

True patriot: A voice of reason and common sense

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [January 23, 2007](#) issue

During the height of the Vietnam War, Bill Moyers was President Lyndon Johnson's press secretary. It was his responsibility to explain to the press and the world what was happening and why the U.S. was doing what it was doing. He was also present as the Johnson administration declared war on poverty, launched its Great Society programs and signed civil rights legislation. Moyers is now one of the most respected journalists and political analysts in the land. His is a voice of reason and common sense, one that I have learned to trust over the years.

He also understands the religious situation and the ideological divide in our nation. Moyers believes that the Vietnam War and the current military action in Iraq are among the "great blunders in our history." So it is remarkable that he was invited to deliver a lecture on "The Meaning of Freedom" at the United States Military Academy at West Point last fall.

I don't know how the cadets and faculty at West Point received the speech. That he was invited at all is a remarkable testimony to the military's openness to dialogue, rigorous critique and dissent. I have been consistently impressed over the years with the military academies' openness to a diversity of opinions on topics about which one might expect the military mind to be closed.

Moyers is a political realist in the mold of Reinhold Niebuhr. He knows that we live in a world that requires us to have a strong military. Moyers understands that "the army is not a debating society."

But he also knows history, and he provided a necessary reminder of the radical principles upon which the American republic was founded. Among them are putting limits on executive power, requiring civilians to control the military and giving Congress the prerogative to declare war. The founders believed that the decision to commit the nation to war belongs to the people. Moyers pointed out that the last time the people's representatives actually declared war was 1941.

Moyers also bravely attacked the president's decision to sidestep mandates of the Geneva Convention in regard to the use of secret detentions and torture—a decision, he told the cadets, “dangerous to our honor and your welfare.”

As a new year began, my attention was drawn to the coverage of the barbaric execution of Saddam Hussein and to the announcement that the number of U.S. troops killed in Iraq reached 3,000 and that the military action in Iraq is now the nation's third longest war, after Vietnam and the War for Independence. In light of those developments, it is important to hear the words of Bill Moyers, a true patriot.