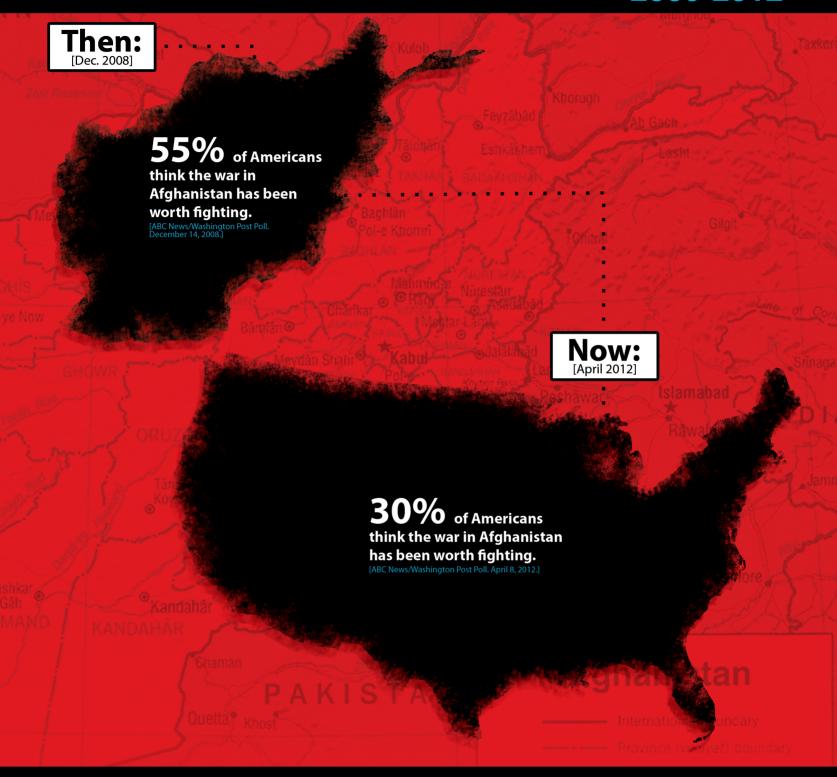
UZBEKISTAN

### 2009-2012



## RETHINK **Afghanistan**

**Brave New Foundation** Study of Effectiveness and Messaging Success

### What Success Looks Like

Brave New Foundation and the Fight to Stop the Afghanistan War

In January 2009, the media narrative in the U.S. favored increasing the number of troops in Afghanistan, bending public opinion in favor of the same. Understanding the national catastrophe waiting in the wings if lives and scarce national resources were wasted on a military "fix" to a political problem, Brave New Foundation knew the media message around the war was an issue, so we gathered our creative forces to devise a plan that would help sway public opinion to avoid the coming economic calamity that history was about to repeat.

We struggled with naming this campaign, knowing that the name would be the banner that everyone would see first – we didn't want to be negative and we wanted to capture the largest audience possible. We decided on Rethink Afghanistan – so people on both sides had the opportunity to be a part of the campaign and so we could introduce information that made

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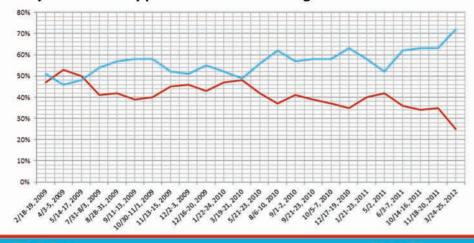
campaign to

people rethink why we entered this war, why we were still in it, what 'winning' means, and what the goals of this war were.

We launched our campaign to convince the public and policymakers that escalation would not make us safer and was not worth the costs. Our goal was to provide information that would persuade those on the fence to join us in opposition, while providing organizational and educational tools for those already part of the movement to help bring our troops home.

Thanks in large part to our work changing the media narrative, the national conversation has finally shifted against the war, and Washington, D.C. is now coming around to where the American people have been for years: rethinking the Afghanistan War.

#### Do you favor or oppose the U.S. war in Afghanistan?

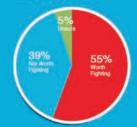


Oppose

Favor

CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll N=1,014 adults nationwide, MoE ± 3

2008



#### December 2008

Leading into the start of *Rethink Afghanistan* in 2009, 55% of

Americans think the war in

Afghanistan has been worth fighting.

[ABC News/Washington Post Poll 12/11-14, 2008, N=1,002 adults Nationwide. MoE ±3.5]

2009



January 1-18, 2009

"Get Afghanistan Right Week" blogging campaign.

