

them. We therefore approach our topic through our shared understanding of the historical actualities of the last 30 years during which we have witnessed and participated in the UK debate on war and peace.

1. Assessing and Explaining the Health of the Movement

The dilemma for British Anti-war activism may, in its starkest form, be expressed thus. At the height of the Cold War in the early 1980s, when the majority UK public opinion was firmly in favour of the retention of Britain's nuclear weapons, and there was little realistic chance of shifting the balance of British public opinion, the peace movement was strong, united, and remarkably sustained in its effort. In 2006, in the midst of a disastrous intervention which has widely been acknowledged as the worst foreign policy blunder since Suez, which is killing thousands of women and children year on year, and when majority public opinion is against the war, the anti-war movement is weak, diffuse, and dispirited. What psychological processes and constructs might help us understand, and remedy this profound paradox?

Table 1. Contrasting features of two phases of the UK anti-war movement

1980s anti-nuclear activism	Post 9/11 anti-war activism	Psychological theme
Aspects of UK society		
<i>Grounded constituencies rooted in long-term local communities</i>	Ungrounded and virtual constituencies depending on the internet and electronic communication	Quality of human relationships within the movement
Strong cultural identities, "peacenik, feminist," and socially homogenous activists: white, with higher education and working in public sector professions.	Weaker collective identity, and shifting multicultural and multiracial coalitions.	Cultural unity/identity of anti-war movement
Consensus of the political left against Thatcher's conservatism	No consensus within ruling Labour Party or Labour supporters. The left is split.	The fragmentation of the British left
Aspects of campaigning issues		
Focus on averting "ultimate" nuclear war	Focus on stopping normal conventional war	Global significance of threat
High perceived level of personal danger (nuclear annihilation of millions in the UK)	Low perceived level of personal danger (terrorist suicide bomb killing tens or hundreds)	Level of fear in the general population
One simple campaigning message "'ban the bomb"	Multiple and shifting campaigning messages	Simplicity of campaigning message
Focus of movement broadly stable across time	Focus of movement rapidly shifting (in response to events)	Stability of movement
Aspects of campaigning context		
Obvious long-term symbolic geographic sites of resistance (e.g. nuclear bases)	No obvious geographic symbolic sites of resistance	Geographic focus of activism
Activism grounded in traditional well-practiced activity (providing expertise and "well-oiled" organisational structures)	Activism includes much new and unpractised activity (within experimental organisational structures)	Skills base among activists

Table 1 provides a summary of some key differences between UK anti-nuclear activism of the 1980s and post 9/11 anti-war activism. These differences will be used as a framework for applying psychological considerations as a basis for understanding the UK anti-war movement as it has moved through different phases of its life in the last quarter century.

2.1 Quality of human relations within the anti-war movement: socio-emotional inter-individual bonds

Activism requires coordinated and well-organised action, sustained over time and space. It is, therefore, based on the ability of groups to function well together. One feature of nearly every activist group is that it exists to get things done. A large focus is on planning, executing, and evaluating agreed projects or tasks. This requires co-operation, and an appropriate division of labour. In these respects an activist group may be considered as similar to a team, of the sort that has been extensively studied, either in occupational settings (e.g. military, industrial, managerial) or in leisure pursuits (e.g. sports, hobbies).

Making the best use of the individual contributions of team members depends upon those members learning about, and effectively deploying, individual strengths, and addressing individual weaknesses. That learning only takes place when there are frequent and extensive opportunities to interact. It follows that teams which are able to meet together regularly, at the same place and time, are likely to develop a higher level of functioning. Teams which function at a distance, or who coalesce around time-limited projects, operating by correspondence and other remote communication methods, rarely meeting one another, are at a signal disadvantage when needing to plan new activities, and particularly when crises of one sort or another occur. When a team is geographically together, a whole range of personal, social, emotional, and cultural support mechanisms can be easily deployed.

There is considerable suggestive evidence that what keeps many activists engaged in the difficult work of anti-war activism, which rarely yield major visible shifts in government policy, is the possibility of obtaining personal psychological rewards directly from the strong contact and experiences shared with other group members, which become part of a bond (of shared support, shared adversity, and, hopefully, shared moments of transcendence and beauty).

