on Washington on April 17, 1965, to protest this escalation of the war. To everyone's astonishment, 30,000 people turned up for this march – small by today's standards, but two or three times what the organizers (or the police) had anticipated, especially given the short notice. The impetus of this success spurred the development both of SDS, with chapters springing up spontaneously on campuses across the country, and of the series of much larger national demonstrations organized over the next few years by the National Mobilization Committee and then by the Vietnam Moratorium. The former was organized in May 1967, and by October 21 of the same year brought about 100,000 people to a rally in Washington DC, followed by civil disobedience on the steps of the Pentagon the next day, with over 800 people arrested. By October 1969, just over five years after the Tonkin Gulf incident, the Vietnam Moratorium mobilized millions of people in local demonstrations around the world,<sup>7</sup> followed by a march on Washington of 500,000 the next month.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the US movement for peace in Vietnam had grown massively within less than five years after the beginning of the escalation.

Meanwhile, back on campus, students in and outside of SDS launched struggles against what was called university “complicity” with the war effort, including military research, recruiting of students into military industry, faculty consultation with the Pentagon and the Central

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<sup>7</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, “BBC On this Day: 15 October,” online at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/15/newsid\\_2533000/2533131.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/15/newsid_2533000/2533131.stm).

<sup>8</sup> See Jeremy Brecher, “The Vietnam Moratorium,” *Liberation* Dec 1969, [Http://www.hippy.com/article-118.html](http://www.hippy.com/article-118.html).



Intelligence Agency, and on-campus training of military officers through the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC).<sup>9</sup> SDS and other left organizations developed a broader anti-imperialist analysis that linked the demands of the anti-war and civil rights movements with other local issues. Students turned to militant civil disobedience, including the occupation of administration buildings and campus strikes, with major confrontations at Columbia University, San Francisco State College, Harvard University, and elsewhere, leading to a nation-wide campus strike in the spring of 1969 after National Guard troops fired on and killed student demonstrators at Kent State University in Ohio and Jackson State University in Mississippi.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, the trend of peace demonstrations during the Iraq war has been in the opposite direction. Despite some variation, the numbers turning out for protest demonstrations have dwindled over time. The invasion was preceded by perhaps the largest peace demonstration in history, the worldwide marches on February 15, 2003, in which from six to ten million people participated.<sup>11</sup> However, that level of activity was

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<sup>9</sup> For discussion of the concept of university complicity, see William V. Spanos, *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1993), 150–54.

<sup>10</sup> George N. Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End, 1987); Alan Adelson, *SDS* (New York: Scribner, 1972); Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Vintage, 1974, c1973); Fred Halstead, *Out Now! A Participant's Account of the American Movement Against the Vietnam War* (New York: Monad, 1978); Randall B. Woods, ed., *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition: The Politics of Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Walter L. Hixson, edited with introductions by, *The Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (New York: Garland, 2000); Lawrence E. Eichel and et al., *The Harvard Strike* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).

<sup>11</sup> BBC News, February 17, 2003, online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2765215.stm>.



never again reached once the war had begun. A march called for “the day after” bombing of Iraq began drew at most 300,000 to the streets of Manhattan on March 22, 2003;<sup>12</sup> by the next fall, a major march on Washington in October was estimated by the *New York Times* to consist of 10,000 people.<sup>13</sup> A global protest in 700 cities on March 20, 2004, to mark the first anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq drew two million people, including 100,000 in New York.<sup>14</sup> A protest at the Republican National Convention in New York in August, 2004, drew 500,000, and a mobilization in Washington in September, 2005, included a march of 300,000 past the White House.<sup>15</sup> In the interim, protests in March 2005 were described by the *New York Times* as ranging “from about 350 in Times Square to several thousand in San Francisco.”<sup>16</sup>

Some falloff in protest activity was to be expected, since President Bush’s announcement on May 1, 2002, that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended” – delivered as he stood in front of a banner reading “Mission Accomplished” – was initially accepted by many opponents of the war.<sup>17</sup> However, as the war has continued, the mass protests have not

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<sup>12</sup> United for Peace and Justice, “About United for Peace and Justice,” online at <http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?list=type&type=16>.

