



TOUGH AND SMART:
**Winning the Debate on
National Security**

By Andy Johnson, Scott Payne, and Kyle Spector

The War in Afghanistan

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Don't Ask, Don't Tell

The War in Afghanistan

A Strategy for Success After Years of Neglect

SUGGESTED MESSAGE:

Just three years ago, our war effort in Afghanistan was adrift, with no clear strategy and too few troops to defeat the Taliban and other terrorists there. Now, President Obama has sent the troops we need, got our allies to provide more forces, and put in place a clear plan for disrupting, dismantling, and defeating the Taliban and al Qaeda and getting Afghanistan to take care of its own security. There are still challenges, but we finally have a strategy for victory.

Under George W. Bush, we faltered in Afghanistan for years and allowed the Taliban to regain strength without ever developing a strategy for success.

After years of neglect by the previous administration, President Obama is taking a new course in Afghanistan—a different and more effective approach to achieving success:

- **Focused, achievable mission.** For years, our military fought in Afghanistan with a vague and shifting set of missions. The President has finally provided our troops with a clear mission that they can and will accomplish.
- **More troops.** The Iraq War starved the effort in Afghanistan of the troops needed to succeed—as Joint Chiefs Chairman Mullen noted at the time: “In Afghanistan we do what we can. In Iraq we do what we must.”¹ Now, for the first time the military is getting the resources it needs to achieve its mission in Afghanistan.
- **Pressure on the Afghans.** Until now, there was no real demand that the Afghan government prepare to provide for its own security. The President’s plan puts pressure on the Afghan government to get ready to take care of itself. We are accelerating the training of the Afghan Army and National Police and working with tribal militias to help provide stability and prevent a return of the Taliban after the US mission is completed.
- **Pakistan is engaged.** Under President Bush, Pakistan dithered in its efforts to confront al Qaeda and the Taliban within its borders, at

one point even providing them with a formal safe haven. Now, at the President's insistence, Pakistan is moving militarily against al Qaeda and its allies, providing the anvil to our hammer in Afghanistan.²

Why It Works

It helps close the mission gap. Even though 61% of Americans think the anti-terrorism mission in Afghanistan is worth fighting for,³ only 42% are in favor of the war.⁴ The key to successfully communicating support for the President's strategy is understanding and addressing this "mission gap"—the 19-point difference between public support for the anti-terrorism mission in Afghanistan and support for the war. Our message does just that by focusing squarely on the anti-terrorism mission in Afghanistan.

Critique and Response

CRITIQUE:

With support for the war in Afghanistan waning, why should the US continue its military mission there?

RESPONSE:

The fight in Afghanistan is difficult, and many Americans are worried about succeeding there. But, for the first time in years, the United States has refocused its efforts in Afghanistan, clarified the mission, and provided our troops the resources they need to get the job done and begin returning home next year.

We have one mission in Afghanistan—to take the fight to al Qaeda and protect America—and we will win. Our goal is to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda and to make sure they do not reestablish the terrorist safe haven they need to plot and strike at America. We can and will achieve that goal.

Combating and Defeating Terrorism

Disrupt, Dismantle, and Defeat al Qaeda and its Allies

SUGGESTED MESSAGE:

Since the day President Obama took office, the United States has stepped up the fight against terrorists. Using our Special Forces and unmanned Predator planes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Yemen, we captured or killed hundreds of al Qaeda's fighters and affiliates in 2009, far more than in 2008. We are still in the thick of the fight, but we have put the focus in the war against al Qaeda back where it belongs and we are getting results.

Because of the brave work of our dedicated troops, intelligence professionals, FBI agents and Foreign Service officers, the progressive strategy of taking the fight to the terrorists is working. Senior al Qaeda and Taliban leaders are killed or captured almost daily. Progressive leaders, from the President himself to Members of Congress, are correct not to declare "mission accomplished." The war is far from over—al Qaeda and the Taliban remain dangerous, implacable foes, and our troops still face a serious fight. But the public must understand that the progress we are making is real and that America is safer as a result. Communicating that message is both a substantive and political imperative—it will build trust in the strategy, which is vital to our war effort, and it will help close the gap between the parties on the question of who best can provide for the security of the nation.

