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## We're Fighting in a War We Lost Before the War Began

Phyllis Bennis

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It shouldn't surprise anyone, but support for the longest U.S. war is dropping further and faster than ever. The latest [national U.S. poll](#), released on May 9, shows 66 percent of Americans are against the war in Afghanistan – with 40 percent "strongly opposed."

We can expect to hear the usual spin, claims that it's a hard slog but Afghans are still better off and we have to finish what we started. That only the presence of our brave troops is giving the Afghan government and military the chance to consolidate their rule. That only our troops provide the possibility for stability and security in Afghanistan. That we have to stay to protect Afghan women.

But the reality is people have watched – and paid for – this war for more than eleven years now, and some facts just can't be spun anymore. Half of the 66 percent who oppose the war say that the presence of U.S. troops is actually hurting the people of Afghanistan more than they are helping. They're the ones who got it right.

U.S. troops urinate on the bodies of dead Afghans. U.S. troops burn Qurans. One or more U.S. troops goes on a murderous rampage killing 17 civilians, 9 of them children. U.S. troops photograph each other grinning with the body parts of dead Afghans draped over their shoulders. As for protecting women, according to Save the Children's new ["State of the World's Mothers"](#) report, Afghanistan is the second worst place in the world for a mother to give birth and try raise a child.

And the war has cost the lives of more than 1800 U.S. troops, killed unknown thousands of Afghans, and cost more than half a trillion dollars in taxpayers' money. That's not spin – those are the reasons that support for the illegal war continues to plummet. If that money ([\\$571 billion according to the National Priorities Project](#)) had not been wasted on the war in Afghanistan since 2001, it could instead have paid for ten years of health care for 12 million low-income people, or hired 840,000 elementary school teachers for ten years, or paid for converting 246 million households to all solar energy for a year.

Think those investments, or a brutal, useless war, would make us safer?

Only 27 percent of people in this country say they support the war now – the lowest number ever. Just a year ago 37 percent supported the war, and the year before that support in some polls was at 46 percent – almost half. And only 8 percent now "strongly" support the war.

Certainly there's an election connection to all this. Support for the war is dropping among Republicans too – to 37 percent backing the war, down from 58 percent just last year. That raises a lot of questions about whether Romney – or perhaps Republican congressional candidates, might decide to abandon the war, even if they loved it when George W. Bush launched it 11 years ago, and embrace the Republican majority who now oppose the war.

"The only solution now is to get out – now, not in 2014. And completely, not with thousands of troops continuing to occupy Afghanistan through 2014 and beyond."

For President Obama, the challenge may be even greater. This is *his* war now, it has been since January 20, 2009. But support for the war in his party (a slightly embarrassingly low 30 percent last year) has dropped to a humiliating 19 percent today. Does he really think he can re-energize his base with the claim that "I'm ending the war" when the reality of his plan is so well known? His plan for two more years of full-scale war in Afghanistan, followed by at least *ten years* of continued occupation by thousands (16,000? 20,000?) of special forces and "training" troops? Too many people know that's the reality of the agreement Obama signed with the U.S.-backed Afghan President Karzai last week. It's not an end to the war, it's simply changing the size and nature of the occupation.

Congresswoman Barbara Lee and the Progressive Caucus are leading an effort to gain support for HR 780, which would cut all funds to the Afghanistan war except money needed to safely withdraw all U.S. troops and contractors. It certainly reflects the vast majority of public opposition to the war – but it still faces a difficult battle. Many members of Congress are signing on, but far too many members are still afraid to use their Constitutional power of the purse to end this war. Too many – and they're not afraid of what will happen in Afghanistan, or what will happen to the troops (how better to keep them safe than to pull them out?). They're afraid of what their hometown headlines will say the next day.

We've largely won the battle for public opinion. The challenge now is to turn that transformation of public opinion into the transformation of policy. It's very late – but we have no choice but to continue to try.

The great songwriter Phil Ochs, in his masterful Vietnam-era "*White Boots Marching in a Yellow Land*" also had Afghanistan right. "We're fighting in a war we lost before the war began." The main unspinnable fact is that whichever of the myriad of reasons, rationales, excuses and justifications for this war of vengeance one chooses, it was lost long ago. The only solution now is to get out – now, not in 2014. And completely, not with thousands of troops continuing to occupy Afghanistan through 2014 and beyond. Get Out. Now.