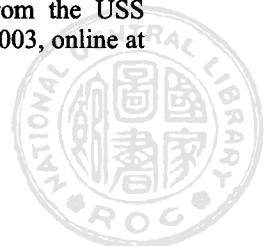
<sup>13</sup> *New York Times*, October 26, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> United for Peace and Justice, “March 20: The World Still Says No to War,” online at <http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?list=type&type=75>; see also *New York Times*, March 21, 2004, which describes the March 20 march in New York City as “markedly smaller and tamer” than the march in February 2003.

<sup>15</sup> United for Peace and Justice, “About United for Peace and Justice,” online at <http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?list=type&type=16>.

<sup>16</sup> *New York Times*, March 20, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended: Remarks by the President from the USS Abraham Lincoln, At Sea Off the Coast of San Diego, California, May 1, 2003, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030501-15.html>.



increased as they did during the Vietnam war. A March 2007 march on the Pentagon drew about 50,000.<sup>18</sup>

A greater difference between the two periods of peace activism is the absence of campus-based protest. As discussed above, the late 1960s saw universities all across America convulsed and shut-down by student protests that targeted not only the war, but the complicity of university administrations with the war. These included strikes and building occupations at Columbia University, Harvard, San Francisco State, Kent State, Jackson State, and the University of California-Berkeley, all during the years from 1968-1970.<sup>19</sup> While each of these campus struggles involved other issues, they were seen as integral parts of the peace movement, broadening rather than diluting that movement's strategic vision. As the Vietnam war came to be regarded as a manifestation of imperialism, campaigns on other issues were seen as attacking other faces of the imperialist system. Today, in contrast, there is very little talk of university complicity, and on-campus anti-war activism consists largely of mobilizing students for off-campus demonstrating and other activity.

One could think of several possible reasons for the lessened militancy of the peace movement against the Iraq war. In this paper will attempt to test three or these possible reasons. The first reason sometimes offered is the absence of military conscription in the United States. Without a draft, it is argued, young people – especially college students – simply lack the motivation to become active against the war. This view can be challenged

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<sup>18</sup> *New York Times*, March 18, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> The Free Speech Movement strike at Berkeley was earlier, in 1964; the People's Park demonstrations took place in 1969.



on several grounds. First, it is not clear why the conscription of 20-year olds should produce more protest than the present policy of staffing the military through the mobilization, remobilization, and lengthening of combat tours of the members of National Guard and Reserve units. The latter are far more likely to be married and to have children and long-term jobs, thereby maximizing the economic and social disruption when they are sent to Iraq for fifteen months or longer. Among other reasons, President Johnson had chosen to rely on the draft for the Vietnam war — albeit with exemptions for college students — because he thought a call-up of the reserves would generate greater opposition.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the timing is wrong. College students in good standing were exempt from the draft until 1971, by which date the number of inductees was declining rapidly (see Table 1); yet the largest and most militant campus demonstrations occurred before that date. Certainly male students before 1971 were concerned with their fate after graduation, and there is no doubt that draft resistance was an important component of the movement for peace with Vietnam.<sup>21</sup> However, without a clearer correlation between the drafting of students and the magnitude of campus militancy, we cannot conclude that conscription was a necessary condition for anti-war mobilization.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence M. Baskir and William A. Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance: The Draft, the War, and the Vietnam Generation* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

<sup>21</sup> Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance During the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 2003); Sherry Gershon Gottlieb, *Hell no, we Won't Go! Resisting the Draft During the Vietnam War* (New York: Viking, 1991); Baskir and Strauss.

<sup>22</sup> It should be added, however, that the existence of military conscription during the Vietnam war certainly heightened the level of antiwar protest *inside* the US armed forces.



Another possible explanation of the underdevelopment of today's peace movement is that it is held back by internal disagreement. For much of the time there have been two separate national coalitions, United for Peace with Justice (UFPJ) and Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (A.N.S.W.E.R.), sometimes in a strained alliance and at times issuing conflicting calls for demonstrations.<sup>23</sup> However, the movement for peace in Vietnam was also characterized by internal disagreement, particularly around the question of whether the movement should demand an end to the bombing, negotiations with the National Liberation Front of Vietnam, or an immediate withdrawal of US troops;<sup>24</sup> SDS was rent by internal disagreement during much of its existence.<sup>25</sup> However, while this dissension sometimes led to breakaway marches within large protest demonstrations, it did not serve to decrease participation in those demonstrations, and it does not seem likely that similar dissension would do so today.