Jasper (1997) has shown that many activist groups have developed what he calls “collective rites”, such as vigils, use of art forms, song, etc. to “remind participants of their basic moral commitments, stir up strong emotions, and reinforce a sense of solidarity with the group – a “we-ness”. He goes on to propose “rituals are vital mechanisms keeping protest movements alive and well.” It is implicit in his analyses of such rituals that they are a strong part of cementing lasting inter-personal bonds of friendship and mutual personal commitment, which can, in many cases persist over many decades. This emotional dimension of social movements has become increasingly acknowledged as significant by researchers (see Aminzade and McAdam (2001).

Public acts of witness are particularly powerful rituals of group solidarity. During a period of personal despair and deep anger, in late 2002 and 2003, when war with Iraq loomed and then began, one of us was deeply nourished by his participation in a small group of peace-activists in his local town, who stood in a circle together for two hours every Saturday morning in the centre of the crowded market square in silent witness against the war. It mattered immensely that it was the same people week after week. Our shared commitment to this ritual was a profound support to each other, and a reminder to each of us that there were others for whom this mattered as much as it did to us. It was vital that everyone there was a citizen of this town, thus emphasising BOTH identities – member of the local community, but also member of the countrywide (even worldwide) anti-war movement; cutting across all other things that might divide us (such as age, gender, ethnicity, level of income and education etc.).

In terms of Social Identity Theory (SIT – Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Brown, 2000) we were engaged in making more salient the identities that joined us together, and de-emphasising those that separated us. This is well documented as a means of increasing group cohesion and positive interactions between people. It is at least a conjecture worth considering, that key aspects of modern communication (particularly the internet) are not strong vehicles for the socio-emotional-cultural binding that creates strong and lasting networks of personal commitment and co-operation (Nie, 2001). For the most extreme contrast to the “virtual community” of the internet, we can do no better, in Britain’s case, than to turn to the extraordinarily rich and long lasting communities formed at the Peace Camps of the 1980s, particularly the women’s peace camps of Greenham Common (Roseneil, 2000).

The Greenham camps were not simply premised on sharing a common identity and lifestyle. For many women, to fully participate in the life of the camps meant explicitly and deliberately leaving other identities and commitments behind. One Greenham woman summed this up very clearly:

“My husband didn’t understand and didn’t like me getting involved outside the home. When I wanted to go to Greenham it was the last straw. He said, “you either stay at home and be a proper wife and mother, or you go to Greenham, but not both”... Since going to Greenham, my own family have rejected me and feel I’ve disgraced them...” (Source: You can’t kill the spirit: Yorkshire Women go to Greenham. Bretton Women’s book fund, Wakefield, p 26. Reprinted in Hudson (2005) p.138).

Psychological studies have made it clear that the greater the personal cost involved in making a decision, the more committed one is to that decision over the long-term, having taken it (Festinger, 1957). Therefore, explicit (and possibly irreversible) rejection of something which has had prior value, can be the strongest motivator for long-term activism. For many women, the total community offered by Greenham, which could involve, if so desired, permanent residence over years, was the catalyst for profound personal change, and the development of lifelong relationships based on shared experiences and shared values.

Other research on 1960s activists shows that those who were most involved in high cost activism, such as the 1964 Freedom Summer campaign of the US civil rights movement, remained committed decades later to the ideals that motivated them in their youth (McAdam, 1988). Those who had been most heavily involved in activism still lived political lives, sustaining the radical identities that they had cemented in early adulthood. This also fits the growing weight of biographical research on the later careers and values of young activists (McAdam 1988, Whittier 1997, Braungart and Braungart 1991).

In this respect, it may be that making a particular act of protest TOO easy, and TOO mainstream, diminishes its motivational value in encouraging long-term activism. One of the possible shortcomings of the February 15th 2003 “March of 2 million” is that its very acceptability to a broad social spectrum lowered its long-term motivating value. It didn’t cost very much (personally, or culturally) to join the march. And for many, no new or powerful relationships formed after the event to encourage and sustain further activism.

