Discourse and Doctrine: Bush Administration Rhetoric and Reality in the War on Terror

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Abstract

This thesis examines the rhetoric utilized in seven executive branch documents from 2000 to 2004 related to the “War on Terror” in order to identify persistent discursive themes and ideologies used to justify the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. These themes include the framing of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Saddam Hussein, and terrorists in general as “Other,” or possessing inferior values. While the U.S. advocates for freedom, terrorists detest it; while the U.S. is “good,” terrorists are “evil.” The rhetoric also portrays the threat posed by these parties as unique and potent, and therefore necessitating new strategies of warfare. The primary overarching ideologies expressed in these documents are American superiority and exceptionalism. This thesis argues that these themes and ideologies form the basis of the rhetoric of the Bush Doctrine. While much of the literature focuses on the Bush Doctrine as a justification for the invasion of Iraq, it also provided an ex post facto justification for the invasion of Afghanistan. The thesis concludes with an analysis of the relationship between discourse and policy and the importance of analyzing governmental discourse to critique U.S. policy.
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Introduction

“Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts.”¹ After the attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York City and Washington, D.C., these were the first words spoken by President George W. Bush in a public address, words that would set the stage for the rhetoric of terrorism in post-9/11 America. President Bush continues, “America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.” Before the perpetrators of the attacks were even known, President Bush had already begun the strategic framing of the attack: America was good, anyone opposed to America was evil. No valid reason could possibly exist for another country or political group to want to inflict harm on the United States; they must hate us simply because of our freedom.

Combating terrorism should not simply involve implementing policies of aggression, but should consider the motivations behind terrorist attacks, particularly those that are reactions to U.S. international politics. The motivations for terrorist attacks cannot be reduced to a hatred of Western culture. To explain Islamic terrorism as a response to American culture or values is to ignore the role of American policy in motivating these attacks. Such misleading and incomplete narratives about the causes of terrorist attacks can lead to ineffective and expensive policy responses. Moreover, these narratives can result in policies that are ultimately self-defeating, causing an augmentation in terrorist activity rather than a reduction.²

² The rise of the Islamic State, a designated terrorist organization, in several Islamic countries epitomizes an outcome of poor policy. Noam Chomsky refers to the Islamic State as “one of the main effects” of the U.S.’s war in Iraq. He continues, “The idea of the Islamic caliphate does have an appeal to large sectors of a brutalized global population, which is under severe attack everywhere, and has been for a long time.”
I do not mean to justify the attacks of September 11. These events were deeply traumatic and, undoubtedly, they were acts of terrorism, or the intentional use of violence against civilians with the goal of achieving a political objective. However, the government’s framing of the attacks – starting with Bush’s first address after 9/11, in which he initiates a rhetorical campaign for “freedom” and against “evil” – as well as its political and military response, does not leave any room for self-reflection or criticism of U.S. foreign policy. Instead, the discourse frames the U.S. as a victim and justifies the perpetuation of political violence in other areas of the world – in this case, the Middle East – as well as allowing the government to pursue more repressive domestic policy through restrictions on civil liberties, particularly the rights to free speech and privacy. The impact of this narrative is evident in the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, the use of drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan, and the extent of NSA spying on American civilians. These policies seem to have gone uncriticized by most of the American public, perhaps in part due to a deeply internalized fear of terrorism. By instilling and perpetuating this fear, the U.S. government can more easily invade citizens’ privacy, as well as engage in violent conflict and escalate imperialist policy in other parts of the world, without needing to be concerned about domestic opposition. This creates a manipulative, undemocratic environment that is detrimental to the lives of Americans and, in this


Edward Said defines imperialism as “the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center that rules a distant territory.” He argues that, although direct colonialism is no longer employed, imperialism continues to flourish. American imperialism does not just refer to “raw military power,” which far surpasses any other nation, but also the overwhelming ideological and cultural belief that America ought to be the world’s leader. As evidence, Said notes that “U.S. military intervention in the Third World…occurred every year between 1945 and 1967,” and since then, the U.S. military has continued its strategy of widespread intervention on a global scale. Edward Said, “Culture and Imperialism,” (lecture, York University, Toronto, Feb. 10, 1993).
case, the lives of Iraqis, Pakistanis, Afghans, and others abroad who are threatened on a daily basis by U.S. aggression.

The attacks of 9/11 inspired a momentous shift in governmental rhetoric and policy. The Bush administration capitalized on the attacks to push forward policies in its own interest, regardless of their ability to combat terrorism. Although exploiting traumatic events to advance needless or oppressive policy shifts is not a strategy unique to the Bush administration, the policies developed as a result of this shift had and continue to have unique and significant consequences. This thesis argues that the language used by the executive branch served to justify American military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq and established a foundation for the Bush Doctrine more broadly. At its core, this discourse frames the U.S. as morally and culturally superior to its “terrorist” enemies, who are evil and whose actions are always unjustified. On the other hand, the exceptionalism of the United States renders all of its policy decisions justifiable.

**Subject of Analysis**

This thesis analyzes the executive branch discourse utilized to justify military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, with an emphasis on language characterizing the “terrorist threat.” Among the themes I examine in the literature review and in the analysis of executive branch documents are: (1) terrorists are “Other”, (2) terrorists are evil, (3) terrorists are opposed to freedom, (4) the terrorist threat is proximate, and (5) the terrorism threat is unique. I also consider the governmental discourse of American moral superiority, which renders the U.S. incapable of provoking a terrorist attack and construes any resistance to U.S. policy as “terrorism.” I investigate the consistency and development of these themes and their employment as justifications for U.S. policy.
International and domestic events shaped governmental discourse and subsequent policy modifications in the War on Terror. Some of the events referenced in the particular documents I analyze are the anthrax scare, terrorist attacks committed in other countries, and the WMD inspections in Iraq. However, I will primarily focus on 9/11, a watershed moment in U.S. foreign policy, as the reference point for the documents’ rhetoric. While these events aided the Bush administration’s rhetorical framing, this thesis suggests that policy developments were predominantly based on pursuing U.S. interests rather than on actually fighting terrorists or eliminating terrorism.

Although the legislative branch also plays a significant part in shaping the discourse of the War on Terror – as do the media – I have elected to focus on the language used by the executive branch. The executive branch has often held primary power regarding the decision to enter wars; one only need look to the cases of World War II and Vietnam for evidence. However, as Colleen Elizabeth Kelley argues, no president before George W. Bush “has claimed for [him]self such ‘sweeping powers’ for an enterprise as vaguely defined as the ‘war against terrorism’ and the ‘axis of evil.’” The vagueness of the administration’s political aims and the immense power held by the president allowed Bush to pursue drastic policies without much fear of retaliation from Congress, the Supreme Court, or the American public. As an example, by 2003, Bush supported a “doctrine of pre-emptive self-defense” to allow the use of force against

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4 Although Congress voted to declare war on Japan, President Roosevelt engineered the conditions for entry. Prior to the Congressional declaration, Roosevelt launched an “undeclared war” against the German navy in the Atlantic and ordered an oil embargo on Japan, both of which “should be understood, at least in part, to invite an ‘incident’ that could be used to justify hostilities” – namely, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In regard to Vietnam, the war powers of the president as Commander in Chief of the armed forces allowed presidents to send troops to Vietnam “without an official war declaration.” John M. Schuessler, "The Deception Dividend: FDR'S Undeclared War," International Security 34.4 (2010): 144-5; "Executive Power," Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, n.d.
Iraq if the administration even “suspected Saddam Hussein might attack at some point.”

Because of the breadth of the executive branch’s definition of “the enemy,” the policy of resorting to any means necessary seemed warranted. Therefore, there was no widespread debate as to whether such a policy was productive in accomplishing the goals of the war, and certainly not whether it was legal.

Part of the increase in power the executive branch assumed after 9/11 was due to the Authorization for the Use of Military Force. Congress, with only one “nay” vote, passed the 60-words resolution three days after 9/11:

“That the president is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001 or harbored such organizations or persons in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations, or persons.”

This resolution gave the executive branch unprecedented war powers, essentially granting it the ability to justify any military action in the name of the War on Terror and allowing it to bypass Congressional authorization for engaging in any such military action. The executive branch’s domination of wartime policy renders its rhetoric particularly essential.

Selected Documents

I analyze the Executive Branch’s discourse on war and terrorism in seven key documents:

1) Joint Vision 2020 (May 2000)
2) The Quadrennial Defense Report (September 2001)
3) President Bush’s Address to Congress after September 11, 2001 (September 2001)

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6 Ibid., 46.
4) President Bush’s Introduction to the National Security Strategy (September 2002)
6) U.N. Secretary of State Colin Powell’s Address to the UN Security Council (February 2003)
7) Testimony of Donald Rumsfeld for the 9/11 Commission (March 2004)

I have chosen these documents because they exemplify the rhetorical themes and trends that I scrutinize in this thesis. Each document serves a unique purpose in the development of Bush Doctrine rhetoric. Joint Vision 2020, although released prior to President Bush assuming office, marks a fundamental shift in U.S. military doctrine that establishes precedence for subsequent policies of aggression formulated as part of the War on Terror. The Quadrennial Defense Review Report, primarily written before the 9/11 attacks, introduces language about a changing security environment and the necessity of preparing for new forms of warfare while lauding the U.S. for its benevolence and superior values. President Bush’s address to Congress nine days after 9/11 outlines the relationship between al-Qaeda and the Taliban and announces the War on Terror, a war he says will be fought between those who support freedom and those who oppose it. The National Security Strategy deepens the narrative of good versus evil, establishing a simplistic division between the U.S. and its allies and enemies of the U.S. This document also introduces the WMD threat. The National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction solidifies the administration’s new focus on the WMD threat, which later serves to rationalize the invasion of Iraq and justifies a strategy of preemption and the U.S.’s “right to respond with overwhelming force” to any threat. Colin Powell’s address to the UN Security Council marks a significant attempt by the U.S. to garner international support for entering a war with Iraq by exaggerating Saddam Hussein’s attempts to develop WMDs and suggesting that a relationship between Hussein and al-Qaeda could result in WMDs in the hands of terrorists. Lastly, Donald Rumsfeld’s testimony to the 9/11 Commission a year after the invasion of Iraq portrays both the
Afghanistan and Iraq Wars as necessary and successful. It encapsulates many aspects of Bush administration discourse that prevailed throughout his first term and affirms the success of the administration’s strategies, regardless of their connection to the 9/11 attacks or the suffering wrought on foreign communities.

When analyzed collectively, these documents provide a summary of the first Bush administration’s language relating to the War on Terror. I focus on documents released during Bush’s first four years in office because it was during this period that the executive branch launched a “war on terror” and invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, two of the most significant military engagements post-9/11. However, the War on Terror, and the rhetoric used to justify it, continued under the second Bush administration and throughout both Obama administrations. Executive branch documents from these subsequent administrations and the rhetorical trends therein are worthy of further research.

**Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis**

I address the topic of this thesis through the lens of critical discourse analysis, a method of studying the interconnection of discourse and societal norms and power dynamics. There are many approaches to critical discourse analysis, which David Howarth outlines in his seminal text *Discourse*. In realist analysis, the purpose of analyzing a text is to uncover how language maintains power and affects material life. The Marxist approach is similar but handles discourses as “ideological systems of meaning” which codify inequality of resources and influence. Norman Fairclough’s method examines how “language and meaning are used by the powerful to deceive and oppress the dominated.” Howarth’s text follows the post-Marxist and post-structuralist view, in which discourses embody social systems, and analysis explains the development and operation
of these discourses. Lastly, Foucauldian discourse analysis examines the relationship between social practices, discourses, and societal relations.\(^8\)

I primarily utilize Fairclough’s approach to critical discourse analysis. Unlike realist and Marxist analyses, Fairclough focuses on discourse as it is shaped by those in power and used as a tool of oppression. Other approaches do not take into consideration the speaker’s particular position of power to the extent that Fairclough does. Fairclough also focuses on the social impact of linguistic and non-linguistic texts. He believes that to explain meaning one must be able to “analyze such texts in order to clarify their contribution to the processes of meaning-making.”\(^9\)

As one of the founders of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough’s methods established important groundwork for the field.

I also draw on Howarth’s brand of critical discourse analysis. In his post-Marxist approach, Howarth defines discourse as “historically specified systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects.” Because discourse involves power relations between various social actors, discourses are inherently political. Howarth explains discourse analysis as the process of examining linguistic or non-linguistic material as texts “that enable subjects to experience the world of objects, words and practices.” Howarth emphasizes the importance of not limiting discourse to linguistic analysis. Rather than “reducing the social world to language,” discourse analysis utilizes an “analogy between linguistic and social systems” that promotes the examination of politics and social relations. Discourse analysis can thus be used not just to analyze texts like reports and manifestos but also speeches, policies, ideas, and events.\(^10\)

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Howarth draws many ideas about discourse from post-Marxist political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. They also emphasize that social behavior is an essential category of discourse. Per Laclau and Mouffe’s approach, Howarth identifies the purpose of discourse analysis as “understanding and interpreting socially produced meanings, rather than searching for objective causal explanations.” Therefore, the role of the discourse analyst is to explore the historical contexts of particular discourses to explain their construction. Additionally, contextual variation requires that concepts and theories be adjusted; discourse theorists should learn to use “the same theoretical rules differently to suit the particular historical contexts in which they are to be applied.” He advocates using concepts and logic fluidly, modifying them according to varying contexts. In critical discourse analysis, “the theoretical framework must be sufficiently ‘open’ and flexible enough to be ‘stretched’ and restructured in the process of application,” allowing for a variety of outcomes.11

Methodology

Faireclough and Howarth’s approaches serve as a model for how I approach the executive branch documents and the themes within. Fairclough identifies a list of questions that one should ask in the process of critical discourse analysis. I have selected what I believe are the most pertinent questions in relation to my paper and use them as the foundation of my textual analysis.

Firstly, “What social event, and what chain of social events, is the text part of?” and “What social practice or network of social practices can the events…be seen as framed within?”

11 Ibid., 128, 131-139.
Social practices include discourses and serve to limit “structural possibilities.” Social events are influenced by social practice and social structures, which include language and socioeconomic status.\(^\text{12}\)

Second, an important component of discourse analysis is examining assumptions, which “broadly reduce difference by assuming common ground.” Fairclough identifies three categories of assumptions: existential assumptions, or “assumptions about what exists”; propositional assumptions, or “assumptions about what is or can be or will be the case”; and value assumptions, “assumptions about what is good or desirable.”\(^\text{13}\) The way that an audience member understands a text depends on his/her knowledge or acceptance of the text’s assumptions. Assumptions are often used to create and perpetuate hegemonic discourses.\(^\text{14}\) Assumptions often express ideologies, which Fairclough defines as “representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation.” Examining how texts perpetuate or alter existing ideologies is an essential component of critical discourse analysis. So, one of Fairclough’s questions for discourse analysis is, “What existential propositional, or value assumptions are made?” as well as whether any of these assumptions are ideological.\(^\text{15}\)

Third, I utilize some of Fairclough’s proposed questions regarding discourses. While discourse generally describes language and the way that it affects society, it can also be used to refer to specific ways of framing parts of the world. Texts may utilize different discourses in a

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 41, 55.
\(^{14}\) To further clarify the difference between the varying kinds of assumptions, Fairclough offers a few examples for each type of assumption from a European Union policy document on globalization. For example, an existential assumption would be that “there are such things as globalization”; propositional assumptions would be that “globalization is a process” and that “globalization constitutes economic progress”; and value assumptions would be that “social cohesion is...desirable, a widespread sense of unease, inequality and polarization [is] undesirable.” Ibid., 57.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., 218, 9, 192.
variety of ways. A text may draw upon one discourse to represent some aspect of the world and a different discourse to represent another.\textsuperscript{16} The questions Fairclough proposes related to discourse are: “What discourses are drawn upon in the text, and how are they textured together? Is there a significant mixing of discourses? What are the features that characterize the discourses which are drawn upon?”\textsuperscript{17} These three categories of Fairclough’s questions – social events, assumptions and ideologies, and discourses – form the basis of my analysis of various texts.

Fairclough’s method of critical discourse analysis is shaped by his definition of discourse: “semiosis in the representation and self-representation of social practices.” He claims the objective of discourse analysis is to explain the relationship between social changes and changes in discourse, and how changes in discourse relate to “other, non-discoursal elements or ‘moments’ of social life.”\textsuperscript{18} Accordingly, I focus on the use of language in relation to social change – in this case, the initiation of two wars and an ever-evolving military presence in the Middle East.

I also draw on Howarth’s brand of critical discourse analysis. Howarth focuses heavily on actions as discourse that shape individuals’ understandings of the world. While I use critical discourse analysis primarily to analyze texts, the actions of the executive branch are also essential to understanding the War on Terror, so I link the administration’s discourse formulation to policy developments. Howarth also emphasizes the importance of flexibility in applying theory to a variety of contexts. This inspires my approach of analyzing recurring themes in the seven documents, despite variation from text to text depending on the audience, speaker, and sociopolitical conditions at the time of publishing.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 133.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 193.
Literature Review

The narrative of the Bush administration has been the dominant narrative shaping the understanding of the events of 9/11, according to Adam Hodges. It has also provided “discursive justification not just of a metaphorical ‘war on terror’ but of the very real wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.” A glaring decision on the part of the executive branch in the framing of the War on Terror narrative is the selection of the term “war.” Much of the existing literature on the topic points to the immediate decision by the government to frame the attacks of 9/11 in terms of a war rather than a crime. David Ryan suggests in Frustrated Empire that was a strategic choice, as war gave the U.S. “a greater sense of national unity and purpose” than a criminal narrative could have. He argues that the rhetoric used by Bush in reference to 9/11 and the War on Terror is based in preexisting narratives about United States history that assume U.S. innocence and frame foreign policy in terms of “assisting with the process of decolonization, self-determination, pluralism, liberty, [and] democracy.”

Adam Hodges explains the narrative framing of 9/11 as following a traditional war narrative engrained in the nation’s consciousness due to the historical precedents of World War II and the Cold War, which “act as exploitable source domains in the formulation of new understandings about the struggle against terrorism.” For example, 9/11 serves essentially the same function as Pearl Harbor: providing justification for entering a war. President Bush also used Lenin and Hitler’s words as a point of comparison for statements from “the terrorists,” thus relating the new “terrorist” enemy to past U.S. enemies, easily understood by the public. This

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21 Ryan, Frustrated Empire, 18.
22 Ibid., 2, 11-14.
narrative, then, is not new, but has clear historical precedence and familiarity amongst the populace.

The construction of this narrative occurred by way of language, symbols, and images. The use of metaphor and analogy in general aided “the mapping of particulars onto a generic script by connecting the particulars (e.g., 9/11 and terrorism) to the genre (e.g., the war genre) through a comparison of different domains of experience.” This process made the events of 9/11 and the War on Terror “familiar, understandable, and easily identifiable.” The administration’s narrative of 9/11 caught on in American society because of the ability of the narrative to connect the “generic war schema” to “the particulars of 9/11.” To the public, the response to 9/11 – namely, engaging in a “war on terror” – began to seem natural and necessary.

The nationalist framing of the language and images used also contributed to the narrative, as well as its success amongst the public. Ryan argues that the administration portrayed the attacks as representing opposition to “American freedom and Western civilization, against tolerance and democracy.” He frames the success of Bush’s discursive strategy in terms of his ability to combine two nationalisms, as defined by Louis Hartz in the 1950s, into one discourse. The first nationalism refers to “the territory, the country, the flag, the state, the map as icon,” and other symbols, while the second refers to “a set of ideas, ideologies, foundational myths and constructs…which are built around traditions of benign rhetoric, national celebration and various forms of storytelling.” Bush seamlessly combined the two in his rhetoric following 9/11. By appealing to shared national values such as “freedom” and “democracy,” and through attempts to

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23 Ibid., 3.
24 Ibid., 9.
25 Ibid., 20.
26 Ibid., 27.
manufacture national unity via images like the flag, the administration was able to foment
national unity and simultaneously discourage public opposition.

The consequence of this rhetorical framing – and its ability to build public support – was
permission for specific military and policy responses. Ryan argues that the framing of the attacks
created the conditions necessary for the administration to pursue given responses and “precluded
a more imaginative and effective pursuit of the perpetrators.”27 Among these military responses
included a “doctrine of pre-emptive self-defense,” which would permit the U.S. to invade Iraq
simply “if the administration suspected Saddam Hussein might attack at some point.”28 Just as
significant, the nationalist narrative constructed by the Bush administration ignores the reasons
why the 9/11 attacks might have occurred in the first place and discourages critical thought on
the “roots of such hatred and violence.” This framing, Ryan argues, purposefully excluded
challenging questions and made no attempt to explain the attacks.29

The early decisions made by the Bush administration in forming the discourse
surrounding 9/11 had immense impacts on policy after the attacks. By putting forth a “war”
narrative recognized by the public, the particular events of 9/11 began to seem familiar, and the
response of a “war on terror” appeared necessary. Through nationalist appeals, Bush was able to
garner more public support while simultaneously deterring opposition.

While much has been written about the Bush administration’s narrative construction of
9/11 and its historical precedence, my thesis adds the unique approach of critical discourse
analysis. Not much literature has provided an in-depth analysis of particular executive branch
documents, nor traced the consistencies amongst them. Rather than discussing the strategy of the
Bush administration broadly, I delve into seven documents that demonstrate the consistency of

27 Ibid., 33.
28 Kelley, Post-9/11 American Presidential Rhetoric, 46.
particular themes and ideologies and how they served to justify the introduction of new policies, regardless of their relation to the War on Terror. Moreover, work on the Bush Doctrine primarily focuses on the policies of the Bush administration. This thesis defines the administration’s discourse as the foundation of policy modifications. By conveying the importance of discourse’s relationship to policy, I hope to provide a new perspective regarding how the first Bush administration was able to engage in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars.