Why It Works

- **Americans want to hear about successes.** Our message clearly explains how the Obama administration has had more success than previous administrations in capturing and killing terrorists. We can talk about this success in tangible terms by listing top al Qaeda and Taliban leaders that have been killed or captured under President Obama.
- **The public supports the President on fighting terrorism.** President Obama's approval ratings on fighting terrorism are higher than his overall job approval rating and his rating on domestic issues. A message tied to the President's policies will receive strong support from the public.

Detention, Interrogation, and Prosecution of Terrorists

Using All of our Tools to Capture, Convict, and Incarcerate Terrorists

SUGGESTED MESSAGE:

We need to use all of our national security tools—the FBI, federal courts, and the military, to confront the terrorist threat. The arrest of the Times Square bomber after only about two days shows the intense focus the Obama administration is placing on combating terrorism. There is no guarantee of foiling every terrorist plot, but this case showed a high degree of cooperation across agencies and personal attention from the highest leaders in the administration.

Some in Washington are more interested in scare tactics and scoring political points than bringing terrorists to justice. They want to limit the tools and resources we can use to battle terrorists and put them behind bars.

The Obama administration proved in the case of the Times Square bombing attempt that our government agencies can successfully work together to halt terrorist attacks, find those responsible, and get needed information. Numerous government agencies, including the FBI, CIA, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the National Counterterrorism Center, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice, all coordinated with one another and shared information to bring Faisal Shahzad into custody within 53 hours of the attempted car bombing.

The FBI demonstrated that the use of non-coercive interrogation procedures can be just as effective at obtaining timely and reliable information as the more controversial, legally suspect tactics used by the CIA in the past. Ultimately, bringing suspected terrorists to justice in a court of law makes us safer, provides much needed justice, and demonstrates to the world that America remains resolute and will not compromise its founding principles in prosecuting terrorists for their murderous acts.

Why It Works

- **Americans want results.** Americans want to know that what we are doing to convict and incarcerate terrorists is working. Fifty-four percent of

Americans express confidence in the prospects for our national security in response to the following statement: "It is safe and reliable to try and imprison terrorists in the United States. The US government safely tried the recently convicted World Trade Center bomber and one of the 9/11 conspirators. Today, more than 300 terrorists are held in federal prisons and no terrorist has ever escaped from our "supermax" prisons."⁵

- **Playing politics with security turns off the public.** Those who are pushing only for military commission trials for terrorists are limiting the use of all of our national security tools just for political gains. These individuals should be called out and labeled as playing politics with national security.

Sample Message

To succeed in the war we are fighting with al Qaeda and its allies, we must be both tough and smart. In fact, President Obama has been even tougher than George W. Bush in taking the fight to the terrorists in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. Recent air strikes and raids have resulted in a significant increase in terrorists killed and captured, including a number of major terrorist leaders in the past few months alone.

But we also have to be smart about fighting terrorism. Our courts have proven to be the most successful way to bring arrested terrorists to justice, both swiftly and safely. Since 9/11, we have convicted and imprisoned more than 300 terrorists through federal courts, including Richard Reid (the shoe bomber), Zacarias Moussaoui (a 9/11 conspirator), and, just recently, Najibullah Zazi (the New York subway terrorist). None of them has ever been released or escaped. During that time, military tribunals have convicted only three terrorists—two of whom have since been released.

As the Christmas Day and Times Square bomber cases have shown, we can continue to question suspected terrorists and gain useful intelligence while they are jailed in federal custody. Under FBI questioning, the Christmas Day Bomber provided actionable intelligence after he was informed he would have access to a lawyer (something he would have in a military tribunal as well). Press reports indicate at least ten others have been detained because of information the FBI learned from him. Conservatives apparently are more interested in using scare tactics to score political points than in bringing terrorists to justice swiftly, safely and lawfully.

State of the Military

Supporting America's Warriors

SUGGESTED MESSAGE:

We have strengthened America's military by increasing pay for troops in the field, providing our troops more time between deployments, and putting new and better weapons, like unmanned aerial drones, into the battlefield to support our troops and military objectives.

President Bush stretched our military thin and decreased its effectiveness.