## **★** The Starting Point:

Washington, D.C. Supports Escalation in Afghanistan

Following the 2008 election, backers of a troop-heavy counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan quickly succeeded in influencing the new administration into a much-larger-than-advertised escalation plan, setting the stage for a new catastrophe in Afghanistan. Media coverage conveyed the sense of a broad, bipartisan consensus on the need for an escalation in Afghanistan. We knew this portrayal was inaccurate and that considerable dissent existed about the wisdom of a military solution to Afghanistan's political crisis--but that dissent was once again being muted in the press, much like the lead-up to the Iraq War just a few years before.

## Get Afghanistan Right

The first hurdle in overcoming the predominant media narrative about the need for an escalation in Afghanistan was the perception that there was a consensus in the progressive community about the need for a troop increase in Afghanistan. To break this perception, Brave New Foundation put together a group of allies in the progressive blogging community to launch "Get Afghanistan Right Week," a week of concerted blogging from January 12-18, 2009, "to publicize growing opposition to the idea that more troops will bring stability to Afghanistan or secure the United States."

By January 16, the group had reached an audience of more than **9 million people** through various websites and generated major media coverage, including The Huffington Post, MSNBC's Rachel Maddow Show, The New York Times and other high-traffic outlets.



Then, in mid-February, the coalition organized a sign-on letter to the President featuring prominent progressive academics and organizations, urging him to reconsider troop increases and to refocus on getting our economy back on track.

Get Afghanistan Right Week reached more than

## 9M People





January 16, 2009

"Get Afghanistan Right Week" reached an audience of 9MM

#### February 10, 2009

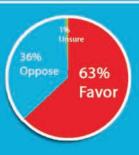
Launch of the Rethink Afghanistan War Debate videos.



#### February 18-19, 2009

"Regardless of how you feel about the war in Afghanistan in general, do you favor or oppose President Obama's plan to send about 17,000 more U.S. troops to Afghanistan in an attempt to stabilize the situation there?"

[CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll. N=1,046 adults nationwide. MoE  $\pm$  3.]



## Rethink Afghanistan War Debates

Following the theory that 'big follows small' in shaping media narratives, we funded several blog fellowships and a series of debates. This groundbreaking social media campaign put a strong focus on the escalation that was happening in Afghanistan and the dangerous results that were being predicted by experts.

These 5-10 minute YouTube videos featured prominent writers and foreign policy insiders debating the escalation policy.





Jon Rainwater vs. Jeremy Shapiro



Lawrence Korb vs. Katrina vanden Heuval

The work of the Get Afghanistan Right coalition, the Rethink Afghanistan War Debates and resulting news coverage elevated voices within the Democratic Party and wider progressive circles questioning the wisdom of massive troop escalations in Afghanistan and helped beat back the perception of unanimity on the president's proposed policies. This achieved our first goal: breaking progressive unanimity on the war.

# Rethink Afghanistan Documentary

In late February 2009, Brave New Foundation ratcheted up its work with the online launch of the first chapter of the full-length documentary, Rethink Afghanistan. Over the next several months, Rethink Afghanistan released a total of six video chapters online, along with other supporting videos, which were then made available collectively on DVD. The online series had over 1 million views. The documentary was an organizational tool for those already with us, and a persuasive tool to convince those on the fence to join us in opposing this brutal, futile war.

The documentary lays out the deep contradictions in U.S. war policies and proposed escalation plans. It warns that adding troops in Afghanistan is not a solution and will make Americans less safe. As one progressive leader put it, the film "lays the intellectual track" for the movement to stop the war.



231,094 views, 388 likes, 1,214 comments



2010-Part 1 Part 2 Part 3 DVD. 3/20/09 /10/0 10/18/09

"All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war in Afghanistan has been worth fighting, or not?"

280,822 views, 519 likes, 1,381 comments

Not Worth Figting Worth Fighting

[ABC News/ Washington Post Poll, N=1,002 adults nationwide, MoE ± 3.5]

## Rethink Afghanistan: Ongoing Campaign

Following the release of the documentary (11/10/2009) the Rethink Afghanistan campaign launched a social media component to build on the success of the film. Primarily based on Facebook, Rethink Afghanistan's active community of supporters spread the message that this brutal, costly war isn't making us safer, while pressuring policymakers to change course. Through this work and our relationship with new and traditional media contacts, the project shaped media narratives and moved public opinion in opposition to the Afghanistan War. Again, our strategy was two-fold: use breaking news as "teachable moments" to persuade people to join us in opposition to the war while providing organizational tools to people already with us.