Before delving into document analysis, I discuss a few central themes of the discourse that feature prominently in the literature that I trace throughout executive branch documents.

“Othering” the Enemy

The practice of “Othering” the enemy has been around as long as the conceptions of “East” and “West.” From the Western perspective, this practice is called Orientalism, defined in Edward Said’s seminal text as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’”30 This has served as the frame of reference for thousands of writers who create social theories about “Orientals” and their minds, cultures, and society based on this notion of a prominent distinction between Eastern and Western peoples and ways of life. One way that this difference is emphasized is through what Said refers to as “imaginative geography,” in which people exaggerate the difference between “what is close…and what is far away.”31 The cultural difference, or distance, between the East and West is thus matched to its geographical distance.

The Eastern way of life was not simply considered different; it was also inferior. This worldview has allowed the West to invade, occupy, and colonize the East without moral qualm.

31 Ibid., 55.
From the perspective of Lord Cromer, the first British controller-general in Egypt, and Lord Balfour, the namesake of the Balfour Declaration, Westerners were intended to dominate, while Orientals should be dominated. This involved occupying their land, controlling their national affairs, and putting “their blood and treasure at the disposal of one or another Western power.”

It also allowed the Western colonizers to discredit any sort of Oriental resistance. For example, if they resist their occupation, the response is that “Orientals have never understood the meaning of self-government the way ‘we’ do.” If Orientals hold any opposing viewpoints, these are written off with excuses such as “they’re all Orientals at the bottom” and class distinction and political and economic factors are ignored. No ideas expressed or actions committed by Orientals could be for any other reason than the fact that they are Oriental. Such a simplification and falsification of “Oriental” people allowed for the perpetuation of oppressive colonial and imperialist structures in the Middle East; there was nothing that could be said to convince these Western colonizers otherwise.

The “Othering” of the East by the West has shaped the relationship between these spheres for centuries, and this influence can still be seen today, particularly in the manner the War on Terror has played out. In his book *Democracy and America’s War on Terror*, Robert Ivie argues that one of the ways in which “Othering” of the enemy occurred in the aftermath of 9/11 was through the administration’s references to disparate values. President Bush claimed the war on terrorism “was first and foremost a defense of freedom from terrorist evildoers.” He continues, “‘America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world.’” The “‘tyranny and evil’” responsible for these attacks must be

32 Ibid., 36.
33 Ibid., 107.
destroyed, “for so long as terrorism exists, ‘freedom is at risk.’” The mind of the terrorist – that is, the “Oriental,” uncivilized terrorist – not only cannot understand freedom, but detests it to the extent that they attacked America for that very reason. The very clear ideological dichotomy established by the president contributes to the “Othering” of the enemy, as the public is convinced to believe that the perpetrators are so ideologically distant that they must be a different category of people altogether.

Profiling is another manifestation of Western racism against “Orientals” that has been prominent in post-9/11 America. A person’s perceived racial or religious identity has often served as justification for governmental monitoring and targeting of civilians, as well as allowing for a gross simplification of the international enemy. Profiling is committed in the wave of terror, as people – and the government – feel extraordinarily threatened. Ivie describes profiling as “a microcosm of terrorism in a pluralistic world,” as a representation “of the difficulty of living safely and not overreacting to Others in an interconnected global village where religious, cultural, and other differences directly confront and threaten one another.” Profiling leads to depersonalization and distortion of the perceived “enemy.” Ivie argues that profiling is a dangerous practice that causes us to perceive and understand the world “through the fog of symbols.” We ought to question such representations of “the enemy,” rather than accepting such narrow portrayals of the “Other,” which only serves to perpetuate unintelligent and dangerous political decisions. Profiling is only one example of methods used to fight terrorism that are based in the rhetoric of an “evil” and “Other” enemy.

34 Robert L. Ivie, Democracy and America’s War on Terror (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 153-5.
35 Ibid., 126.
36 Ibid., 126-7.
**Good versus Evil**

One significant component of the language of “Othering” the enemy is the notion of a “good” America versus “evil” enemies. Three days after 9/11 in his speech at the National Cathedral, President Bush “vowed to ‘rid the world of evil.’”\(^\text{37}\) This war against terrorism, he said, would be different from any previous war, as it would be fought in many places, against a stealthy enemy, and for a long period of time. Once establishing this narrative of good against evil, it was quite easy for the administration to engage in additional military and political maneuvers, so long as the public was convinced of the moral corruption of the opposing side. The “us versus them” dichotomy is one that “promotes ‘satanization’ of the enemy…and a legitimization of unlimited escalations of violence to the point of extermination of the evil Other.”\(^\text{38}\) In a war of ideas with no end in sight, America can do no wrong, according to the Bush administration’s rhetoric. After all, as Bush himself claimed, “Our nation is the greatest force for good in history.”\(^\text{39}\)

Robert Ivie writes that the result of Bush’s rhetoric was to “stir the nation into patriotic fits of belligerence.” This rhetoric, he argues, leaves no space for a fluid conception of democracy, but rather “promotes the mistaken promise of a universal peace in a mythical world made safe for democracy.” From this perspective, democracy is constantly threatened, and because it is under attack, it must be defended with the utmost security. Democracy is not a symbol of strength, but an invitation for conflict. Through this victimizing narrative, the Bush administration exaggerates the threat of the evil enemy and justifies its continual violence in the Middle East. This act of demonizing the enemy happens on both sides and leads both “to participate in an escalating dance of death.” Because of the demonization of the opposing side,

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 161.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 136-7.
and simultaneous affirmation of the importance and superiority of American “values,”
“Americans were expected to fight for the hollowed-out symbols of freedom and democracy”
and ignore any of the potential causes of terrorism.40

The irony of this approach is that the “good” side is reduced to the same language and
tactics as the “evil” side. According to Ivie, both the “perpetrators of terror and counterterror”
utilize equivalent language “to reduce one another to demons that savagely massacre innocent
people” and pose a threat to the entirety of civilization. He goes on: “Each sides marks the Other
for eradication as subhuman, barbarian, insane, and wicked outlaws.” Despite its rhetorical
commitment to democracy, the West becomes “complicit with terror” through this rhetoric of
evil which sustains it. The war against evil was simply necessary; dead and injured civilians and
infrastructural destruction are merely collateral damage, “legitimate consequence[s] of exercising
righteous force over a demonic antagonist.” This simplistic approach to the conflict causes both
sides to use brute force against one another and feel justified in doing so. For the United States,
this involved “legitimizing the preemptive killing of Iraqi civilians” as a way to achieve the
abstract political goal of “ridding the world of evil.”41

Conflating the Enemy

A significant consequence of the narrative of good versus evil is the conflation of
enemies – in this case, “Al-Qaeda was conflated with the Taliban, terrorism and Islamism, and
the infamous phrase of the ‘terrorists and tyrants.’” This was a familiar tactic, as the government
also grouped together a variety of opponents during the Cold War.42 The image of “international
terrorism” was formed through the use of language joining disparate enemies – “from al-Qaeda

40 Ibid., 5-7.
41 Ibid., 135, 160,165.
42 Ryan, Frustrated Empire,1-2.
and the Taliban of Afghanistan to the ‘axis of evil’ in Iraq, North Korea, Iran, and beyond.’” As just one example of efforts taken to create a single, evil enemy, the Bush administration created the Office of Special Plans after 9/11 with the specific intention of finding links between Iraq — specifically, Saddam Hussein — and al-Qaeda. Such links were entirely fabricated, as the American public would learn later, but the discursive trickery was successful in justifying the war in Iraq to the public. Because of the breadth and level of danger of the terrorist threat, preemptive attacks were deemed necessary: “even the conventional prerequisite of a clear and imminent threat to national security was dismissed by the White House as irrelevant.”

Although the “enemy” in Iraq was completely unrelated to the individuals responsible for 9/11, the Bush administration was able to portray them as one in the same through the use of broad language, particularly the narrative of good versus evil. After conflating Saddam Hussein’s level of evil with the evil of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, not much more needed to be done to convince the American public: drawing a connection between disparate enemies persuaded the public of the power of the opposition. All parties posed a threat to America, its citizens, and its values; no other justification for invading Iraq was necessary.

Proximization

A final theme from the literature I wish to discuss is proximization, explored by Piotr Cap in his book *Legitimization in Political Discourse*. Although the Bush administration strove to portray the “enemy” as an “Other,” entirely different in ideology and culture, it simultaneously sought to convince the public that there was an imminent threat that needed to be promptly

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43 Ivie, *Democracy and America’s War on Terror*, 158.
45 Ivie, *Democracy and America’s War on Terror*, 158.
addressed. So, ideologically the enemy was very distant, but the threat was made to seem very close.

Cap identifies three categories of proximization: spatial, temporal, and axiological. The spatial component of proximization attempts to place the addressee in the ‘diectic center’ of an event, and external occurrences are considered “in terms of physical distance.” Applying this concept to the Iraq War, “we observe that the Bush administration have been utilizing the notion of ‘direct threat’” to convince the public of the spatial proximity of danger due Iraq’s supposed WMD possession, and to increase the nature of the threat by attempting to connect it to 9/11, an example of a time in which danger was not appropriately addressed and resulted in a physical manifestation of the danger that directly impacted the addressees. Second, the temporal component consists of convincing the addressee that the events of the spatial component are “momentous and historic and hence of central significance.” Finally, the axiological component of proximization involves the addressee’s “interpretation of alien ideological beliefs and values relative to the axiological background of the self, or the dominant ideology of the State.” Rather than the potential for physical destruction (spatial) or the political events leading up to such destruction (temporal), the axiological component “involves the narrowing of the distance between two different and opposing ideologies whose clash could lead to the events defined within the other dimensions.”

While all of the components of proximization have been utilized by the Bush administration, the spatial and axiological components were particularly common in Bush’s discourse. In his 2003 speech to the American Enterprise Institute, for example, Bush refers to “ideologies of murder,” which establishes “an axiological frame defining the essence of...

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47 Ibid., 5-6.
dictatorship-based functioning of the states opposing the US ideology of ‘freedom,’
‘democracy,’ etc. He also presents this threat as a “very physical” one, appealing to the spatial aspect of proximization.\(^{48}\) If one of the types of proximization fails to convince the public – as in the case of the 9/11 analogy, in which the spatial proximization failed as the inaccuracy of the intelligence became apparent – then another form of proximization is needed. In this case, Bush utilized axiological proximization, portraying an “extended representation of countries to be construed collectively as harbors of values endangering the axiological backbone of the US audience.”\(^{49}\) Proximization was a significant tactic used in the Bush administration’s discourse, attempting to emphasize the direct physical threat posed by the enemy, the political and historical significance of the threat, and the danger and proximity of an ideological clash.