This has implications for some of the most important ideas about protest and social movements. Granovetter has argued that movement networks based upon weak ties between groups not normally connected to each other will spread to mobilise more people than will action based in a network of strong ties between people who are very similar socially. A weak ties network then will be most conducive to mobilising more people for a mass demonstration. He also acknowledges, however, that a ‘strong ties’ network may sustain more demanding action for longer because of the interdependence of those involved (Granovetter, 1973). Thus a strong ties network will be most likely to develop an enduring and sustained movement based on a high level of activism.

This can be connected to a second point: Tarrow (2000) has argued that the nature of protest mobilisation is changing. The large and intense organisations such as CND in the 1980s with a culture of local groups based on weekly or monthly meetings and sub-groups, are being replaced by a new kind of organisation of the kind that the Stop the War coalition seems in part to represent. This is much smaller, and able to mobilise large numbers of participants for demonstrations without the scale of bureaucracy and organisational time previously required. This is partly a consequence of the Internet and the ease it allows in distribution of information, but it is also a result of the accumulation of activist experience across the generations, which allows activists to rejoin protests regularly. The now extensive biographical research on the subsequent careers of 60s and 70s activists suggests that those involved in intense social movement activity do not so much retire as move into less publicly visible action, but without giving up on their core ideals. As a result they “remain available for mobilisation in times of stress or opportunity and keep the flame of activism alive for another day. This continuity also helps to explain why small and apparently weak organizations can produce surprisingly large explosions of protest activity. After the high points of contention pass, these activists remain part of critical communities connected to centres of innovation and potential insurgency.”(Tarrow 2000: 278). On the one hand this suggests a long-term and latent population of post-60s activists. On the other hand, if past activists return only for major events such as the February 2003 anti-war demonstrations, are the new large protests a weaker form of mobilization than

the smaller but more intense culture of the 1980s peace movement? The challenge for contemporary anti-war activists is to develop a form of participation capable of re-involving those who are already sympathetic to their cause in a more sustained way.

2.2 Cultural Unity/Identity of the Anti-War Movement.

The coalescing of people from different backgrounds under a common cause is never an easy process. Cultural and social differences cannot be ignored – they can obtrude into activities, and become a source of intra-group conflict in and of themselves. They have to be dealt with. And therefore, it seems fairly reasonable to suppose that the more shared identities that exist in a group of activists, the easier it will be to handle intra-group conflicts, and sustain the pursuit of common activities in the long-term.

The British anti-nuclear movement of the 1980s and that of the 1960s was, while culturally inclusive in some ways (for instance in age and gender), quite culturally narrow in others. Other than the dominance of the middle class public sectors professions, the most obvious feature of the movement, if compared to the “rainbow” of February 15th 2003, was its ethnic uniformity (Byrne 1997: 65). The vast majority of visible activists were white and UK-born. In addition, there were very specific sub-identities, which provided inter-related “niches” for different activist groups. These included groups developing feminist practices (including radical feminism and the challenging of gender stereotypes in personal lifestyle decisions), groups oriented around religion and spirituality (particularly of a non-traditional and non-hierarchical kind), groups engaging in lifestyles that prioritised conservation and harmony with nature (ecologists, vegetarians etc.) and groups developing alternatives to prevailing economic practices with respect to family, property, and income (e.g. the co-operative movement). Moving between these different types of activism was relatively easy, as they all shared a certain over-arching “world view”. This meant that different types of activism interacted and fed each other. An activist could sense that going and working on an organic farm was in some deep way “the same thing” as participating in a blockade of a nuclear facility, or becoming a radical feminist. We were all “peaceniks”.

Anti-war activities of recent years have, in contrast, involved a complex and shifting kaleidoscope of groups, alliances, and impulses. The most radical change has been the participation of diaspora and ethnic minorities, often bringing with them strong cultural and religious affinities representing mainstream or even conservative (rather than fringe or progressive) values of the countries and regions with which they identify. For instance, the Serbian community that played such an important role in the anti-war activities of 1999 were predominantly politically conservative, many being devout Orthodox Christians, and quite hostile to Muslims. Similarly, many of the Muslims who played a major role in the anti-war activism that developed after 9-11 were religiously and politically conservative, and would find little or no common ground with the set of values that characterise the more seasoned peace activist. Many compromises over quite fundamentally different world views were needed to hold the Stop the War Coalition together at the height of its influence. There was a sense that the different communities did not interact easily, and those of us who attended the many marches, rallies, and meetings, in the 2001 – 2003 period could not fail to notice

how little real interaction there was between the Muslim and white groups represented. The construction of “coalitions” of anti-war activists varied in response to each successive military campaign. People who were central to the movement in one conflict simply “disappeared” in the next one. Those of us committed for the long haul have had to “remake” our constituencies several times in the last decade. This has drained time and energy.