After years of repeat deployments with little dwell time in between, consistent failures to meet recruitment goals, and major equipment inadequacies, the US military is finally getting the support it deserves. While the recent troop surge in Afghanistan has delayed the Army's plans to increase time between deployments temporarily, the Army expects to give 70 percent of active duty soldiers two years of dwell time for every one year deployed and 80 percent of reserve and National Guard troops four years of dwell time for every one year deployed beginning in 2011.⁶

The 2010 National Defense Authorization Act raised military salaries, demonstrating President Obama's and Congress' commitment to giving our troops the payment they deserve.⁷ After years of equipment problems, the military now has access to improved weapons, including more unmanned aerial drones and more effective rifles adapted for the fighting conditions in Afghanistan.⁸ Helicopter and tank crews are receiving updated uniforms and gear to protect them from harsh weather conditions,⁹ while the Army has been issuing lighter-weight gear and equipment to reduce the load soldiers have to carry on the battlefield.¹⁰ This new and better equipment is helping our troops to do their jobs more effectively.

Why It Works

- **Americans support dedication to the troops.** 69 percent of Americans say they have more confidence in the prospects for our national security when they hear our suggested message about support for the troops. This includes 86 percent of Democrats and 69 percent of independents.

- **Our troops are warriors, not victims.** Too often, progressive leaders point to medical care for veterans when asked about national security. While those efforts are vital, it is also important to emphasize steps to improve the equipment, training, and battlefield effectiveness of our men and women in uniform. This helps to make real gains in the public's readiness to trust progressive security policies.

Nuclear Security

Protecting America Against Nuclear Terrorism

SUGGESTED MESSAGE:

We have dramatically stepped up efforts to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists while at the same time maintaining a strong nuclear deterrent. A new treaty with Russia will eliminate unnecessary nuclear warheads, and a recently convened global summit with foreign leaders resulted in agreements to prevent nuclear smuggling.

Conservatives continue to hold to out of touch Cold War views of America's nuclear arsenal and wrongly say the nuclear doctrine weakens US security by limiting our ability to respond adequately to an attack and reducing the US nuclear deterrent.

President Obama has taken three major steps this year to reorient US and global nuclear policy to focus on 21st century threats and reduce the chances of nuclear conflict. The Department of Defense released its Nuclear Posture Review, providing a roadmap for sustaining a safe, secure, and effective US nuclear deterrent.¹⁷ On April 8, President Obama signed the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) with Russia, reducing and securing unnecessary nuclear weapons from the Cold War. A week later, the President convened a Nuclear Security Summit of 47 world leaders in Washington, at which concrete commitments were made to secure nuclear materials and keep them out of the hands of terrorists.

Despite—or perhaps because of—these accomplishments, conservative critics reacted sharply. They have argued that efforts to reduce large nuclear stockpiles are naïve and specifically claimed that New START undermines our security, that the Nuclear Security Summit failed, and that the Nuclear Posture Review ties our hands in the event of attack by another country. All of those attacks are false.

The Obama administration's nuclear doctrine builds on a long, bipartisan history of seeking to contain and reduce the prevalence of nuclear weapons around the world. It properly places the threat of nuclear terrorism as a top security priority, clarifies the US nuclear position for our allies, and singles out

bad actors, like Iran and North Korea, as worthy of international sanction and exempt from any US security guarantees.

Why It Works

- **Americans support ratification of New START.** An April CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll found that Americans overwhelmingly believe that the US Senate should ratify New START (70% to 28%).¹²
- **Americans view nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorist as a significant threat.** Seventy percent of Americans said that the possibility of terrorists obtaining nuclear weapons is a “major” threat or greater in an ABC/Washington Post poll.¹³ Agreement was even stronger in a Quinnipiac University poll, which found 79 percent of registered voters agreeing with this claim, with only 17 percent opposed.¹⁴
- **Support for reducing the use of nuclear weapons is high.** Fifty-seven percent of Americans support a ban on the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear nations.¹⁵
- **Enacting responsible arms control agreements that improve US security is a bipartisan tradition.** Presidents at both ends of the political spectrum have supported arms control agreements as a way of improving American security, including John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama.

Iran's Nuclear Program

Increasing Pressure on Iran

SUGGESTED MESSAGE:

We have taken the lead in mounting international pressure against Iran and getting results. While just a few years ago the US stood alone in its attempt to limit Iran's nuclear weapons, we have now convinced the UK, Germany, France, China and Russia to join us in this effort. Iran is isolated and finally facing some real pressure. Rather than pursue a dangerous and ultimately ineffective military strategy, we are working with allies to address this serious threat.