**Document Analysis**

*Joint Vision 2020 (May 2000)*

Joint Vision 2020 was released by the Department of Defense in 2000 and was intended to set the groundwork for future U.S. military strategy. The document notes that the “office of primarily responsibility” is the Director for Strategic Plans and Policy but was formally approved by General Henry H. Shelton, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Therefore, the perspective of this document is that of some of the highest-ranking military officials within the Department of Defense, those charged with advising the president on military matters and with great influence on policy. Although this document was released prior to the 9/11 attacks, its doctrine established the basis for the strategies used subsequently in Afghanistan and Iraq. An article in the Review of African Political Economy explains the relationship between

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 9.
governmental documents related to the War on Terror – particularly the war in Iraq – including Joint Vision 2020. In it, the author links the notion of “full spectrum dominance” to later a document stressing the need for this tactic in the CENTCOM zone, which includes the Middle East, as well as a document stating that the U.S. “must be able to introduce military forces into foreign territory in a non-permissive environment.” The “arc of instability” observed in the CENTCOM region combined with the necessity of “forced entry” is “indeed a formula for full-spectrum dominance.”

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff states his vision in the beginning of the document: “Dedicated individuals and innovative organizations transforming the joint force for the 21st Century to achieve full spectrum dominance: Persuasive in Peace; Decisive in War; Preeminent in Any Form of Conflict.” Achieving “full spectrum dominance” is the primary goal established by this document. The document defines the term this way: “the ability of US forces, operating unilaterally or in combination with multinational and interagency partners, to defeat any adversary and control any situation across the full range of military operations.” The goal is not just to be able to defeat any military enemy, but to control any and all military engagements.

The document explains the technical details of how this goal will be achieved, including technological advances, “dominant maneuver, precision engagement, focused logistics,” etc. Based on the diction, the document appears to be addressed at military personnel or relevant political figures, such as the president. Although the document takes care to explain much of its terminology, the document specifically discusses what can be done by servicemen and women to

52 Ibid., 6.
53 Ibid., 3.
achieve the goal of full spectrum dominance, and how to handle obstacles. It also provides specific policy recommendations. With this military audience in mind, rather than a broader audience like the American public, particular assumptions are embedded in the language used to discuss military strategy.

Consider the “basis” of the goals established in Joint Vision 2020. The authors describe it in four points:

“the global interests of the United States and the continuing existence of a wide range of potential threats to those interests; the centrality of information technology to the evolution not only of our military, but also the capabilities of other actors around the globe; the premium a continuing broad range of military operations will place on the successful integration of multinational and interagency partners and the interoperability of processes, organizations, and systems; and our reliance on the joint force as the foundation of future U.S. military operations.”

These points illustrate the authorial view of the superiority of American ideas. To identify potential challenges to “global interests” of one country as the basis for pursuing “full spectrum domination” seems redundant. The reason to pursue control over all military engagements is to protect American “interests,” a broad word that could be manipulated to include any sort of political or economic goal, important or not. Domination is thus justified by domination. The fourth point, which emphasizes the key role of the joint force in military operations, also seems redundant: because the joint force will be the “foundation” of the future of military action, it must achieve full spectrum domination. It must become the strongest in order to be the strongest. The basis of these goals is thus reflexive. Full spectrum domination must be achieved in order

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54 Ibid., 36.
for the joint force and U.S. military in its entirety to exercise full spectrum domination. This assumes full spectrum domination as a reasonable and good goal, requiring little explanation.

The second point forming the basis of Joint Vision 2020’s goals emphasizes the importance of technological development to maintain war-fighting superiority, while the third point expresses the importance of continuing widespread military operations to maintain successful alliances and partnerships. These points address more specific aspects of full spectrum domination: technological advancement and strategic alliances. But the idea behind all four of these points is that the U.S. military is superior, should continue to be superior, and must work and fight in order to do so.

Even just from the stated goal of “full spectrum domination” and the four points defined as the basis for this goal, one can identify several embedded assumptions. Full spectrum domination, or superiority in all aspects of war and peace, is not only a good goal for the United States military, but it is necessary. This is evident from language about the importance of maintaining U.S. “interests” and “responsibilities,” as well as the claim that the U.S. will “require a military that can both win wars and contribute to peace” as the next two decades progress. Second, the interests of the United States come before the interests of any other country and deserve to be met. Third, as noted before, the U.S. military must take concrete steps to ensure its superiority.

Although this document does not address specific instances of terrorism or other forms of international conflict and was published before the start of the Afghanistan or Iraq wars, the doctrine it establishes is essential to understanding the course of those wars and the logic used to justify them. Fairclough describes discourse as the language of power, which allows the continuation of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated. While the document

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55 Ibid., 1.
does not discuss *who* is being dominated, the implication is that it could be anyone, since the role of the U.S. military, as expressed by this document, is to dominate – and thus control – everyone. It is only in subsequent documents discussing the specific political contexts for the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq that the language of domination is contextualized.

*Quadrennial Defense Review Report (Sept. 2001)*

In contrast to Joint Vision 2020, the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report addresses a more public audience rather than focusing on the upper echelons of military and political society. QDR reports are released periodically and are intended to describe developing threats faced by the U.S. and military goals to address those threats and maintain the safety of the U.S. and its citizens. The QDR was written by “senior civilian and military leadership of the Department of Defense” and involved intense consulting with the president, so the report takes a top-down approach to explaining military threats and offering suggestions for future development and action.\(^{56}\) This is very similar to Joint Vision 2020, except that civilian leaders like the president were involved in the drafting of the QDR, whereas Joint Vision 2020 was intended to serve as a recommendation *to* the president. Although the report was released after 9/11, most of it was written before the attack, but its authors say the attacks supported the direction that the report was suggesting for defense strategy.\(^{57}\)

The report begins with an introduction by then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that establishes a strong discourse about those responsible for the 9/11 attacks. He describes the attacks as “vicious” and “bloody,” brought by “the brutal, faceless weapons of terror.”\(^{58}\) On the other end of the spectrum, he describes Americans who died at work, “on American soil,” as

\(^{57}\) Ibid., v.  
\(^{58}\) Ibid., iii.
“innocent victims” of this violence. By placing those wounded and killed by the 9/11 attacks in opposition to those who carried out the 9/11 attacks, Rumsfeld establishes a binary of good versus evil.

One way that Rumsfeld describes the evilness of the terrorist “enemy” is through the process of Othering. He frames the 9/11 attacks as a war “against America and America’s way of life,” “a war against freedom itself.” The attacks were perpetrated by people opposed to American values, defined here essentially as “freedom.” The “Other,” or the enemy, does not share these values and actively seeks to destroy them. As the document states, the September 11 attacks showed that “not all accept America’s purposes or share its values.” Because of this, antagonists will attempt to attack and weaken America. But what are America’s purposes and values, and why is the rejection of them in and of itself portrayed negatively?

The document states that the goals of the United States are “to promote peace, sustain freedom, and encourage prosperity.” These goals appear again in the stated “national interests” of the U.S., which it seeks to protect through its military. These include “ensuring U.S. security and freedom of action, including U.S. sovereignty, territorial integrity, and freedom, safety of U.S. citizens at home and abroad, and protection of critical U.S. infrastructure,” as well as “honoring international commitments” and “contributing to economic well-being,” among other goals. In conjunction with honoring international commitments, the document also states that “U.S. leadership is premised on sustaining an international system that is respectful of the rule of law” – a statement that is particularly dubious considering the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were waged illegally. And, to expand on its promotion of “economic well-being,” the

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59 Ibid., iii.
60 Ibid., 1.
61 Marjorie Cohn, president of the National Lawyers Guild, affirms the illegality of the Afghanistan War because the U.S. contradicted the UN Charter, which states that countries may only engage in military
document describes the unique role of America in maintaining security throughout the world; it “provides a general sense of stability and confidence [to its allies], which is crucial to the economic prosperity that benefits much of the world.” 62

By looking purely at the first two pages of this document, one can see a very powerful portrayal of America as a force for good. The United States seeks peace and freedom; it wants to help other countries around the world prosper; it promotes the rule of law internationally; and it tries to protect its own citizens, as well as its allies around the world. Ironically, the document contradicts the vision for military strategy established in Joint Vision 2020. The QDR report states, “America seeks to use its current political, economic, and military advantages not to dominate others, but to build a durable framework upon which the United States and its allies and friends can prosper in freedom now and into the future.” 63 Joint Vision 2020 establishes the military doctrine of seeking “full spectrum domination.” At least in terms of military force, Joint Vision 2020 explicitly establishes domination as a goal, contrary to the QDR’s claim. Moreover, the emphasis placed on military domination in Joint Vision 2020 promotes the use of force rather than diplomacy, prevents the development of a more balanced foreign policy, and encourages continued opposition to the U.S. Both documents refer only to the advancement of the U.S. and its allies, rather than pursuing more mutually beneficial international policy. Regardless, the operations against other countries in self-defense or with Security Council approval. The Afghanistan War meets neither condition. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan condemned the Iraq War as a breach of the UN Charter as well. According to Prof. Mark Salter, President Bush attempted to reframe the mission of the UN Charter, which aims to “protect future generations from the ‘scourge of war.’” Bush individualizes this by claiming the goal of UN members was to protect world peace from “the will and wickedness of any man.” He goes on to discuss Saddam Hussein’s crimes and failure to account for missing American bodies from the Gulf War. Bush’s reframing of the UN Charter portrays Hussein as barbarous and uncivilized and therefore deserving of war; Bush fails, however, to “account for [Iraqi] deaths caused by UN sanctions” or Iraqi deaths after the Gulf War “as a result of their failure to overthrow the Hussein regime.” Dahr Jamail, "Afghanistan: Where Empires Go To Die," Truthout, Sept. 17, 2009; "Iraq War Illegal, Says Annan," BBC News (BBC, 16 Sept. 2004); Mark B. Salter, “The Clash of Civilizations and the War on Terror(ists): An Imperial Discourse,” Global Dialogue 5.1 (2003).

61 Ibid., 1.
QDR’s portrayal of the U.S. as pursuing freedom rather than domination contributes to the overall image of America it creates. America’s noble goals establish it as a protagonist; the authorial voice does not indicate any negative aspects of U.S. policy, nor any valid reason for another country to attack, or even to disagree with, the United States.

The QDR also emphasizes the importance of the United States defending itself and its citizens from the constant threat of attack by those who do not support American values. It claims, “The highest priority of the U.S. military is to defend the Nation from all enemies.”64 It places emphasis on partnerships and alliances abroad in order to ensure security at home, as these relationships are the basis of “the political stability on which the prosperity of civilized nations is built.”65 In order to protect itself and its allies, the U.S. must know how to adapt to a changing security environment because one never knows when an adversary could attack, or what technology and strategy the adversary might use. The U.S., the QDR speculates, “is likely to be challenged by adversaries who possess a wide range of capabilities, including asymmetric approaches to warfare.”66 The document even specifically mentions the potential of an enemy using weapons of mass destruction – what would eventually serve as the justification for the war in Iraq. As later documents will show, the notion of Iraq posing the threat of developing nuclear weapons was a key component of discourse directed at the public surrounding the invasion, despite the flimsy evidence and internal documents showing that the WMD threat was little more than a rhetorical tool.

