

Tomgram: Allegra Harpootlian, Ending the Forever Wars?

Posted by Joan Russow

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Posted by [Allegra Harpootlian](#) at 3:15pm, June 23, 2019.

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I remember well the antiwar movement of the Vietnam era. I was in it and it was distinctly in the streets, big time. I was typical, for instance, in traveling to Washington in October 1967 for a march on the Pentagon, which proved to be the [largest antiwar protest](#) ever staged to that point -- a crowd so vast I had never seen the likes of it before. And I returned to the capital a year or two later for a far more chaotic antiwar demonstration in which I remember having to choose between staying with a bold friend eager to rush further into the tear-gas-laced streets around the Washington Mall or run for it -- alone. (I reluctantly chose to stay.) And then there were all the little moments of work and opposition over so many years, the moments when you weren't with crowds of people in those streets, but you were still focused on opposing that American war from hell.

And then, of course, I remember that [second antiwar moment](#) of vast crowds on a [global scale](#) in the winter and early spring of 2003, when I found myself once again [marching](#) with staggering numbers of other people against a grim American war, this time one still to come. It was already obvious, though, that the top officials of the Bush administration were intent on invading Saddam Hussein's Iraq, no matter what. Still, I suspect the crowds of demonstrators then put even the Vietnam protests to shame. Strangely, however, when that war began and essentially didn't end but spread, when it came to embroil, in one way or another, much of the Greater Middle East and then parts of Africa, when the Arab Spring broke out, Syria cracked open, and ISIS appeared -- when, to use a [phrase](#) of former Arab League head Amr Mussa, it was clearer that we had passed through "the gates of Hell" in the Greater Middle East -- it seemed as if no one in the U.S. was in the streets or anywhere else.

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Yes, there were some places [like TomDispatch](#) that continued to focus on those never-ending wars and the [chaos](#) , [death](#) , [displacement](#) , and

[destruction](#)

they caused, but generally it felt -- at least to me -- as if, in a period of

[never-ending](#)

and disastrous conflicts across vast (and distant) stretches of the planet, the American public was nowhere to be found. That's why, when I read

[TomDispatch](#)

[regular](#)

Allegra Harpootlian's take on the situation, I found a certain genuine hope there. No, there still isn't an antiwar movement in the streets of America, but that doesn't mean nothing is happening, nothing is forming, nothing is brewing when it comes to our twenty-first-century wars from hell, not if you look in the right way and in the right places. Check out her piece and see what I mean.

Tom

The Antiwar Movement No One Can See Will It Put a Crimp in the War on Terror?

By [Allegra Harpootlian](#)

When Donald Trump entered the Oval Office in January 2017, Americans took to the streets all across the country to protest their instantly endangered rights. Conspicuously absent from the newfound civic engagement, despite more than a decade and a half of this country's fruitless, destructive wars across the Greater Middle East and northern Africa, was antiwar sentiment, much less an actual movement.

Those like me working against America's seemingly [endless wars](#) wondered why the subject merited so little discussion, attention, or protest. Was it because the still-spreading war on terror remained shrouded in government secrecy? Was the lack of media coverage about what America was doing overseas to blame? Or was it simply that most Americans didn't care about what was happening past the water's edge? If you had asked me two years ago, I would have chosen "all of the above." Now, I'm not so sure.

After the [enormous demonstrations](#) against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the antiwar movement disappeared almost as suddenly as it began, with some even openly

[declaring](#)

it dead. Critics noted the long-term absence of significant protests against those wars, a lack of

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political will in Congress to deal with them, and ultimately,

[apathy](#)

on matters of war and peace when compared to issues like health care, gun control, or recently even

[climate change](#)

The pessimists have been right to point out that none of the plethora of marches on Washington since Donald Trump was elected have had even a secondary focus on America's fruitless wars. They're certainly right to question why Congress, with the constitutional duty to declare war, has until recently allowed both presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump to wage war as they wished without even consulting them. They're right to feel nervous when a national [poll](#) shows that more Americans think we're fighting a war in Iran (we're not) than a war in Somalia (

[we are](#)

).

But here's what I've been wondering recently: What if there's an antiwar movement growing right under our noses and we just haven't noticed? What if we don't see it, in part, because it doesn't look like any antiwar movement we've even imagined?

If a movement is only a movement when people fill the streets, then maybe the critics are right. It might also be fair to say, however, that protest marches do not always a movement make. Movements are [defined](#) by their ability to challenge the status quo and, right now, that's what might be beginning to happen when it comes to America's wars.

What if it's Parkland students [condemning](#) American imperialism or groups fighting the [Musli](#)

[m](#)

[Ban](#)

that are

[also](#)

fighting the war on terror? It's veterans not only trying to take on the wars they fought in, but putting themselves on the front lines of the

[gun control](#)

,

[climate change](#)

, and

[police brutality](#)

debates. It's Congress

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[passing](#)

the first War Powers Resolution in almost 50 years. It's Democratic presidential candidates

[signing](#)

a pledge to end America's endless wars.

For the last decade and a half, Americans -- and their elected representatives -- looked at our endless wars and essentially shrugged. In 2019, however, an antiwar movement seems to be brewing. It just doesn't look like the ones that some remember from the Vietnam era and others from the pre-invasion-of-Iraq moment. Instead, it's a movement that's being woven into just about every other issue that Americans are fighting for right now -- which is exactly why it might actually work.

A Veteran's Antiwar Movement in the Making?

During the [Vietnam War](#) of the 1960s and early 1970s, protests began with religious groups and peace organizations morally opposed to war. As that conflict intensified, however, students began to join the movement, then civil rights leaders like [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

got involved, then war veterans who had witnessed the horror firsthand stepped in -- until, with a seemingly constant storm of protest in the streets, Washington eventually withdrew from Indochina.

You might look at the lack of public outrage now, or perhaps the [exhaustion](#) of having been outraged and nothing changing, and think an antiwar movement doesn't exist. Certainly, there's nothing like the active one that fought against America's involvement in Vietnam for so long and so persistently. Yet it's important to notice that, among some of the very same groups (like veterans, students, and even politicians) that fought against that war, a healthy

[skepticism](#)

about America's twenty-first-century wars, the Pentagon, the military industrial complex, and even the very idea of American exceptionalism is finally on the rise -- or so the

[polls](#)

tell us.