#### Campaign Highlights:

#### Holding the Pentagon Accountable



Our work has been essential in countering Pentagon war propaganda and exposing civilian casualties denied by U.S. and NATO forces. We were able to obtain exclusive evidence of civilians killed by U.S. forces in Gardez and Sangin

districts, exposing cover-ups perpetrated by forces responsible for the killings. We also played a lead role in pushing back against the Pentagon's month-long media blitz initiated when General Petraeus took over for disgraced general Stanley McChrystal.

#### Braving Dangers on the Ground



Led by Anita Sreedhar, our team of producers, bloggers, and independent journalists in Afghanistan work tirelessly in a tough, unforgiving environment, putting themselves at risk to get the truth out about the war. Armed with simple flipcams and

their own ingenuity, they face suspicious military officials and corrupt Afghan bueracrats, not to mention the ever-present danger of violence in a war zone. They go into the most dangerous areas of the country, and some of them have been caught and questioned by the Taliban. It's dangerous and expensive work, but it's absolutely essential to the movement to end the war. The phenomenal, work done by Anita's team is made even more remarkable by the fact that most major news companies maintain one correspondent, often freelance, in Kabul.

#### The True Costs of War



Rethink Afghanistan has worked to keep the costs of the war, both human and economic, in the public mind. When U.S. casualties crossed the 1,000-troop mark, Rethink Afghanistan produced a

video marking the grim milestone which was featured on The Huffington Post's front page. For Tax Day 2011, we created a "War Tax Calculator" where users inputted their income level and filing status to receive an IOU for money paid supporting the Afghanistan War and other military spending. Users could forward the IOU to representatives demanding better use of tax dollars. Rethink Afghanistan delivered IOUs to Congress and held a press conference featuring a large bipartisan group of Members of Congress and outside groups, calling for an end to the war and better priorities for taxpavers' money. The event received major media attention and helped elevate conservative voices who also want to end the war.

#### "Because It's Time"



In early 2011, Rethink Afghanistan created a "Because It's Time" wall on rethinkafghanistan.com where users could leave their photo and a note about why they felt it was time to end the Afghanistan War. The

community voted on their favorite entries, and the writers of the top three comments were featured in a TV ad on CNN in Washington, D.C., funded by individual supporters of Rethink Afghanistan. This was the first anti-Afghanistan-War ad ever run on cable television.



#### Osama Bin Laden's Death

On May 1, 2011, President Obama announced that special operations forces killed Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan. Recognizing a unique opportunity to crystallize public opinion, Rethink Afghanistan published an email that night linking to a petition urging President Obama to bring troops home now that Bin Laden was dead. Roughly 35,000 people signed it within the first few days, and major network news covered our efforts. In part due to our quick reaction and work to shape the media narrative, U.S. public opinion rallied around our position, and according to a poll taken just days later, 59% believed that the "mission is accomplished" and the U.S. should bring troops home.

July 24, 2010

Rethink Afghanistan on the cover of

Newsweek.



#### October 2010



- The Afghanistan War entered its 10th year.
- "A Costly and Brutal Anniversary" video released (10/6/10)
- Cost of war reaches over \$1trillion

2011-

January 2011

"Because It's Time" campaign launched



## Measurable Results:

### Washington, D.C. Turning Against Afghanistan War

The constant work of the Rethink Afghanistan campaign from 2009 to present has been a key driver of growing public opposition to the war. When we launched the Rethink Afghanistan War Debates and the full documentary, 63% of Americans favored the president's plan to escalate the war (CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll. Feb. 18-19, 2009). Now, 78% of Americans approve of the U.S. withdrawing military troops in Afghanistan (FOX News poll by Anderson Robbins Research and Shaw & Company Research. April 22-24, 2012). Over the course of the last three years, largely due to the trend-setting work done by our campaign, the national consensus has moved from one supporting escalation and military action to intense impatience with Washington, D.C. for failing to end an unpopular war.

The picture is clear: the Afghanistan War's days are numbered, thanks to the continued public education and agitation of a set of groups and grassroots activists including Brave New Foundation.

The political consequences of our sustained political pressure are now apparent in the White House and Congress. NATO's May 2012

meeting in Chicago resulted in the announcement of an "irreversible" roadmap to withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. (1) President Obama's messaging has shifted almost totally to a frame of "responsibly winding down" the Afghanistan War. (2) In Congress, the Republican leadership has been reduced to procedural tricks to prevent floor consideration of withdrawal legislation that would surely pass if brought to a vote, language that had the support of the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee. (3) The picture is clear: the Afghanistan War's days are numbered, thanks to the continued public education and agitation of a set of groups and grassroots activists including Brave New Foundation.