Although the report claims that the occurrence of the 9/11 attacks – as well as the constant threats the U.S. faces from those who do not agree with American “interests” or “values” – gives good reason to pursue changes in military strategy more quickly, it does not

64 Ibid., 18.
65 Ibid., 15.
66 Ibid., 3.
portray the 9/11 attacks as unique. Indeed, it is just one example of many kinds of aggression the U.S. could potentially face. So, while it fits into the framework established in this document and in Joint Vision 2020 in warfare engagement, it is not portrayed as an event that in and of itself should change the course of military policy.

In general, the QDR uses less language about the “terrorist” “enemy” and more language about the United States. It portrays the U.S. (and its citizens) as a positive force and the protagonist in the “war” started by “terrorists” against “American values.” It juxtaposes these two actors to establish a simplistic narrative of good versus evil. In this case, rhetoric about the goodness of the U.S. is just as significant and powerful as rhetoric about the evilness of the “enemy.” It differs from Joint Vision 2020 in its focus on positive American values and pursuits that benefit people globally, rather than on domination as a military goal. Both documents, however, seem to emphasize American superiority, albeit from different angles.

Transcript of President Bush’s address to a joint session of Congress (Sept. 2001)

Nine days after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush delivered a pivotal speech to a joint session of Congress. In it, Bush outlines the relationship between al-Qaeda, the organization responsible for the 9/11 attacks, and the Taliban, the ruling party in Afghanistan that he charges with “harboring terrorists.” He also declares a “war on terror,” a war not limited to the fight against al-Qaeda but a global war of those supporting freedom versus those against it.

“On September 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country,” Bush says of the 9/11 attackers. The dominant discursive theme throughout this speech is American freedom, and the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks embody a dangerous threat to this freedom. He refers to America as a “country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom,”
the freedom that represents the “way of life” that terrorists seek to “disrupt.” Bush addresses a question he believes Americans have been asking in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks: “Why do they hate us?” He claims that freedom is the reason that al-Qaeda carried out the attacks: “They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”

Yet the freedom that Bush claims terrorists are attempting to attack is not limited to America, but to all “civilized” nations; the war is not simply between the U.S. and al-Qaeda, but is a global war between ideologies. While the “civilized world” supports “progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom,” the terrorists behind the 9/11 attacks “follow in the path of fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism.” So, while the War on Terror may start with al-Qaeda, “it will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.”

Bush also defines the Taliban regime as “committing murder” through its “sponsoring and sheltering and supplying terrorists.” Bush is sure to implicate not only terrorist organizations, but also any regimes complicit in terrorist activity as part of the “enemy.” Because of this, Bush frames the Taliban in opposition to “civilized” values. In Afghanistan, he says,

“Women are not allowed to attend school. You can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough.”

The Taliban, too, exemplifies “totalitarianism” and opposes freedom. While Bush does not explicitly declare war against the Taliban in this speech, his does provide them with a list of non-negotiable demands. He elaborates on the position of the Taliban by stating that any country that harbors terrorists or otherwise supports terrorism “will be regarded by the United States as a

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68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
hostile regime." He then poses a choice: “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.”

Although Bush portrays the Taliban and al-Qaeda’s disdain for freedom as the most fundamental element of their ideological inferiority, he fails to recognize alternative interpretations of freedom. In fact, freedom is a fundamental component of al-Qaeda’s foundations. Three foundations form al-Qaeda’s ideology: first, the establishment of an Islamic state with shari’a law; second, “the liberation of the homelands,” including their resources, from aggressors (such as the U.S.); and third, “the liberation of the human being,” which involves “a contractual relationship between Muslims and their rulers that would permit people to choose and criticize their leaders,” freeing them of (often U.S.-backed) dictators. While al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri stipulates that leaders must rule based on “Islamic laws and principles,” he also affirms the importance of free elections and the rights of the people.\footnote{Christopher M. Blanchard, \textit{Al-Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology}, Rep., Congressional Research Service, July 9, 2007, 10-11.}

Rhetorical support for freedom does not necessarily correlate with policy, of course. It is important to keep in mind that both the Taliban and al-Qaeda are responsible for tens of thousands of deaths. One report suggests that al-Qaeda kills eight times more Muslims than non-Muslims.\footnote{Yassin Musharbash, "Surprising Study On Terrorism: Al-Qaida Kills Eight Times More Muslims Than Non-Muslims," \textit{Spiegel Online}. Dec. 3, 2009.} The Taliban, too, is an intensely oppressive regime, responsible for multiple war crimes including “targeting civilians, indiscriminate attacks by suicide bombers, summary executions, and use of children in combat including as suicide bombers.”\footnote{"Afghanistan: No Amnesty for Talibian Crimes," \textit{Human Rights Watch}, Nov. 25, 2012.} Still, at the very least, the goals of al-Qaeda indicate the importance of freedom from foreign oppression. Again, these ideological complexities are entirely ignored by Bush. He is right to point out the totalitarian

\footnote{Ibid.}
nature of the Taliban, but fails to acknowledge the ways in which al-Qaeda pursues freedom, albeit a form of freedom that may not fit into Bush’s conception of the term.

Through the portrayal of al-Qaeda and the Taliban as sharing a value system that is antithetical to that of the U.S., Bush not only portrays the moral superiority of the U.S., but he also portrays these “terrorist” forces as “Other.” He describes the seemingly absurd policies of the Taliban as a representation of the disparity between their values and those that Americans are so familiar with. By framing the Taliban and al-Qaeda as the antithesis of the “civilized” United States, he essentially calls them uncivilized. Bush’s portrayal of the terrorist enemy ought to make the audience aware of not only the vast difference between “us and them,” but also the inferiority of them as Others. Bush thus contributes to the centuries-old discourse of Orientalism outlined by Said. Although Bush is sure to emphasize that the enemy is not Muslims or Arabs or even Afghans, his conflation of the values of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, two “Eastern” entities with significantly different goals and ideologies, reveals his Orientalist thinking. In doing so, he also enhances the image of the threat posed by these groups.

In his portrayal of the Taliban and al-Qaeda as uncivilized, Bush ignores the history of U.S.-Afghan relations that led to the 9/11 attacks and thus fails to present the complexity of the U.S.’s relationship to these groups. During the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the U.S. provided material support for the Afghan mujahideen in an effort to force Soviet withdrawal. Once this goal was actualized, the U.S. quickly lost interest in Afghanistan, leaving the war-torn country to fend for itself in the following power struggle. U.S. interest was only revitalized with the rise of the Taliban. Initially, the U.S. viewed the Taliban as a “source of stability” for the region that would allow “the construction of an oil pipeline across Central Asia.” When the Taliban rejected U.S. terms for the project, the U.S. quickly turned against the Taliban. In particular, the U.S.
began to focus on Osama bin Laden and his relationship to the Taliban. The U.S. imposed crippling economic sanctions when the Taliban refused to turn bin Laden in.\textsuperscript{74}

Moreover, Bush fails to examine the similarities and ties between the Taliban and his Saudi allies. Saudi Arabia was a close ally of the Taliban in the 1990s and helped them rise to power. The Taliban’s ideology also shares many similarities with Saudi theology.\textsuperscript{75} By simply writing off al-Qaeda and the Taliban as uncivilized and Other, Bush avoids discussing the historical circumstances that brought these groups into power and the U.S.’s role in shaping these circumstances.

Bush also paints the threat of al-Qaeda as unique, potent, and proximate. The uniqueness is shown in Bush’s reference to the 9/11 attacks bringing about “a different world.” He also describes the brutality of the “terrorists” to emphasize the threat they pose. He claims, “The terrorists’ directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans and make no distinctions among military and civilians, including women and children.” An organization (presumably the “terrorists” he refers to is al-Qaeda) with such destructive goals seems to pose a threat to the U.S. and ought to warrant a response. Not only is the terrorist threat potent, but also pervasive and therefore proximate. Bush describes terrorist training camps such as those found in Afghanistan, where recruits are “trained in tactics of terror,” later to return home and carry out such tactics or “sent to hide in countries around the world to plot evil and destruction.” This is truly a global threat; Bush claims, “There are thousands of these terrorists in more than 60


countries.” Such claims demonstrate the potency of the terrorist threat, its unique organizational strength, and the potential proximity of the threat to America and its allies.76

Through his rhetoric expressing the “Otherness” of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, including their hatred of freedom and disdain for civilized values, and through his portrayal of these groups – and “terrorists” in general – as uniquely potent and pervasive, Bush provides a framework with which to justify an American military response. He advises servicemen and women to “be ready” to act; he warns civilians to expect widespread increases in security, particularly air safety measures; he announces the creation of the Office of Homeland Security; and he tells Americans to expect “a lengthy campaign unlike any other we have seen,” one that could potentially involve “dramatic strikes visible on TV” but could also involve “covert operations secret even in success.” Bush says the United States “will direct every resource at our command – every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war” in order to accomplish the goal of eliminating terrorism throughout the world. Using any means necessary only appears justifiable due to the strong language Bush uses to portray the threat. Bush appears to believe that the goal of eliminating terrorism is feasible, for the outcome of this conflict is “certain”: “Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.”77 The conflict between the United States and al-Qaeda, and more broadly between terrorism and civilization, is based on opposing value systems. Not only did terrorists attack the U.S. because of America’s superior value system, but terrorists are also destined to lose in the battle with the U.S. because of American moral superiority. Terrorists are dangerous, but they are Other, and they are inferior, so in a battle of good versus evil, they will lose.

76 Bush, "Transcript of President Bush's Address."
77 Ibid.
This strong view of U.S. exceptionalism and the inferiority of American enemies results in policy measures that resemble the behavior of groups whose values the U.S. claims to reject. Rampant claims about al-Qaeda and the Taliban’s authoritarianism, disdain for freedom, and uncivilized values allows the U.S. to pursue even more violent and oppressive policies than its enemies. This “war on terror” has resulted in indiscriminate drone strikes, which kill far more civilians than potential “terrorists”; “torture, enforced disappearances, [and] rendition to trial in torturing states”; and National Security Agency spying on the personal communications of U.S. citizens. If it weren’t for the Bush administration’s exceptionalist ideology, perhaps it would understand the hypocrisy of its own policies.

Of the assumptions embedded in this speech, the most significant is the propositional assumption that the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks targeted America because of their disdain for freedom. (In fact, he believes hatred of freedom is the motive behind all terrorists.) On the contrary, Osama bin Laden issued two fatwas years prior to 9/11 declaring al-Qaeda’s war against America. The reasons for this war on America include the “occupation of the two Holy Places,” located in Saudi Arabia, “by the armies of American Crusaders”; U.S. support for violence perpetrated against Muslims in Palestine, Somalia, Chechnya, Bosnia, and other countries; and the close relationship between the U.S. and Israel, which bin Laden refers to as “the Zionist-Crusader alliance.” Bin Laden describes in detail the impact of U.S. “occupation” of Saudi Arabia, particularly economic issues like the fixing of oil industry prices “to suit the American economy and ignoring the economy of the country.” He blames the U.S.-Saudi

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relationship for the degradation of religion and the suspension of shari’a law, which he believes dismantles the regime’s legitimacy.\textsuperscript{79}

However, by assuming “freedom” is the reason for the 9/11 attacks, Bush avoids a discussion of U.S. foreign policy or other political motives of the perpetrators. Instead, he makes a series of value assumptions, including that freedom, pluralism, and tolerance are desirable and are “civilized” values. He also makes the propositional assumption that the United States possesses these superior values, whereas the “terrorists” possess inferior values, such as authoritarianism and suppression. The superiority of American values guarantees U.S. victory in the War on Terror.

