

*How did the U.S. government lead its people to war?*

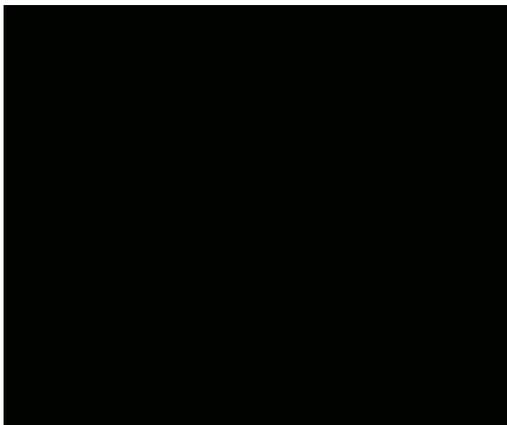
## Rhetoric and Spin

### “The War on Terror”

After the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, the Bush administration could have focused on combating al-Qaeda, since that is the group that had attacked the U.S. This policy might have been called: “War on al-Qaeda.”

Instead, a different policy was adopted, and the term chosen was “War on Terror” – a broad, loosely-defined label that allowed for a wide variety of actions, including military action, clandestine surveillance, detention without due process, torture, and other actions, including an invasion of Iraq.

#### Video: THE WAR ON TERROR



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Professor Samantha Power of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government provides an interesting perspective on the issue of “war on terror.” In the *New York Times* on July 29, 2007, she wrote [\[link to source\]](#)

“The day after the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush declared the strikes by Al Qaeda ‘more than acts of terror. They were acts of war.’ Bush’s ‘war on terror’ was ‘not a figure of speech,’ he said. Rather, it was a defining framework. The war, Bush announced, would begin with Al Qaeda, but would ‘not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.’ The global war on terror, he said, was the ‘inescapable calling of our generation.’

### The New York Times

“The phrase and the agenda that grew out of it caught on, and from 9/11 onward, the administration used its pulpit to propagate several new premises. First, with the threat of Islamic radical terrorism, new rules, new tools and new mind-sets had to be devised to meet the novelty of the menace. As Vice

President Dick Cheney put it, ‘old doctrines of security do not apply.’ The criminal justice approach of trying terrorists would have to be scrapped, supplanted by a military approach. Second, we were told, the states that sponsored terrorism or offered lodging to terrorists had to be treated the same way as those non-state actors who carried out the threats. Even more dramatically, America’s friends had to prove their loyalty by taking concrete steps in our global war.

“In Bush’s view, wartime demanded a strong commander-in-chief, and he would be far more effective prosecuting the war if he could free himself of the meddlesome legislative, judicial and even interagency checks fashionable in peacetime. Surely, Bush’s team argued, the extreme continuing threats to our national security warranted a dramatic expansion of presidential power.

“Six years later, most Americans still rightly believe that the United States must confront Islamic terrorism — and must be

relentless in preventing terrorist networks from getting weapons of mass destruction. But Bush's premises have proved flawed, and the war-on-terror frame has obscured more than it has clarified.

"As with the war on drugs and the war on crime, the invocation of 'war' initially seemed metaphorical (we do not send the 82nd Airborne into downtown Detroit to combat street crime). But in the terrorism context, war proved less a rhetorical frame than a strategic assertion that armed conflict (that is, ground and air invasions of other countries) was the main tool the United States should employ to neutralize terrorism. ... the Bush administration used its post-9/11 political capital to smuggle its pre-existing anti-Saddam Hussein agenda to the fore — with disastrous results for American forces, for Iraq and for the wider strategic goal of eliminating Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups."

*The Guardian*, a major British newspaper, reported on January 24, 2007 that the head of the Crown Prosecution Service (the principal prosecuting authority in the U.K.), Sir Ken Macdonald, warned that the "war on terror" framework could lead to "fear-driven and inappropriate" responses to the threats posed by terrorists. Instead, he argued, the so-called "war on terror" should be redefined as a police and intelligence operation, not a military operation.

The article continues: [\[link to source\]](#)



"[Macdonald] said: 'London is not a battlefield. Those innocents who were murdered on July 7, 2005 [London subway bombings] were not victims of war. And the men who killed them were not, as in their vanity they claimed on their ludicrous videos, 'soldiers'. They were deluded, narcissistic inadequates. They were criminals. They were fantasists. We need to be very clear about this. On the streets of London, there is no such thing as a 'war on terror'... The fight against terrorism... is the prevention of crime, the enforcement of our laws and the winning of justice for those damaged

by their infringement.'...

"... The criminal justice response to terrorism must be 'proportionate and grounded in due process and the rule of law,' he said. 'We must protect ourselves from these atrocious crimes without abandoning our traditions of freedom.'

[\[continue to the next section: Enemy Motives\]](#)

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