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## Bill Moyers: Winning the war on terror

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By Bill Moyers, Common  
Dreams

President Bush spoke eloquently the other day about what the war on terror requires of us. He said, "The war on terror is not a figure of speech. It is an inescapable calling of our generation." Those words ring true. Whatever drives them, whatever grieves them, Islamic fanatics have declared war and seem willing to wage it to the death. If they prevail, our children will grow up in a world where fear governs the imagination and determines the rules of life. Mr. Bush clearly believes what he said: The war on terror is an inescapable calling of the generation now in charge.

Like most Americans, I want to support him in that work; I want to do my part. But the president makes it hard. He confused us by going after Saddam Hussein when the villain behind the mass murders of 9/11 was Osama bin Laden. He seems not to realize how his credibility has been shredded by all the false and misleading reasons put forth to justify invading Iraq; Lyndon Johnson never recovered from using the dubious events at the Gulf of Tonkin as an excuse to go to war in Vietnam, and even if Mr. Bush wins reelection this November, he, too, will eventually be dragged down by the powerful undertow that inevitably accompanies public deception.

The public will grow intolerant of partisan predators and crony capitalists indulging in a frenzy of feeding at the troughs in Baghdad and Washington. And there will come a time when the president will have no one to rely on except his most rabid allies in the right wing media; he will discover too late that you cannot win the hearts and minds of the public at large in a nation polarized and pulverized by endless propaganda at odds with reality.

So what to do? How to assure we win this war?

The hearings in Washington suggest a start. It is clear now the Bush White House bungled the warnings about Al Qaeda, but it's also clear that the Democrats under Bill Clinton made plenty of mistakes, too. Why can't both parties come clean, apologize, and start over? Either party could lose this war but both parties together just might win it. Why not a wartime cabinet to serve a wartime nation? Al Gore as head of Homeland Security. Gary Hart at Defense. The independent-minded John McCain or Warren Rudman at State. The world would get the point: This time we mean it, all of us - the war on terror no longer a partisan cause.

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Surely, too, there are ways to subject all of us to the moral equivalent of the draft. The president put it well in another speech last week when he said, "I've seen the spirit of sacrifice and compassion renewed in our country. We've all seen our country unite in common purpose when it mattered most." Those words ring true, as well. But so far sacrifice has been asked only of the men and women in uniform and their families: Nearly 600 dead since the war began -- over 400 of them since the President landed on that aircraft carrier under a banner reading "Mission Accomplished."

Even now the privates patrolling the mean streets of Baghdad and the wilds of Afghanistan, their lives and limbs constantly at risk, are making less than \$16,000 dollars a year in base pay. Here at home, meanwhile, the rich get their tax cuts - what Vice President Cheney calls "their due." Favored corporations get their contracts, subsidies and offshore loopholes. And as the president praises sacrifice he happily passes the huge bills that are piling up on to children not yet born.

My thoughts started running on this track a couple of weeks ago when my wife Judith came across a relic of the past in our attic - a ration book, issued by the OPA (the Office of Price Administration) with stamps for the purchase of essential goods. It's dated 1943 and it's aged so much you can barely make out the name on it -- "Billy Don Moyers," the alias my mother gave me at birth.

I was nine years when this ration book was issued, and America was fighting a war on two fronts, against Nazis and Japanese warlords. Just about everything vital was going to feed the war machine, so just about everything was rationed: gasoline, tires, sugar, butter, meat, tea, diapers, kitchen utensils, lawnmowers. When stockings became scarce, women painted seams down their calves to simulate the real thing. You stood in line to get scarce items; and all of us were called upon to eat less, drive less do without.

Kids weren't exempt. I took this book with me to the store, and tore off exactly the number of stamps required to buy something. I never used all the stamps in this one book - that's how parsimonious people were. Or maybe it was patriotism. Anyway, I think of this now as a kind of war souvenir, a keepsake to remind me that victory on the home front began at 801 East Austin Street.

Where does the home front begin today? President Bush hasn't told us. I believe him when he says the war on terror is the inescapable calling of our generation. But it is one thing to say it, and yet another to lead all of us, and not just a partisan few, to answer it.

Bill Moyers is host of NOW with Bill Moyers, airing Fridays at 9pm ET on PBS (check local listings at <http://www.pbs.org/now/sched.html>)

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[If you don't watch Moyers, you suck - Cecil]