\textit{The National Security Strategy of September 2002}

By the release of the White House National Security Strategy in September 2002, the Bush administration had developed a powerful rhetoric that frames its enemy as evil, Other, and opposed to freedom. National Security Strategies are documents released by the executive branch that lay out U.S. national security issues and plans to confront them. The documents are primarily intended to address Congress, as well as the American public. In this particular release of the document, one year after 9/11, President Bush seeks to show the uniqueness of the enemy America is up against in the twenty-first century. I focus only on the introduction to the document written by President Bush.

The document’s introduction begins by framing the current state of international affairs as a result of the victory of liberty in the fight “between liberty and totalitarianism” in the twentieth century. In this century, “only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic

\textsuperscript{79} Osama bin Laden, "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," \textit{PBS Newshour}, Aug. 23, 1996.
human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity.” Liberty is thus defined as the protection of human rights and political and economic freedom. These are rights that everyone around the world desires, and it is the duty of “freedom-loving people” to protect such values “against their enemies.” Bush frames the United States as part of this category of “freedom-lovers” with a role to protect the freedom of people around the world from the enemies of freedom who seek to destroy it.  

Bush also emphasizes the military, economic, and political strength of the United States, strength that must be used in this fight for freedom internationally. This strength will be used to “defend the peace” through combating “terrorists and tyrants,” “preserve the peace” through alliances with other strong global leaders, and “extend the peace” by pushing for freer societies throughout the world. Here, Bush offers the first explanation of who the “enemies” of freedom are: terrorists and tyrants. He also defines some goals of the U.S., which not only include defending freedom, but also spreading peace.

In spite of America’s strength, Bush claims, “In keeping with our heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press for unilateral advantage.” Not only does this hint at a dubious understanding of American “heritage,” but it also contradicts the goal of full-spectrum domination established by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Joint Vision 2020, which explicitly states that the U.S. must be able to act unilaterally in order to “accomplish the objectives directed by the National Command Authorities.” Neoconservatives like Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, 

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 The notion that the U.S. has always been a beacon of freedom is severely misguided, considering the forced removal and ethnocide of Native Americans; the enslavement of Africans and subsequent Jim
Dick Cheney, and other members of the neoconservative think tank Project for the New American Century also proposed a shift in U.S. policy to establish a “unilateral U.S. empire.” A policy paper published by the group in 2000 suggests that the collapse of the Soviet Union created the opportunity for the U.S. to “shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests,” and that the U.S. should seek to expand its “advantageous position” for as long as possible. The positioning of the U.S. relies upon “a secure foundation (of) unquestioned U.S. military preeminence.” As Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Cheney went on to secure high positions in the Bush administration, their ideas about a unilateral American empire founded upon military superiority went with them. That such ideas were fundamental to the ideologies of top Bush administration officials illustrates the true goals of U.S. superiority, contradicting Bush’s references to “freedom” and “peace.”

Moreover, Bush’s definitions of the “enemy” and the U.S.’s goals contradict U.S. policy at the time. In reality, the U.S. has often supported tyrannical regimes that do not promote free or democratic societies, including the Saudi and Omani regimes and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Bush fails to address the tyranny and oppression of these regimes or countless other U.S. allies throughout the Middle East and the world. This signals to the Bush administration’s understanding of “terrorists” (and apparently even “tyrants”) to simply mean those opposed to U.S. policy – not necessarily those who actually pose a greater threat to freedom.

Crow laws; governmental backlash against civil rights, Black Power, and leftist organizers; a history of police brutality; gratuitous sentencing for minor crimes resulting in mass incarceration, particularly of poor Americans and people of color; and very slow progress for the LGBTQ community. While gains for freedom and equality have certainly been made since America’s founding, de facto and de jure policies in the U.S. still primarily serve to benefit affluent white men above all other citizens. For more on the history of U.S. oppression of African Americans, see Michelle Alexander’s The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness (New York: New Press, 2011); Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Joint Vision 2020,” 6.

Bush also describes the uniqueness of the enemy in this document, as well as how the particular characteristics of the enemy should impact the goals of the U.S. and its freedom-fighting allies. The enemy of today is not like the enemy of the past, who “needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America.” Today’s enemy consists of a “shadowy network of individuals” that are able to endanger America “for less than it costs to purchase a single tank.” He asserts that the organization of terrorists is designed “to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us.” By this logic, the U.S. also poses a dangerous and unique threat due to its covert operations at home and abroad. In the Middle East, this included the overthrow of democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 to install the dictatorial Shah and give Western powers greater access to Iran’s oil reserves. In a more recent covert operation, the U.S. under the Reagan administration funneled arms into Iran during an arms embargo and used the revenues to fund the Nicaraguan contras, anti-Communist rebels fighting the democratically elected Sandinistas. As part of this operation, the U.S. also facilitated narcotics trafficking by the contras into the U.S. to fund their movement. This resulted in a massive crack epidemic in American cities, particularly in African American communities. Evidently, the U.S. does not hold itself to the same standards as it holds its enemies.

Bush’s seamless transition between referring to the “enemy” generally and mentioning “terrorists” implies that Bush understands the terms to be equivalent and interchangeable. This sets a precedent for any state or individual opposed to American policies or values to be

85 Ibid.
classified as “terrorist.” His claim that the greatest threat to the U.S. “lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology” portrays the “enemy” as a unique kind of threat that has never been faced before. Part of this new threat is the potential to be attacked by weapons of mass destruction, which Bush claims enemies of the U.S. have “openly declared” to be seeking. Yet Bush does not elaborate on the supposed evidence, nor which “enemies” have made such a claim. Bush utilizes this language about the danger of the enemy to justify the government’s actions against countries or organizations opposed to U.S. policy – even though the U.S. may utilize similar tactics and pose a similar (if not greater) global threat.

After describing the threat posed by the enemy of the new century, Bush asserts that the U.S. and other leading countries must fight this enemy together. The world’s great powers are now united by “common dangers of terrorist violence and chaos,” and increasingly by their “common values” as well – specifically, democracy and economic freedom. The goal of these world leaders, then, should be to build “a balance of power that favors freedom.” Nations like the U.S. that already have freedom must “actively fight terror,” and any nation that requires international stability must “help prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction.” Bush establishes commonalities between the values and goals of the U.S. and countries throughout the world and uses those commonalities to advocate his own policy objective: fighting a war on terror, including the threat of weapons of mass destruction. He establishes the “responsibility” of the U.S. in “leading this great mission” as well, demonstrating the U.S.’s commitment to these goals and expressing his belief that the U.S. is the most ethically qualified to front the cause.

Throughout Bush’s introduction to this edition of the National Security Strategy, he espouses a narrative of good versus evil, wherein the United States and other countries that
support “freedom” are good and any forces fighting against freedom are evil. He also uses the words “enemies” and “terrorists” more or less interchangeably with no explanation of to whom specifically those words are referring. He thus assumes that the audience of the document understands who the “enemy” is – who is threatening American freedom, who is using modern technology against “open societies,” and who is rapidly pursuing the development of WMDs with the goal of threatening America. His framing of good versus evil also lends itself to the portrayal of the enemy as “Other.” The enemy is always defined in contrast to what America is: the enemy detests freedom, modern technology, and democracy, and embodies totalitarianism. Yet the specifics of who constitutes the category of “enemy” are never defined, nor are the values of freedom and democracy, which America apparently espouses and stands for.

From these narratives, one can also identify several assumptions embedded in Bush’s discourse. Bush makes the existential assumption that the United States has an “enemy.” He makes the propositional assumption that terrorists constitute this enemy, and that the enemy is engaging in attempts to attack the United States. Although freedom is not specifically defined, Bush also makes a value assumption that freedom is desirable, not just to the audience of the text but also to the vast majority of the global population – excluding those engaged in the fight against it.

In addition to assumptions, Bush also embeds ideology within this text. His assumptions are largely the product of acceptance of these broader ideologies, which illustrate his perception of the world and the power dynamics within it. Among the most fundamental ideologies embedded in the text is that America is superior to all other nations. Bush specifically mentions America’s economic and military superiority, but he also alludes to America’s superiority of values. Although he praises other global powers that accept democracy and economic freedom,
he issues this praise from a position of authority, as if these values originated in and are epitomized by America. The unique position of power that the United States holds and its concurrent moral superiority hint at American exceptionalism, the notion that America is somehow different and distinct from all other nations because of its history of “democracy,” “freedom,” and unprecedented degree of power.


National Security Presidential Directive 17/Homeland Security Presidential Directive 4 details the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction. It establishes a strategy with three key components: counterproliferation to combat WMD use, strengthened nonproliferation to combat WMD proliferation, and consequence management to respond to WMD use. Although the document does not refer to al-Qaeda, the Taliban, or Saddam Hussein’s regime, its rhetoric is shaped by the political environment in which it was published, namely the “post-9/11” United States.

This document portrays the security environment of the time as very unique in light of the 9/11 attacks. NSPD-17 says WMDs in the hands of “hostile states and terrorists” is “one of the greatest security challenges facing the United States,” and that the prevention and deterrence of WMD attacks by these groups is one of the most challenging issues faced by the U.S. Framing the threat in terms of terrorist groups is evidence of the post-9/11 mentality of the authors. The threats the U.S. faces today, they write, “are far more diverse and less predictable than those of the past. States hostile to the United States and to our friends and allies have demonstrated their willingness to take high risks to achieve their goals, and are aggressively pursuing WMD and their means of delivery as critical tools in this effort.” They portray the threat posed by these
regimes and organizations as uniquely brutal, as they are willing to use extremely violent means to accomplish their goals. It also explains the uniqueness of the threat they pose because of “current and potential future linkages between terrorist groups and state sponsors of terrorism.” However, the document does not mention specific groups they are referring to or what goals they have, nor does it provide any evidence of anti-American regimes or organizations pursuing WMDs. Nevertheless, this description contributes to the characterization of the threat, as well as the response: like the U.S. War on Terror and homeland security strategy, “the U.S. approach to combat WMD represents a fundamental change from the past.” A new kind of threat requires a new kind of response.\footnote{George W. Bush Administration, \textit{NSPD 17 / HSPD 4 (unclassified version): National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction}. (National Security Presidential Directives, Dec. 2002).}

NSPD-17 also emphasizes the importance of the U.S. relations with other nations. It repeatedly mentions America’s “friends and allies,” whom the U.S. must also seek to protect through these new counterproliferation, nonproliferation, and consequence management tactics. It claims, “Defending the American homeland is the most basic responsibility of our government,” but it goes on to say that the U.S. should prepare to respond to WMDs employed “against our forces deployed abroad, and to assist friends and allies.”\footnote{Ibid.} Because WMDs in the hand of enemy regimes or terrorist groups poses a threat to both the U.S. and its friends and allies, “it is vital that we work closely with like-minded countries on all elements of our comprehensive proliferation strategy.”\footnote{Ibid.} Although it does not offer examples of countries that are “like-minded” or what shared traits that would include, it is likely from the context that the text is referring to the friends and allies of the U.S. Establishing a group of “like-minded countries” also establishes a group of countries that are not like-minded – in this case, the regimes and
terrorists seeking the development of WMDs. This puts the regimes and terrorists into the
category of the “Other”; not just their goals are different, but their way of thinking is even
different, foreign to that of the U.S. and its allies.