Iran has been and will remain a difficult situation. The Iranian nuclear program poses a direct threat to US national security interests and the international nonproliferation regime. According to the US intelligence community, "Iran is technically capable of producing enough highly-enriched uranium for a weapon in the next few years" and "has the largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the Middle East...many of which are capable of carrying a nuclear payload."¹⁶ Though intelligence estimates agree that Iran has not yet weaponized its nuclear program, the threat from continued uranium enrichment by the Iranian regime is clear.¹⁷

Eight years of agitating Iran did nothing to improve America's interests—in fact, Iran's influence grew during the Bush administration. Moreover, Bush's belligerent policy toward Iran divided our international partners and left the US virtually alone in dealing with Iran. President Obama's strategy of engagement has created space for the Iranian regime to choose cooperation with the US and the international community while still allowing for tough sanctions and consequences for Iranian intransigence. After years of going it alone, the US now has an international backing for sanctions both in Congress and at the United Nations, thanks to the hard work and effort of the administration.

Why It Works

- **Americans support sanctions over force.** Fifty-five percent of Americans said they have more confidence in Democrats on national security when they hear that Congress voted for sanctions against Iran and its dangerous nuclear weapons program, and that President Obama is working with other countries to increase global support for sanctions and pressure major corporations and countries to stop doing business with Iran.¹⁸

- **Americans think engagement is the best method for stopping Iran's nuclear program.** A CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll found that even though 92 percent of Americans believe Iran has or will have nuclear weapons within the next few years, 63 percent of Americans favor using only economic and diplomatic efforts to get Iran to shut down its nuclear program, with just 23 percent favoring military action.¹⁹
- **International support for non-military action against Iran is strong and widespread.** Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak stood alongside Defense Secretary Robert Gates and proclaimed that it is "time for sanctions and diplomacy" to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions.²⁰ British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has stated that he would reject a military option for Iran, instead preferring to pressure Iran "by expanding the sanctions...and creating the conditions that will enable the Iranians themselves to confront their leaders."²¹ With the five permanent members of the UN Security Council agreeing that sanctions are necessary, the consensus for peaceful action is strong.

Iraq

Bringing the Conflict to a Stable Close

SUGGESTED MESSAGE:

We're safely withdrawing from Iraq so that we can focus our resources on our real enemies: al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations.

In 2007, at the height of the troop surge, the US had 20 combat brigades totaling 170,000 troops on the ground in Iraq.²² The number of troops deployed to Iraq has decreased steadily since the end of the surge, with the number of troops deployed to Afghanistan exceeding the number deployed to Iraq for the first time earlier this year. Despite the recent turmoil stemming from the disputed March elections, the US met its target to withdraw its combat troops from Iraq this year and will leave a smaller residual force in the country through 2011.

Safely withdrawing from Iraq will allow us to refocus our resources and our troops on the threat of terrorism. President Obama stuck to his campaign pledge to get out of Iraq, ensuring a stable end to the conflict, and making the US more secure. With the August withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq, approximately 50,000 US troops and 75,000 contractors will remain to assist with non-combat operations,²³ assuring a stable transition to Iraqi-led security, and paving the way for all US troops to leave Iraq by the end of 2011.

Why It Works

- **Americans want out of Iraq.** A CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll found that 64 percent of Americans supported President Obama's plan to withdraw all combat troops this year. A majority (51 percent) continued to support a 2010 withdrawal even if the country is in the midst of widespread violence and lacks a stable government.²⁴
- **Afghanistan is the root of the problem, not Iraq.** As President Obama noted when announcing the troop surge in Afghanistan last December, "the Iraq War drew the dominant share of our troops, our resources, our diplomacy, and our national attention." He acknowledged that while "Afghanistan is not lost...for several years it has moved backwards."²⁵ Withdrawing from Iraq will finally allow us to give Afghanistan and Pakistan the attention and focus that is needed to ensure that terrorist groups cannot establish a safe haven within their borders.

