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[What Ever Happened to the Antiwar Movement?](#)

[David Boaz](#) - March 21, 2011

About 100 antiwar protesters, including [Daniel Ellsberg](#) of [Pentagon Papers](#) fame, were arrested Saturday outside the White House in demonstrations marking the eighth anniversary of the [U.S.-led war in Iraq](#). It's a far cry from the Bush years, when [hundreds of thousands](#) or [millions](#) marched against the war, and the *New York Times* [declared](#) "world public opinion" against the war a second superpower. Will President [Obama](#)'s military incursion in a third Muslim country revive the antiwar movement?

On a street corner in Washington, D.C., outside the Cato Institute, there's a metal box that controls traffic signals. During the Bush years there was hardly a day that it didn't sport a poster advertising an antiwar march or simply denouncing President [George W. Bush](#) and the war in Iraq. But the marches and the posters seemed to stop on election day 2008.

Maybe antiwar organizers assumed that they had elected the man who would stop the war. After all, Barack Obama rose to power on the basis of his early opposition to the Iraq war and his promise to end it. But after two years in the White House he has made both of George Bush's wars his wars.

In October 2007, Obama [proclaimed](#), "I will promise you this, that if we have not gotten our troops out by the time I am president, it is the first thing I will do. I will get our troops home. We will bring an end to this war. You can take that to the bank." Speaking of Iraq in February 2008, [candidate Barack Obama said](#), "I opposed this war in 2002. I will bring this war to an end in 2009. It is time to bring our troops home." The following month, under fire from Hillary Clinton, [he reiterated](#), "I was opposed to this war in 2002....I have been against it in 2002, 2003, 2004, 5, 6, 7, 8 and I will bring this war to an end in 2009. So don't be confused."

Indeed, in his famous "the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow" speech on the night he clinched the Democratic nomination, he also proclaimed, "I am absolutely certain that generations from now we will be able to look back and tell our children that . . . this was the moment when we ended a war."

Today, however, he has [tripled President Bush's troop levels](#) in Afghanistan, and we have been fighting there for more than nine years. The Pentagon has declared "the official end to Operation Iraqi Freedom and combat operations by United States forces in Iraq," but [we still have 50,000 troops there](#), hardly what Senator Obama promised.

And now Libya. [In various recent polls](#) more than two-thirds of Americans have opposed military intervention in Libya. No doubt many of them voted for President Obama.

There's another issue with the Libyan intervention: the president's authority to take the country to war without congressional authorization. As many bloggers noted over the weekend, in 2007 Barack Obama [told Charlie Savage](#) of the *Boston Globe*,

The President does not have power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation.

Candidate [Hillary Clinton spoke similarly](#):

If the country is under truly imminent threat of attack, of course the President must take appropriate action to defend us. At the same time, the Constitution requires Congress to authorize war. I do not believe that the President can take military action – including any kind of strategic bombing – against Iran without congressional authorization.

And candidate [Joe Biden](#):

The Constitution is clear: except in response to an attack or the imminent threat of attack, only Congress may authorize war and the use of force.

Fine words indeed. Will their supporters call them on their apparent reversal?

It's hard to escape the conclusion that antiwar activity in the United States and around the world was driven as much by antipathy to George W. Bush as by actual opposition to war and intervention. Indeed, a [University of Michigan study](#) of antiwar protesters found that Democrats tended to withdraw from antiwar activity as Obama found increasing political success and then took office. Independents and members of third parties came to make up a larger share of a smaller movement. [Reason to look at the dwindling antiwar movement two months ago](#)

target share of a smaller movement. REASON: [LOOKED AT THE DWINING ANTIWAR MOVEMENT](#) TWO MONTHS AGO.

With his launch of a third military action, President Obama seems to have forgotten a point [made](#) by Temple University professor Jan C. Ting: “Wars are easy to begin, but hard to end.” Americans haven’t forgotten, though.

Nearly [two-thirds of Americans now say](#) that the war in Afghanistan hasn’t been worth fighting, a number that has soared since early 2010. Where are their leaders? Where are the senators pushing for withdrawal? Where are the organizations? Could a new, non-Democratic antiwar movement do to Obama what the mid-2000s movement did to Bush? And the \$64,000 question — though these days it would have to be at least a \$64 billion question — could a new antiwar movement hook up [with the Tea Party movement](#) in a [Stop the War, Stop the Spending](#) revolt?