Because of the intensity of the threat posed by “terrorists” and other enemies of the
United States acquiring WMDs, the document outlines a particular strategy for preventing,
deterring, and defending against WMDs. However, it also discusses broadly the kinds of actions
the U.S. is justified in taking to respond to the threat. Because some regimes are already
committed to the process of developing or increasing WMD capabilities, the document claims
that the U.S. will utilize “country-specific strategies” that aid the U.S. and its allies the most in
eliminating this threat. In addition to developing unique strategies for various countries pursuing
WMDs, NSPD-17 also reserves the right of the U.S. to use “preemptive measures” as a part of its
defense against enemies with WMDs, including the use of “capabilities to detect and destroy an
adversary’s WMD assets before these weapons are used.”

In addition to establishing a basis for preemption, perhaps the most significant claim
made in the document is the right of the U.S. to use any means necessary to face the WMD
threat, reserving its “right to respond with overwhelming force.” The differences between the
unclassified and classified version is particularly telling. In the declassified version, the
document claims that the force it uses in response to a WMD threat could include “resort to all of
our options.” However, in the classified version, this phrase is changed to “potentially nuclear
weapons.” This phrase in the classified version of NSPD-17 is the only time in the entire
document in which the authors acknowledge the U.S.’s possession of nuclear weapons.

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94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
A key ideology underlying NSPD-17 is that of American exceptionalism. The document emphasizes the danger posed by unfriendly regimes and terrorist groups getting access to WMDs. However, it sometimes refers to WMDs as a threat themselves without referring to a specific actor who would be using them. Yet, in the unclassified version, the document makes no reference at all to the fact that the U.S. is one of only nine countries possessing nuclear weapons, and its supply is over 24 times as large as that of any other country, excluding Russia. It also does not note that the U.S. is the only country in history to use WMDs against an enemy. By remaining silent on these key points, the document fails to criticize the role of the U.S. in the perpetuation of WMD production. After all, the U.S. and eight other countries with WMDs also appear as a threat to countries around the world without them. The underlying ideology of NSPD-17 is that America is exceptional – it has WMDs to defend itself and is willing to use them when leaders deem it necessary. Yet other countries without WMDs do not have the right to try to defend themselves against the potential of aggression from any of the countries with WMDs. The bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima were the most destructive terrorist attacks – by which I mean deliberate attacks against civilians carried out with political motives – in global history. Because of the ideology of American exceptionalism informing NSPD-17, the document fails to acknowledge the hypocrisy of criticizing terrorist groups and enemy regimes for seeking WMDs – a claim that is never backed up with evidence – when the U.S. possesses one of the largest nuclear stockpiles in the world and is the only country to have ever committed acts of terror using them.

U.N. Secretary of State Colin Powell Addresses the UN Security Council (Feb. 2003)

97 “Nuclear Arsenals,” ICAN: International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.
In an address to the UN Security Council, Secretary of State Colin Powell claims Iraq has failed to comply with “disarmament obligations” established by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1441, passed on Nov. 8, 2002 unanimously with the intent to “disarm Iraq of is weapons of mass destruction.” He outlines the evidence of the development of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the threat that this poses. While there is debate about whether this is the penultimate speech leading up to the war in Iraq – Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, Powell’s aid at the time who compiled the speech, claims that the president and other administrative figureheads had already resolved to start the war – this speech certainly added fuel to the fire leading up to the invasion.

In the first half of the speech, Secretary Powell reports evidence gathered from various intelligence sources showing that Iraq is pursuing WMDs and has failed to comply with Resolution 1441. He plays recordings of Iraqi officials discussing their “evacuation” of nuclear materials, rather than the destruction of such supplies, to prepare for inspections. Some of the evidence provided is the ordered removal of forbidden weapons from Hussein’s palaces; important files being stowed in cars and materials being kept in the homes of government officials and scientists; computer hard drives at weapons facilities being replaced; satellite images allegedly showing forbidden WMD materials that had been moved from WMD facilities; and a refusal to allow reconnaissance flights “that would give the inspectors a better sense of what's being moved before, during and after inspectors.” Comparing this behavior with Iraq in the 1990s, Powell says, “We know that Iraq today is actively using its considerable intelligence

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capabilities to hide its illicit activities,” in particular, “their efforts to produce more weapons of mass destruction.”

Powell then begins discussing Iraq’s progress toward various kinds of WMDs, including biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons. Powell refers to vast supplies of biological weapons, a supply that Iraq was very hesitant to admit. Powell immediately transitions to talking about the U.S. anthrax scare in the fall of 2001. He compares the destructive quality of tiny amount of anthrax used in these envelopes with the thousands of liters of anthrax in Iraq’s possession, which, in a concentrated, dry form, would be tens of thousands the quantity of the amount used in the U.S. Through his seamless alternation between the U.S. anthrax scare and Iraq’s anthrax possession, Powell effectively implicates Iraq in the occurrence of this attack. By implying this connection, Powell shows the danger posed by Iraq’s possession of WMDs and its willingness to target the U.S.

In regards to chemical weapons, Powell states, “No country has had more battlefield experience with chemical weapons since World War I than Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.” He notes that Hussein has used chemical weapons on another country and Iraqi citizens, that these weapons have not been accurately accounted for, and that Iraq has been known to lie about what weapons it possesses. Despite a lack of accurate reporting from Iraq, Powell estimates that Iraq’s stockpile likely consists of enough chemical agent for 16,000 battlefield rockets. The irony of Powell’s characterization of Hussein for keeping large stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons is that the U.S. has not only known of Iraq’s use of these weapons in the past, particularly in its war against Iran, but it also continued to provide Iraq with shipments of these

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100 Powell, “Secretary of State Addresses the U.N. Security Council.”
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
weapons.\textsuperscript{103} He refers to these weapons as “horrific” and condemns the secrecy Iraq has maintained over its possession of them, yet the U.S. played a vital role in providing Hussein with access to these weapons.

Lastly, Powell embarks on the task of convincing the United Nations of Iraq’s possession of nuclear materials and its goal of developing nuclear weapons. He claims that Saddam Hussein is “determined” to develop nuclear weapons and has been for at least a decade. Intelligence from a defector revealed that Hussein had “a massive clandestine nuclear weapons program,” likely valued at several billion dollars. One piece of evidence Powell provides is Hussein’s continuous efforts “to acquire high-specification aluminum tubes,” efforts that continued even after Iraq was under investigation for possessing nuclear materials. While Powell admits that these tubes have other uses besides enriching uranium for nuclear weapons, he concludes, “Iraq had no business buying them for any purpose. They are banned for Iraq.” Although he does not provide evidence proving the aluminum tubes were being used for nuclear production, he argues that Iraq’s history of lying about its weapons supplies should make it unworthy of trust. Indeed, Powell seems certain that Hussein is developing missiles “in order to project power, to threaten, and to deliver chemical, biological and, if we let him, nuclear warheads.”\textsuperscript{104} Of course, Powell would learn later that all of the intelligence upon which his claims were based was false.\textsuperscript{105} But at the time, claims of Iraq possessing materials to build nuclear weapons, as well as speculation about Iraq’s goals for using such weapons, served to generate fear and distrust of Iraq in order to justify an invasion.

\textsuperscript{103} Shane Harris and Matthew M. Aid, "Exclusive: CIA Files Prove America Helped Saddam as He Gassed Iran," \textit{Foreign Policy}, Aug. 26, 2013.
\textsuperscript{104} Powell, “Secretary of State Addresses the U.N. Security Council.”
\textsuperscript{105} Wilkerson et al., "Decade After Iraq WMD Speech at UN, Ex-Powell Aide Lawrence Wilkerson Debates Author Norman Solomon.”
The portion of this speech that deserves the most attention is the second half, which focuses on links between Saddam Hussein and Islamic terrorism. A key reason for the administration’s concern is that any WMDs developed by Iraq could fall into the hands of terrorist organizations, which Powell claims Hussein has close ties with. “Iraq and terrorism go back decades,” he states, explaining the training of Palestinian Liberation Front soldiers in Baghdad and funding the families of suicide bombers in Palestine during the Intifada.\textsuperscript{106} In particular, Powell explains the connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda, the group responsible for the 9/11 attacks. He claims Iraq hosts a terrorist network led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, “an associated in collaborator [sic] of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda liutenants,” and that this connection is unsurprising as Iraq has maintained ties with al-Qaeda for decades.\textsuperscript{107} Powell conflates Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda’s goals, portraying them as a unified terrorist front opposed to the values of the United States.

Powell confronts the notion that the goals of Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda are incompatible because of Hussein’s secularism and al-Qaeda’s emphasis on Islam. Powell argues, “Ambition and hatred are enough to bring Iraq and al-Qaeda together.”\textsuperscript{108} He claims representatives from Hussein’s regime trained al-Qaeda members in document forgery in the 1990s, and reemphasizes the potential of al-Qaeda developing WMDs with Iraq’s help. This fear is dependent upon two assumptions: 1) that, without U.S. intervention, Iraq has the desire and ability to successfully develop WMDs, and 2) that al-Qaeda also intends to pursue WMD production. Powell claims there is evidence supporting the veracity of both of these assumptions. His argument that Iraq supports al-Qaeda and will help it grow stronger demonstrates the

\textsuperscript{106} Powell, “Secretary of State Addresses the U.N. Security Council.”
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
potency of the terrorist threat and the necessity of suppressing Hussein’s regime, particularly through destruction of its nuclear programs, in order to prevent al-Qaeda from gaining strength.

Powell depicts the Hussein regime as immoral, referring to his use of terror for “decades.” He describes Hussein’s violations of human rights, such as the ethnic cleansing of Kurds and the use of mustard and nerve gas against them, as well as the fact that tens of thousands of people have gone missing in Iraq in the past decade. Hussein’s history of violence and human rights abuses make his regime one not to be trusted, but feared. “None of this should come as a surprise to any of us,” Powell says of Hussein’s relationship with al-Qaeda, citing Iraq’s consistent support of terrorism even before the proliferation of terrorist networks in the region. Iraq’s denial of accusations of ties with al-Qaeda is “not credible”; indeed, Hussein’s portrayal of Iraq’s goals and weapons possessions are “all a web of lies.” In summation, Hussein’s regime is one that is seeking domination of the Middle East and planning for attacks against the U.S. by pursuing WMDs and supporting a powerful terrorist network. If the U.S. does not act against this threat, “we are confronting an even more frightening future.”