2.3 National Political Landscape: Fracturing of the Traditional Left.

In the UK peace movement of the 1980s, Thatcher and Reagan were the hate-figures that united the movement, and the Labour Party in opposition provided plausible “glue” for a left-leaning activist community. For 18 wilderness years (1979 – 1997 representing the entire adult lifespan of many people) progressive hopes had focused on the eventual return of Labour to power. Successive electoral Labour defeats may have dejected the progressive left, but the fact that Labour remained the principal opposition party, with massive electoral support particularly in the cities and in Scotland and Wales, gave the left hope that, with appropriate leadership, and with the eventual disillusionment of the electorate with conservatism, Labour’s time would come, and progressive policies would once again enter the mainstream. Longstanding hopes were raised to new heights on the euphoric day in May 1997 when Tony Blair’s Labour party swept to power on a landslide victory. But it did not take long for most of these hopes to be dashed.

It would be hard to overestimate the depth of the disillusionment and disorientation experienced by many supporters of the political left as Blair’s New Labour quickly revealed itself to be far from progressive on a whole range of issues. The rightward move of the Labour leadership increasingly disenfranchised the left of the party, and many left-leaning citizens felt equally disenfranchised. The third major party, the Liberal Democrats, showed few signs of resolutely filling the political gap vacated by Labour, and fringe parties, such as the Greens, did not have the electoral appeal in a “first past the post” electoral system to fill the vacuum left by Labour.

Given the record of previous Labour administrations on matters of war and peace it was perhaps naïve of the anti-war left to pin their hopes on Blair, but it is pretty clear that the anger felt by those on the left towards one-time member of CND Blair was far more motivationally debilitating than the anger felt towards Thatcher which, for many, was energising. Fighting a common perceived enemy is far easier than dealing with what one perceives to be a betrayal by someone who was supposed to be on the same side. Blair’s repositioning of Labour meant that the anti-war movement had no real home in mainstream British party politics.

Since 1999, pro-war and anti-war camps have increasingly formed independently of party-political allegiance. Some of the most hawkish proponents of war have been found on the Labour back benches, and some prominent Conservatives (such as ex Governor of Hong Kong and EU-commissioner Chris Patten) have found themselves considerably to the left of Blair. An extraordinary example of “crossing the floor” came in June 2006, when Michael Portillo, a former minister in the Conservative government, joined the ranks of the anti-war left in calling for unilateral British nuclear disarmament (Portillo, 2006).

Activist movements are at their most healthy and vibrant when they can command the resources of major societal organisations that adopt and organise around their agendas (be they political parties, churches, or charitable organisations). Denied a home in New Labour, the UK anti-war movement currently has not succeeded in recruiting organisational sponsorship of the sort that would underpin its long-term health. This is in contrast to the movement in the 1980s which had the support of Labour, trade unions and many local authorities. It is also in contrast to the environmental movement, the anti-poverty/development movement, and human rights movement, all of whom have managed to win organisational support on a large scale (from political parties (across the spectrum), faith groups, conservation groups (countryside and heritage), as well as the business community).

There is no inherent reason why wealthy and societally powerful organisations, such as major churches, should not actively support and nurture anti-war activism. Many high-profile religious leaders have expressed profound unease at the direction in which Blairite foreign policy is taking Britain, yet anti-war issues are hardly raised in most churches. This is in contrast with the 1980s when Church groups were to the fore in peace movements in many European countries (Klandermans, 1990). Opportunities are there for the grasping, but to exploit them possibly requires a deep understanding of and engagement with the organisations involved, an engagement for which people exercising leadership within the current movement may be poorly ill-equipped.