- **President Obama's plan ensures a smooth transition.** By leaving a residual force in the country, President Obama is ensuring that Iraqi Security Forces will continue to receive the training, equipment, and advising that they need to take over security operations fully. The residual force will not be engaging in combat operations so that the remaining troops and contractors can focus solely on ensuring a safe, secure transition to Iraqi control of their country.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Focusing on the Mission, Not the Individual

SUGGESTED MESSAGE:

Repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell would put the focus back where it belongs: on the mission, not an individual's personal life. Leaders at the Pentagon agree that we must allow our military to recruit and retain any qualified, patriotic, and courageous American who wants to serve their country.

Supporters of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy are putting their own personal views above the considered judgment of leaders at the Pentagon, who devote their lives to maintaining and strengthening our fighting force.

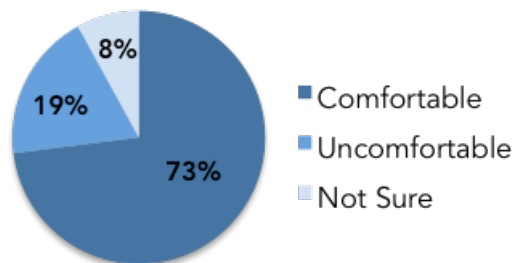
On the issue of repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell, we recommend an overall frame of focusing on the mission, rather than the individual. For moderate Americans, Don't Ask, Don't Tell pits two competing impulses against one another: the belief that gay and lesbian people should enjoy the same basic rights as everyone else, and a concern about whether the military can handle a change to Don't Ask, Don't Tell in the midst of two wars. This message reinforces the importance of the traditional institution of the military and reassures moderates that repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell won't weaken that tradition.

Why It Works

- **Our country has changed dramatically since Don't Ask, Don't Tell was enacted.** In 1993, when Don't Ask, Don't Tell was first introduced, only 23% of Americans knew an openly gay person;⁶

today three-quarters do.⁷ Seventy-three percent of Iraq and Afghan War veterans say they are comfortable around gay people.⁸ And 45% suspect that they served with a gay person in their unit.⁹ While Don't Ask, Don't Tell had the full support of the Pentagon when it was enacted, now both Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans: "Personally, how comfortable are you in the presence of gays and lesbians?"



Mike Mullen have testified in full-throated support of repealing the law, saying in a recent congressional hearing that repeal is “the right thing to do” and the question “is not whether the military prepares to make this change, but how we best prepare for it.”

- **For moderates, the “discrimination” argument isn’t good enough.** Moderates view the military first and foremost as an institution that secures the nation. While they are amenable to allowing gay and lesbian troops to serve openly, they want to make sure that change is implemented in a way that does not undermine the military’s mission, and focusing on how the current law discriminates against gay and lesbian people doesn’t address their concerns. While arguing that repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell would make the military *stronger* is too much of a stretch, talking about the issue using the military values of courage, duty, and freedom reassures moderates and fits better with the way they see our armed forces.
- **Moderates respect and revere the military, and they don’t want to see it changed.** As on many gay and lesbian issues, moderates are worried that repealing Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell will change the tradition of the military. Framing support for repeal in terms of putting the mission first and valuing individuals based on how they will fight to achieve that mission helps moderates see that repealing the law will reinforce the military’s existing values, not change them.

Critiques and Responses

CRITIQUE:

Repealing Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell would fundamentally change our military and undermine the strength of that institution.

RESPONSE:

On issues of national security, we should listen to our top military leaders, who support repealing Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, have testified in support of repeal, saying it is “the right thing to do” and the question “is not whether the military prepares to make this change, but how we best prepare for it.”

CRITIQUE:

We should not be forcing our military to change their policies to advance a liberal social agenda—especially when we’re in the middle of two wars.

RESPONSE:

There are already an estimated 66,000 gay and lesbian people serving in our military.¹⁰ Repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell would not change the composition of our armed forces—it would merely allow those troops to continue to do their jobs well without worrying about being fired because someone found out about their personal life.

* * *

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ABOUT THIRD WAY

Third Way is the leading think tank of the moderate wing of the progressive movement. We work with advocates and elected officials to develop and advance the next generation of moderate policy ideas.

For more information about Third Way please visit www.thirdway.org.

■ ENDNOTES

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