This brings me to the third reason I want to consider, the differences in the national political scene. To put it simply, there was never a credible possibility that the movement against the Vietnam War would win in the electoral arena, while the movement against the Iraq War has hoped for precisely that.

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<sup>23</sup> A full discussion of the differences between UFPJ and A.N.S.W.E.R. would require another paper. Those differences may appear small at times. In general, UFPJ is more interested in uniting a broad coalition around a mutually-agreed-upon set of positions, while A.N.S.W.E.R. tends to be more interested in advocating a comprehensive revolutionary program.

<sup>24</sup> For the last, see Howard Zinn, *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

<sup>25</sup> Adelson; Sale.



The escalation of the Vietnam War took place under the administration of Lyndon Johnson, a liberal Democratic president who had just orchestrated the successful passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, thereby attaining one of the major goals sought by the left for the past several decades. Although Eugene McCarthy's anti-war primary challenge to Johnson's reelection succeeded in ending Johnson's career,<sup>26</sup> the assassination of Robert Kennedy<sup>27</sup> and the violent suppression of anti-war protest at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago ended any hope that an anti-war president would be elected in 1968.<sup>28</sup> Mass protest and civil disobedience were the only available alternatives. The war was widely regarded as "Johnson's war," and Vice President Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic nominee for president in 1968, as Johnson's successor. Few anti-war activists saw the Democratic Party as a vehicle to achieve their goals in that year. This rejection of the major parties led to the formation of the Peace and Freedom Party, and to a turn to militant protest.

Following the election of Richard Nixon in 1968, there was a partial realignment of the parties on issues of war and imperialism. Although a

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<sup>26</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy: The Rise and Fall of Postwar American Liberalism* (New York: Knopf, 2004). Jeremy Larner, *Nobody Knows; Reflections on the McCarthy Campaign of 1968* (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

<sup>27</sup> See Thurston Clarke, *The Last Campaign: Robert F. Kennedy and 82 Days That Inspired America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Norman Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago; an Informal History of the Republican and Democratic Conventions of 1968* (New York: World, 1968); Frank Kusch, *Battleground Chicago: The Police and the 1968 Democratic National Convention* (Westport: Praeger, 2004); David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Hunter S. Thompson, *The Kingdom of Fear: Loathsome Secrets of a Star-Crossed Child in the Final Days of the American Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).



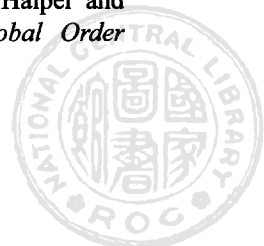
few antiwar Republicans, such as Pete McCloskey (R-CA) carried on in Congress, antiwar opinion began to consolidate in the Democratic Party, a trend that was reinforced when Senator George McGovern (D-SD) won the Democratic nomination for president in 1972. Most of the antiwar movement did support McGovern (although there were also antiwar candidates from the Peace and Freedom and Communist parties), but, in contrast to Barack Obama's campaign in 2008, the McGovern campaign failed miserably. However, by that time a variety of forces – not only the strength of antiwar sentiment in Congress as well as in American public opinion, but the demoralization and degeneration of the US military forces in Vietnam<sup>29</sup> – caused the US to begin reducing troop strength and to negotiate what was virtually a surrender to the National Liberation Front and the government of North Vietnam in January 1973.

The War in Iraq, in contrast, has taken place entirely with the more conservative and more militaristic party, the Republicans, in power.<sup>30</sup> The war was the initiative of Republican President George W. Bush, and the resolution endorsing it, the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002 (PL 107-243) was passed with the votes of 215 of 221 Republican representatives and 48 of 49 Republican senators, while 61% of Democratic representatives and 42% of

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<sup>29</sup> Matthew Rinaldi, "The Olive-Drab Rebels: Military Organizing During the Vietnam Era," *Radical America* 8.3 (1974).

<sup>30</sup> For discussion of the theory behind Bush's foreign policy, see Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).