One sign of hope is the recent decision by the Roman Catholic Bishops of Scotland to oppose the replacement of the British nuclear deterrent. In April 2006, they issued a joint statement urging “the Government of the United Kingdom not to invest in a replacement for the Trident system and to begin the process of decommissioning these weapons with the intention of diverting the sums spent on nuclear weaponry to programs of aid and development” (Scottish Bishops, 2006). To what extent this position was arrived at through efforts of anti-war activists is as yet unclear.

2.4 Global Significance of Threat and Levels of Fear

One reason for the lesser involvement of the Churches in the contemporary anti-war movement compared to the 1980s is likely to be the greater moral ambiguity of the contemporary wars. The war on terror requires political judgements that are more in the tradition of just war theory: is more harm than good likely to result from an invasion of a country that will remove a brutal and repressive regime (Afghanistan and Iraq), for instance? The reasons that we would argue yes in these cases are political and contextual, including the question of who carries this out. Such reasons do not entail that all efforts to remove tyrants are wrong.

In contrast, the threat that motivated anti-nuclear activists of the Cold War was ultimate and apocalyptic. They argued that it was clearly morally wrong to plan a defence system based upon the “hair-trigger” readiness of both the USSR and the USA to instigate “mutual assured destruction ” This also had a strong cultural impact. It

burrowed its way deep into cultural consciousness, as manifested by a spate of novels, films and docu-dramas (such as “When the Wind Blows” (Briggs, 2006)) providing graphic depictions of the fate of ordinary people in our own countries, which etched themselves in the memory and the imagination. These threats were given added reality by (a) regularly repeated footage of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and (b) a series of actual nuclear crises and stand-offs (e.g. Bay of Pigs), which made it seem only too plausible that nightmare scenarios could be enacted. These crises were given a heightened “fear factor” by the virulent and all-encompassing anti-Soviet propaganda that spewed out of all major Western capitals, depicting Soviet leaders as fundamentally malign and intent on conquest of the West at all costs, justifying the refusal of the USA and its allies to adopt a “no first use” policy, and intensify the arms race. This propaganda had the effect of making many people believe that nuclear war was likely. In 1983 the doomsday clock of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientist was set at three minutes to midnight (it was only closer than this in 1953 when both the USSR and the USA exploded thermonuclear devices in separate tests). For most of the 1990s the clock receded further than 10 minutes from Midnight (Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, 2006).

In a major nuclear exchange there could be no “unaffected survivors”. A prolonged nuclear winter could destroy civilisation and result in the death of billions, regardless of the location of explosions. Anti-nuclear activists were explicitly fighting for human and planetary survival. This was nowhere more powerfully expressed than in the Russell-Einstein manifesto, issued in 1955 by a group of concerned scientists, led by Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein (Born et al., 1955).

“It is feared that if many H-bombs are used there will be universal death, sudden only for a minority, but for the majority a slow torture of disease and disintegration... Here, then, is the problem which we present to you, stark and dreadful and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race; or shall mankind renounce war?”

The only contemporary campaigns that have the same level of appeal to public consciousness and human survival are environmental campaigns (such as those against global warming or destruction of the rain-forests) and some public health campaigns (e.g. against HIV-AIDS). They share with anti-nuclear campaigning that same irrelevance of geography. Wherever the damage is started, the whole world will eventually suffer for it. It is perhaps no surprise that these campaigns have more widespread public support than current anti-war campaigns.

In contrast, the wars against which UK activists currently campaign kill mainly foreigners in far-off places, and any potential “blow back” to the UK is slow and indirect. It is hard to persuade the average person that life in the UK would be greatly better than it is now had we not bombed Belgrade, or retaken the Falklands. There is a growing public consciousness of the ways in which the Iraq fiasco could rebound to broader international disadvantage (e.g. more terrorist attacks, rising oil prices), but none of the potential scenarios share the simple global inevitability of the consequences of a nuclear war or of global warming. That being the case, the motivations for becoming a contemporary anti-war activist and sustaining that activism must, of necessity be more diverse, and more complex. Campaigning messages must also be

similarly diverse and conceptually rich. That makes for difficulties in focus and compellingness.