While Rethink Afghanistan's work won't be done until all of our troops are home from Afghanistan, we've accomplished one of our central goals: to turn public opinion against the Afghanistan War and against continued combat troop deployments there. With the support of our Rethink Afghanistan activists and financial supporters, we've transformed the media narrative and public debate into tools to pressure elected officials to bring our troops and national resources home. As Brave New Foundation moves to broaden our work to expose the cost of militarism and war profiteering more generally, we're building on a foundation of success.

- (1) "Nato sets 'irreversible' roadmap to withdrawing troops from Afghanistan." The Telegraph, May 22, 2012.
- (2)"President Obama Speaks at ISAF Meeting on Afghanistan." Whitehouse.gov, May 21, 2012.
- (3) "House Republicans don't allow vote forcing Administration to stick to Afghanistan timetable." CNN's Political Ticker, May 17th, 2012.



The Department of Defense is now using Rethink Afghanistan in classroom instruction for Service Members and is translating the video into Spanish. The video will be shown throughout the Western Hemisphere and for Security Cooperation at Fort Benning. Military officers and civilian government officials are teaching a course where Rethink Afghanistan and the information Brave New Foundation has uncovered will be featured.

2011 Continued-



April 15, 2011 Rethink Afghanistan creates War Tax Calculator.



#### May 1, 2011

- Announcement that Osama Bin Laden is dead.
- Rethink Afghanistan launches petition for President Obama to bring troops home- 35,000 sign

#### 2012-

April 22-24, 2012

"Do you approve or disapprove of the U.S. withdrawing military troops in Afghanistan?

[Fox News Poll conducted by Anderson Robbins Research and Shaw & Company Research. N=915 registered voters nationwide. MoE + 31



## **Key Statistics**











Short Videos Produced



we're building on a foundation of success.

### Partners and Advisors in the Rethink Afghanistan Campaign

#### **EXPERTS INTERVIEWED IN RETHINK AFGHANISTAN VIDEOS**

Tariq Ali; Faiysal Alikhan; Philip Alston; Rusian Aushev; Orzala Ashraf; Andrew Bacevich; Robert Baer; Shukria Barakzal; Thomas Barfield; Dr. Ramazan Bashardost; Linda Bilmes; Bill Black; Pratap Chatterjee; Steve Coll; Cathrine Collins; Jo Comerford; Carl Conetta; Daniel Ellsberg; Fantana Gallani; Erica Gaston; Anand Gopal; Tom Hayden; Matthew Hoh; Stephen Kinzer; Sonali Kolhatkar; Lawrence Korb; Ann Jones; Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy; Mohammad Osman; Kavita Ramdas; Ahmed Rashid; Robert Pape; Rory Stewart; Fahima Vorgetts; Winslow Wheeler

#### SIGNERS OF THE GET AFGHANISTAN RIGHT POSITION STATEMENT

Dr. Lila Abu-Lughod, Department of Anthropology, Columbia University; Dr. Manan Ahmed, University of Chicago; Dr. Judith Butler, Department of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature, University of California, Berkeley; Dr. Bob Buzzanco, Department of History, University of Houston; Dr. Noam Chomsky, Department of Linguistics, MIT; Dr. Peter Hess, Faith Project Director, National Center for Science Education, Inc.; Dr. Saba Mahmood, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley; Professor Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, Department of Justice and Peace Studies, University; Dr. Dan Prior, Department of History, Minimi University; Dr. Paul E. Schroeder, Department of Political Science, Case Western Reserve University; Dr. Margaret Jo Shepherd, Teachers College, Columbia University; Dr. Sarah Shields, Department of History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Eric Straatsma, Peace Think Tank; Dr. Ronald Suny, Department of History, University of Michigan; Dr. Robert Thurston, Department of History, Miami University; William O. Walker III, author, National Security and Core Values in American History; Action for a Progressive Pakistan; and Progressive Democrats of America

#### BRAVE NEW FOUNDATION, RETHINK AFGHANISTAN – PROJECT COLLABORATORS

CREDO Mobile, USAction/TrueMajority, MoveOn.org, National Priorities Project, Peace Action West, SFV Dem Club, NH Peace Action, Westchester Dem Club, US Labor Against the War, USW675, New Hampshire Peace Action, Lake County Dems, Progressive Christians Uniting, United for Justice with Peace, Code Pink, Burans, Mercer University, Wheaton College, Democrats Abroad, Hammer Museum/ Levantine Center, lark University, Vail Symposium, United Church of Christ, Austin, Texas Gray Panthers, University of Pittsburgh, Women Making a Difference, Amnesty Int'l Group 471, North Country, San Diego, Campus Antiwar Network @ University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists, Peace Center of Nevada County, Wake County Dems, Salem Peace Committee, Traction Durham, North Carolina Peace Action, Chippewa County Democratic Party