Democratic senators voted against it.<sup>31</sup> One year after the invasion of Iraq, Howard Dean made opposition to the war the focus of his presidential campaign, and quickly became the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. Dean's campaign collapsed a few months later, but by that time the Democratic Party had been positioned as the antiwar choice. This positioning was established so firmly that John Kerry was seen as the antiwar candidate in 2004 despite his long and enthusiastic support for military action against Iraq.<sup>32</sup>

The internet-based group MoveOn.org played a key role in the process of bringing the antiwar movement into the Democratic Party. First organized in order to oppose the impeachment of President Bill Clinton – its name comes from its initial slogan, “Censure and Move On” – the group's website was one of the first to offer web-based collective action for like-minded people who are left of center.<sup>33</sup> Participants in their huge mailing list are constantly asked to send messages to Congress, to attend rallies and other visible events, to contribute money to buy political ads on television, and to join in campaign activity. Early in the 2004 campaign the group polled its members, and announced that they had

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<sup>31</sup> Among the Democratic votes for the resolution were those of John Kerry (D-MA) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY). Ironically, while each was thought to be voting yes in order to protect his or her viability as a future presidential candidate, each found the vote a liability by the time they actually ran.

<sup>32</sup> The *New York Times* reported in early 1998 that Kerry had joined two Republican senators, Arlen Specter (R-PA) and John McCain (R-AZ) in calling for CIA covert action, including sabotage and the bombing of power plants, against Iraq. *New York Times*, February 26, 1998. See also John C. Berg, “Surviving Nader? The Future of the US Greens,” paper presented at, American Politics Group (Canterbury, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Richard Davis, *The Web of Politics: The Internet's Impact on the American Political System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) Ch. 3.

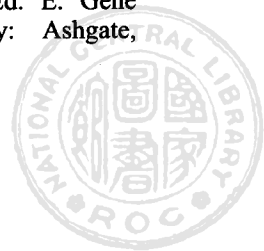


chosen Howard Dean as the progressive Democrat, and then used its website to organize support for Dean in the primaries. Following Dean's withdrawal, the organization endorsed Kerry, using the website to mobilize volunteers from non-competitive states to travel to Florida, Ohio, and other key battlegrounds of the campaign.

With so much hope riding on a possible Democratic victory, there was a tendency on the part of much of the left to downplay not only protest but radical politics in general. The strategy of the Green Party offers a good example. In 2000, the Greens had nominated Ralph Nader, a prominent and charismatic activist, who won 2.7% of the national vote and, with little doubt, changed the outcome of the election in Florida and hence in the nation. In 2004, in contrast, the Greens voted not to endorse Nader, but instead to nominate the little-known David Cobb, who announced his intention to concentrate his campaign in states that were not competitive between the major parties.<sup>34</sup> While there were a number of reasons for this decision, including Nader's refusal to join the Green Party himself, the Greens desire not to appear to undermine Kerry's changes certainly played an important role. John Rensenbrink's questions summed up the concerns of a substantial number of Greens:

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<sup>34</sup> John C. Berg, "Spoiler or Builder? The Effect of Ralph Nader's 2000 Campaign on the U.S. Greens," *The State of the Parties: The Changing Role of Contemporary American Parties*, Ed. John C. Green and Rick D. Farmer (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Berg, "Surviving Nader"; John C. Berg, "Conventions for the Unconventional: Minor Party Conventions, 1992–2004," *Rewiring Politics: Presidential Nominating Conventions in the Media Age*, Ed. Costas Panagopoulos (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 107–10; John C. Berg, "Greens in the USA," *Green Parties in Transition: The End of Grass-Roots Democracy?* Ed. E. Gene Frankland, Paul Lucardie, and Benoît Rihoux (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2008), 252–53.



Another vexing question: If Nader seems strong enough with enough voters so that he looks as if he might equal or even do a little better than the 3 million votes (about 3%) he garnered in 2000, will he again be attacked as a spoiler—and is that the kind of baggage the Green Party wants to carry on its back in its efforts to sustain momentum and gain even more? Wouldn't the party be better off grooming one or more of its own up-from-the-ranks leaders to run for president/vice president?<sup>35</sup>

Following Kerry's narrow loss to President Bush, both MoveOn.org and the broader peace movement looked to the Congressional election of 2006 as the next focus for antiwar politics, both creating the belief that the election would be an opportunity to vote against the war, and bringing substantial resources to the campaign. Following the Democratic victory in that election, MoveOn.org worked both to maintain pressure on the Democratic congressional leadership to act against the war (with little success to date, due to divisions within the Democratic Party), and to mobilize support for the nomination and election of Barack Obama (D-IL), whom it endorsed through a web-based vote of its members.