2.5 Simplicity and Stability of Campaigning Message

The anti-nuclear movement of the Cold War had the best campaigning slogan imaginable - "Ban the Bomb". A highly paid advertising copywriter could not have done better. Instantly recognisable, rhythmically and phonetically symmetrical, and of utter simplicity, this slogan served as a rallying call for several generations of activists.

It is as relevant for anti-nuclear activists today as it was when first invented in the 1950s, even if it has a somewhat culturally dated feel ("the bomb" no longer has a clearly understood referent among younger people).

In contrast, the slogans spawned by the anti-war movement of the Blair era have come and gone. "Don't attack Iraq" was probably the phrase that rallied the greatest number of people in 2003. But the moment the first bomb dropped on Baghdad the slogan became useless. It is not fanciful to attribute some of the failings of the movement to the transient and time-limited nature of its slogans. Slogans are psychological anchors. They bind people together, literally (they are good for coordinated chanting and marching) and metaphorically – by providing a clear "brand" identity. They are also easy to remember and call upon at times of stress and challenge. They have, in this respect, some of the "grounding" properties of mantras and other meditative devices.

But slogans only go skin deep. Committed activists must be able to call on a clearly articulated repertoire of arguments to justify their position. The more stable a particular issue is (and the longer time over which it remains an issue) the better the opportunity for learning, rehearsing, and enriching one's understanding, and the flexibility and convincingness of ones' campaigning message. Someone who campaigns against nuclear weapons will be able to call on knowledge that was often acquired decades ago, but is still relevant today. The same states possess the vast majority of the world's nuclear weapons as did 30 years ago, and the destructive capacities of these weapons remains much the same.

In contrast, someone campaigning against a potential US military strike on Iran will need to have acquired much new (and constantly updated) knowledge. As something of a "hoarder" one of us occasionally looks back over old campaigning material. Although much anti-nuclear literature from the 1980s can still be read with profit today, boxes full of Balkans-related literature has almost no relevance to current conflicts, except in a rather academic historical sense. Being an effective anti-war activist today means constantly following the twists and turns of international events. Arguments deployed against an air-attack on Iran's nuclear facilities will not be the same as arguments deployed against the ground invasion of Iraq, and cannot easily or plausibly be recycled.

So, today's anti-war activists may be increasingly "tied up" in the sheer business of "keeping on top of events". This takes energy from all the other necessary components of activism (e.g. planning, organising, inspiring, building relationships,

evaluating). How can the movement overcome the ephemerality of specific events? One way is to locate a conceptual framework that sits above specific conflicts, and may be “re-applied” to successive crises without starting from scratch. Different wars may therefore be interpreted and understood as context-specific manifestations of “the same thing”.

A strong motivation for many of those who have remained active throughout the Kosovo-Afghanistan-Iraq sequence of wars is a perception of an underlying (and basically unchanging) US strategic vision, which has a number of elements, but in which military and political control of areas of geo-strategic importance (particularly oil-producing regions) is paramount. Opposition to this succession of wars can then be based on a set of unchanging principles – e.g. that wars promoted as being for the benefit of the peoples of the countries attacked are actually pursued for reasons of imagined self-interest, and that any benefit to the people of those countries is incidental.

It should follow that individuals who are able to articulate overarching concepts to explain their anti-war stance will be more likely to remain active in future conflicts than individuals whose opposition to a particular war is motivated primarily by specific aspects of the conflict in question. For instance, a substantial number of opponents of the Iraq War based their opposition on the absence of a Security Council Resolution. The presence of such a resolution in the case of Afghanistan would therefore be sufficient reason to explain why such people did not oppose the Afghan invasion (or might not oppose a future attack on Iran or some other country, should Security Council approval be given).

To build long-term commitment to anti-war activism will require (among other things) the intellectual leadership of the movement to provide a compelling narrative that is both comprehensive enough to be a reliable framework for several decades to come, but flexible enough to take account of the very different conflicts in different parts of the world which any future UK government might be tempted to take part in. One example of such a framework is that being developed by the Oxford Research Group (Abbott, Rogers, and Sloboda, 2006)

2.6 The Campaigning Context

It has been hugely grounding to the anti-nuclear movement that nuclear installations have clear and long-term physical manifestations on UK soil. Aldermaston, Greenham, Faslane, have been just three of several high-profile sites. These are both physical and psychological foci for activists. These sites have properties that enable certain kinds of engagement. They have high security, large numbers of military and related personnel going in and out, often located in relatively remote areas of some natural beauty (thus “engaging” for those who have concerns for the natural environment), and are in a real sense “shrines” to the lethal and costly weapons and plant within their boundaries. For the committed activist this is “distilled evil”, which stays put and cannot easily run away. There are simple logistic and planning advantages. People can become familiar with the geographical specificities. Local residents and local politicians can be engaged over the long term.

But there are also more subtle motivational advantages. It is no accident that so many of the actions around nuclear bases have a “spiritual” component, in the broadest sense of the word. Activists engage in rituals of various sorts (from explicit prayer within mainstream traditions, through to improvised symbolic acts – e.g. tying of flowers and pictures to the perimeter fence) which aim to summon up and project “good energy” to counteract the “evil energy” emanating from within the perimeter fence. Spiritual rituals need physical focus. That is why people need churches and shrines. In the case of the nuclear base there is even a suggestion of “exorcism”, the uttering of sacred words and the enactment of sacred rituals as a deep transformative act. It matters to the activist that they are in the physical presence of the evil they seek to transform.

An activist against the Iraq occupation has no such clear geographical focus. Military personnel and plant come from all over the country, and, as troops rotate, the geographical mix of the deployment changes. No one local military base is any more or less an appropriate target for activists than any other. Political targets are equally amorphous. There is no symbolic substitute for Parliament and Downing Street, but these are the foci of any type of political activism relating to any action of the current government on any topic whatsoever. There is nothing specific to war. Also, few activists, even the most ardent, would want to identify the entire parliamentary and government machine as “evil” in the way that anti-nuclear activists can identify a nuclear base as such.

The only potential long-term “shrine” for the UK anti-war movement is Parliament Square, where, at the time of writing, despite the government’s best efforts, a chaotic collection of hand-made anti-war banners and posters has been maintained by a small group of activists ever since shortly after 9-11. However, this presence has never caught widespread support, and, on the many occasions when one of the authors has walked past this (on the way to meetings with parliamentarians or civil servants) the installation has a neglected air, with few people near it. It is a fragmentary patchwork of differently pitched messages. It does not attract or inspire with a clear and focused message.

Finally, it can be argued that new-wave anti-war activism has “deskilled” traditional campaigners. Where so much is new, experimental, and transitory, involving shifting constituencies, skills acquired over decades may become at best in need of re-shaping, at worst irrelevant. There is much creativity, and, out of that creativity, success may emerge. But the flip-side of trial and error is many failed experiments, and increased levels of disagreement about strategy and tactics. Where activism involves new skills (e.g. internet), new issues (e.g. terrorism), new constituencies (e.g. British Muslims), new issues (e.g. civilian casualties), and new organisations (e.g. STWC) then there is bound to be a strong “learning curve”, at the beginning of which the general level of effectiveness is low.

It may be optimistic to hope that international affairs will ever regain the “frozen” stability of the cold war decades. The conditions for the steady development of a skill-base may never again be as good as they were through the three decades of the 1960s-1980s. But this means that activists must think even harder about how new activists are recruited, trained, developed, and retained. What are the conditions

that will ensure that the person you invite to join you in an upcoming action or project is still going to be in the movement, using and developing their skills, in ten year's time?

Psychological studies of skill (e.g. Ericsson, 1996) provide some potential answers:

1. Frequent opportunities to exercise skills (ideally daily)
2. Early opportunities for success, leading to a sense of personal efficacy
3. Appropriate feedback, both positive and negative
4. Opportunities to increase skill levels through engagement in more challenging activities as skill levels rise.

Most committed activists will probably realise that these things happened for them, but in an unplanned and random way. Can anti-war organisations become strategic enough to ensure that these things are guaranteed to large numbers of people? This may be the key challenge facing the UK anti-war movement.

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