Congressional action made little progress. The Democratic majorities were not large enough to end a Senate filibuster or override a presidential veto. The Democrats could have simply refused to supply any funds for

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<sup>35</sup> See John Rensenbrink, "Challenge and Response: The Emergence of the Green Party in the United States," *Green Horizon Quarterly* Feb 2003.



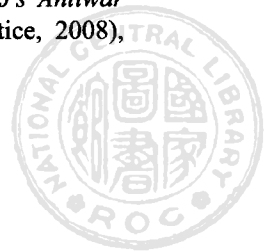
the war, but had neither the will nor the internal unity to take such a strong action. Attention and hope therefore turned more and more to the presidential campaign.

The result of this history has been that, from late 2003 until November 2008, much of the antiwar movement hoped that the next national election would bring a policy change leading to an end to the war. The left wing of the movement tried to take a more nuanced position. For example, UFPJ the broadest and largest coalition calling for an immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, featured on its website an article by Carl Davidson about UFPJ's Voter Engagement Project. In 1966 Davidson, then National Secretary of SDS, was co-author with Greg Calvert of a call for the antiwar movement to move "from protest to resistance."<sup>36</sup> Now he was calling for voter education. Davidson emphasized that "If you think this project is about hustling votes for Obama or any other particular party or candidate, you're mistaken," and insisted that "It's[sic] aim is to expand the electorate in the direction of our issues, set our issues as the prevailing ones for any candidate to address, educate both candidates and the electorate on our issues, get out the largest possible turnout of voters educated on our issues, and, most important, to strengthen our grassroots member groups and their alliances in the process."<sup>37</sup> Voter engagement is one of three parts of UFPJ's strategy; the other two are legislative action

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<sup>36</sup> Personal memory of the author. Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements of the 1960s* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) 121 describes SDS's change of strategy, without citing the Calvert and Davidson position paper specifically.

<sup>37</sup> Carl Davidson, *Getting Organized, Getting Engaged: A Memo on UFPJ's Antiwar Intervention in the 2008 Election Campaigns* (United for Peace and Justice, 2008), [Http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?list=type&type=127](http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?list=type&type=127).



and nonviolent direct action; at this writing, the major focus on their website is on lobbying Congress to cut off funding for the war.

Similarly, Amy Goodman and David Goodman, progressive journalists, write in their 2008 book about the “vast groundswell of political action” that is “swamping the traditional bastions of power:”

Bush triggered this political tsunami. Now Republicans and Democrats alike must reckon with the power of this grassroots uprising that is wresting control of our country back from the corporate profiteers, ideologues, and religious zealots. Newly minted and mobilized activists and movements have helped to counter the current regime and will have a major impact on future elections.<sup>38</sup>

Neither UFPJ nor the Goodmans endorsed the Democratic Party, or even said that electoral politics should be the focus of the antiwar movement. At the same time, both offered the possibility that the next election, or even the next vote in Congress, would bring an end to the war. In 1969, electoral politics appeared to be a dead end; in 2008, it appeared to many peace activists, and still more to the antiwar public, to be the way forward. As long as this remained true, a massive movement of antiwar direct action and street demonstrations was not likely to develop.

Finally, one other difference from the Vietnam war must be considered. The US war in Vietnam was portrayed as a war against

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<sup>38</sup> Amy Goodman and David Goodman, *Standing up to the Madness: Ordinary Heroes in Extraordinary Times* (New York: Hyperion, 2008), 5.



communism. Although the majority of Americans were anti-communist (though not, perhaps, very familiar with the actual ideas and practices of communism), a small but active minority were sympathetic with it. The antiwar movement included people from a variety of Marxist, socialist, and communist organizations. More broadly, many antiwar activists came to sympathize with and support the program and goals of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam and the Communist Party and government of North Vietnam. Thus there was a significant element in the antiwar movement that advocated withdrawal on the grounds that the Vietnamese revolutionaries would run their own country effectively, and more equitably, once the US left the scene. Meanwhile, those on the right expected the result of a US defeat or withdrawal to be a strong Vietnamese state — a communist dictatorship — not an escalation of bloodshed and chaos.<sup>39</sup>

Iraq is a very different situation. The resistance to the US occupation is divided into mutually hostile groups — Shi'a Islamists, Sunni Islamists, Ba'ath socialists, and others. None of these is well understood by the American left, and there are very few Americans arguing for either the return to power of the Ba'ath party formerly led by Saddam Hussein or the victory of the Shi'a militant leader Moqtada al-Sadr. Unlike the earlier situation in Vietnam, it is not at all clear what the situation would be were the US to withdraw, and the result might well be an increase in violence. Peace activists generally do argue that Iraqis should be left free to determine their country's fate, but without the confidence of Vietnam-era

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<sup>39</sup> Kathleen Gough, *Ten Times More Beautiful: The Rebuilding of Vietnam* (Vancouver: New Star, 1978).



activists that such a fate would be a desirable one.

What are the future prospects for the US peace movement? Is President Obama the equivalent of Lefty, who this time has arrived, after all? And if he is, will he live up to the hopes people have for him?

Obama is hardly an anti-imperialist, but the expectations are strong. In my hometown the local peace group, Dorchester People for Peace (DPP), is more radical than liberal. It has taken strong stands against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, supported the liberation of Palestine, and joined in militant blockades meant to block housing foreclosures. DPP has chartered a bus to take members to Washington for Obama's inauguration, declaring that "In Washington, there will be millions of people and there is no guarantee that we will actually be able to see Obama, the inauguration, or the parade. But we'll help Celebrate!"<sup>40</sup>

The lull in protest during the election season will very probably continue through the inauguration into the early months of the Obama Administration. UFPJ is calling for a large national protest march — in New York, not Washington — on April 4, 2009. Meanwhile, Obama, the president-elect, appears to be acting on his pledge to seek victory in Afghanistan, whether by military or other means, while gradually withdrawing US troops from Iraq over a period lasting from his Inauguration to the summer of 2010. However, the Obama campaign website stated:

Under the Obama-Biden plan, a residual force will remain

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<sup>40</sup> Flyer, author's personal collection.



in Iraq and in the region to conduct targeted counter-terrorism missions against al Qaeda in Iraq and to protect American diplomatic and civilian personnel. They will not build permanent bases in Iraq, but will continue efforts to train and support the Iraqi security forces as long as Iraqi leaders move toward political reconciliation and away from sectarianism.<sup>41</sup>

Much depends on the success of this strategy, both in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Barring some dramatic event, it may take some time for an assessment of that strategy to become clear. Even if the war in Iraq does not end, or the war in Afghanistan escalates, it may take a year or more before we can expect a resurgence of antiwar protest.

To sum up, the movement for peace in Vietnam grew both more confrontational in tactics and more radical in its political beliefs as the war went on. This change was due, in large part, to the movement's inability to penetrate the inner circles of power and policy. In contrast, the movement for peace in Iraq has continually hoped that a change in policy would be brought about through elections. In that sense it has been waiting, not for "Lefty," but for Barack Obama. It might be argued that there have not been confrontational peace demonstrations on campus because they have not been needed. On the other hand, if the Obama administration finds itself embroiled in a major war in Afghanistan a few years from now, a more militant peace movement may begin to develop.

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<sup>41</sup> Obama-Biden campaign, "War in Iraq," online at <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/iraq/index.php>.



**Table 1. Inductees by year, 1961-1973**

1961	118,586	
1962	82,060	
1963	119,265	
1964	112,386	<b>Gulf of Tonkin resolution</b>
1965	230,991	<b>Escalation begins; SDS march</b>
1966	382,010	
1967	228,263	
1968	296,406	<b>Columbia building occupation</b>
1969	283,586	<b>National Moratorium</b>
1970	162,746	
1971	94,092	
1972	49,514	
1973	646	<b>Conscription ends June 30, 1973</b>

**Source:** United States Selective Service System, "History and Records: Induction Statistics," online at <http://www.sss.gov/induct.htm>.



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