Powell’s address also portrays the threat posed by al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein as proximate. By exaggerating the potential for al-Qaeda to secure WMDs and use them against the U.S., Powell makes the threat seem spatially proximate. The urgency with which he delivers the speech and the emphasis on the significance of the threat illustrates its temporal proximity. Through his language describing Hussein as immoral and untrustworthy, Powell formulates an ideological clash that heightens the imminent possibility of the use of WMDs. A relationship between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda increases the proximity of the terrorist threat, and therefore makes the threat more dangerous and war more necessary.

109 Ibid.
Moreover, Secretary Powell also conflates the goals of Hussein with those of al-Qaeda, arguing that their “hatred” brings them together. By doing so, he portrays the threat they pose as unified and extremely dangerous, as they each have the ability to increase the strength of the other. He makes assumptions about the similarities of their goals, particularly about both groups’ goals of attaining WMDs. By emphasizing the danger that would be posed by a terrorist state or organization possessing WMDs, Powell attempts to persuade the United Nations of the necessity of invading Iraq to prevent the expansion of the terrorist threat. Although Powell fails to gain enough support for the UN – or even for Congress – to grant permission for war against Iraq, the U.S. launched an invasion anyway. Indeed, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan referred to the war as “illegal” and a breach of the UN charter.\textsuperscript{110} The lack of UN support begs the question of the purpose of such rhetoric, as the U.S. launched a war regardless of the response. This disregard for international opinion falls in line with rhetoric of American superiority and exceptionalism. Regardless of international permission, the U.S. executive branch felt it was justified in pursuing its own objectives, even if it meant engaging in an illegal war. American exceptionalism permeates the executive branch so deeply that it believes its pursuits are above the control of international law.

\textit{Testimony of Donald Rumsfeld for the 9/11 Commission (March 2004)}

In this speech, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is addressing the 9/11 Commission, a bipartisan committee formed by Congress charged with the task of drafting a report describing the conditions of the 9/11 attacks, specifically the U.S.’s degree of preparation, the U.S.’s reaction, and strategies to prevent attacks from occurring in the future.\textsuperscript{111} Delivered

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} "Iraq War Illegal, Says Annan,"  \textit{BBC News}.
\item \textsuperscript{111} \textit{National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States}, http://www.9-11commission.gov.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
one year after the invasion of Iraq, Rumsfeld attempts to portray the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as necessary and as, up until this point, successful.

Rumsfeld begins with a reference to the terrorist attack that happened a couple weeks prior in Spain. Such attacks serve as reminders that the United States and fellow “free nations” are engaged in a war against “dangerous enemies, that kill innocent men, women and children – enemies who are working to acquire weapons that would one day allow them to kill not hundreds, as on March 11 in Spain, but tens of thousands.” Of course, the allegations of Iraq pursuing WMDs – presumably the “enemy” Rumsfeld is referring to in this case – were extremely shoddy, and no specific plans to kill tens of thousands of civilians existed. His generalizations about the “enemy” that carries out various terrorist attacks and their goals simplifies a complex issue, but it also makes the terrorist threat appear to be much more unified and potent, thus warranting a response.

Rumsfeld relies on several narrative themes to convincingly portray the U.S.’s response to 9/11 as successful and necessary. For one, he emphasizes the terrorist threat as unique and imminent. The war the U.S. has become embroiled in is a “new and different war,” a change enacted with the attacks of 9/11. Because of these attacks, “we have entered into a new security environment, arguably the most dangerous the world has known.” The threat posed by terrorists in the post-9/11 world is thus the biggest threat the United States has ever faced. Therefore, we cannot deal with this threat as we would have dealt with a “20th century problem,” but that we must “recalibrate our thinking to fit the new century.” Conflict in the 21st century is even more severe than during the Cold War because there are non-state actors in addition to state forces, and an increasing amount of information that has to be continually analyzed. Because this is the

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first time the U.S. has faced a threat of this nature, the threat is particularly potent and demands to be addressed.\textsuperscript{113}

Part of the uniqueness of this conflict, as portrayed by Rumsfeld, is the widespread nature of the enemy. The enemy cannot be reduced to a single organization or state but consists of many disparate forces. However, by lumping the “enemy” into a single category, Rumsfeld (and indeed, many others within the executive branch) makes the “enemy” seem unified, with a common goal of attacking America and its values. One example of this in the text is through Rumsfeld’s portrayal of the threat of nuclear proliferation. He discusses the potential of “hostile states” developing WMD capabilities, which 1) could “hold our populations hostage to blackmail” with the threat of these weapons, and 2) could result in WMD capabilities being shared with “terrorist networks, that could use them to attack us without fingerprints.”\textsuperscript{114} Although he distinguishes between “hostile states” and “terrorist networks,” he still fails to make distinctions regarding which actors these could include or differences in the goals of various actors. In this case, Iraq could be considered a “hostile state” while al-Qaeda could constitute a “terrorist network.” Yet these two actors did not share common goals nor any form of collaboration against the U.S. In this instance, Rumsfeld is simply wandering down a slippery slope by conflating the actors considered “enemies” in the War on Terror.

In conjunction with the uniqueness of the enemy in this conflict, Rumsfeld also portrays the threat the enemy poses as imminent. With a striking lack of evidence or explanation, he claims, “Another attack against our people will be attempted. We do not know where, or when, or by what technique. It could be in weeks, months, or years – but it will happen.”\textsuperscript{115} Again, in the conclusion, Rumsfeld claims, “It is likely – indeed almost certain – that, in the period ahead,

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 3,20, 8.  
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 8.  
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 2.
somewhere, somehow, more terrorist attacks will be attempted – even here in the United States.” Of course, Rumsfeld has no way to prove such speculative statements. He even contradicts himself, one stating that terrorist attacks will be attempted in the United States at some point in the future, the other stipulating that it is likely that terrorist attacks will be attempted, but not necessarily in the United States. The utility of such speculative statements does not lie in their accuracy, however, but in their ability to generate fear, portraying the threat as persistent and extraordinarily dangerous.

Because of the uniqueness and imminence of the terrorist threat to the United States, Secretary Rumsfeld declares that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are necessary – and are proving to be successful. He describes President Bush’s response to the terrorist attacks, which involved sending a coalition to Afghanistan in order to “overthrow the Taliban regime, and destroy the al-Qaeda stronghold.” This coalition succeeded within the first 63 days, wherein “Kabul was taken – and Afghanistan was liberated.” Rumsfeld equates the American takeover of Afghanistan’s capital to Afghanistan’s “liberation,” and Afghanistan’s “liberation” to success. He goes on to discuss the elimination of the al-Qaeda “sanctuary” in Afghanistan as evidence of success. Overall, the mission was a “rapid success” in its destruction of al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime.

In describing the success of the United States’ post-9/11 military strategy, Secretary Rumsfeld lists several steps that have been taken since 9/11 to quell the threat that international terrorists pose to the United States. According to Rumsfeld, by this point, the U.S. had “overthrown two terrorist regimes, and liberated some 50 million people”; “hunted down thousands of terrorists and regime remnants in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries”; “captured

116 Ibid., 21.
117 Ibid., 4, 11.
or killed 46 of the 55 most wanted in Iraq – including Saddam Hussein”; and “interdicted shipments of chemical and nuclear weapons components bound for terrorist states,” among many other feats.\textsuperscript{118} The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown the world’s “terrorist states” that “harboring terrorists and the pursuit of weapons of mass murder carries with it unpleasant costs.”\textsuperscript{119} Rumsfeld refers to Afghanistan and Iraq both as “terrorist states” and discusses attempts to “harbor terrorists” and “pursue WMDs” as if both nations share these goals. This conflates the enemy, making them appear to be two sides of the same coin, as if they have similar state structures or goals. It also ignores the fact that neither state had anything to do with the 9/11 attacks, the event which supposedly was the catalyst for starting both of these wars.

Secretary Rumsfeld argues in this document that the United States should be focused on preventing terrorist attacks from happening again in the future. He claims the successes in Afghanistan and Iraq “undoubtedly prevented a number of planned terrorist attacks” and that they have “undoubtedly saved lives, and made us safer than before September 11\textsuperscript{th}.” The steps the United States had taken to combat terrorism up until this point were intended to help prevent the occurrence of future terrorist attacks. If steps like these had been taken sooner, he argues, we could have prevented the 9/11 attacks. He asks the audience to imagine “we were back before September 11, 2001” and the president had declared, “We need to invade Afghanistan, overthrow the Taliban, and destroy the al-Qaeda terrorist network.” There probably wouldn’t have been as many, if any, countries willing to join a coalition with the U.S. to enter such a war. Rumsfeld believes it is problematic that people would be opposed to preemption in a post-9/11 world. He provides a list of objections people could have had to invading Afghanistan, and compares them to objections that people voice about the war in Iraq, deeming them all

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 16.
unreasonable in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. Terrorism shouldn’t be treated as a “manageable evil,” something that can be handled in the aftermath and easily taken care of, but as “an evil that need to be not contained, but fought and eliminated.” Only through the elimination of terrorism can attacks be prevented from occurring in the future.¹²⁰

With a goal as extreme as “eliminating terrorism,” it isn’t surprising that Rumsfeld believed a strategy as extreme as preemptively invading a nation under dubious pretenses and with no relation to the 9/11 attacks whatsoever seemed acceptable. In fact, Rumsfeld seems willing to accept any method or strategy that could potentially diminish the terrorist threat. In a telling quotation, Rumsfeld controversially questions basic military strategy used to save innocent lives:

“‘It’s important not to dumb down what’s needed by promising not to do things – by saying ‘we won’t use ground forces,’ or ‘we won’t risk lives,’ or ‘we won’t permit collateral damage,’ or ‘we won’t bomb below 15,000 feet,’ or ‘we’ll set an arbitrary deadline that it will end as of this date.’ That simplifies the problem for the enemy and makes our task vastly more difficult – and vastly more dangerous.’”¹²¹

Rumsfeld suggests that the U.S. military should be able to do whatever it wants in a conflict situation in the post-9/11 environment; any sort of limitation would be too much. The fight against terrorism should be fought using any means necessary – even if these means contradict standard operating procedure or international law.

Rumsfeld makes many assumptions throughout his testimony. He assumes that both Afghanistan and Iraq qualify as terrorist states, and that the audience understands what this means (he never provides a definition or explanation). His logic is most fundamentally based on

¹²⁰ Ibid., 14, 21, 5-6.
¹²¹ Ibid., 13.
the assumption that launching a war on a “terrorist state” will lead to a reduction in terrorism and an increase in safety, which is quite a big assumption to make. He also assumes that invading a country and overthrowing the leaders of a “terrorist regime” constitutes liberation of the peoples of those countries. While these are just a few examples of the assumptions Rumsfeld makes, they all point to an ideology of American superiority. Rumsfeld frames the U.S. as a foil to the states of Afghanistan and Iraq. While these countries represent evil, America represents good – so much is this the case that the U.S. is even capable of liberating an entire country through its sheer military force and domination. The regimes of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein were certainly both responsible for many atrocities, but this is also true of the United States, a nuance that is entirely lost on Rumsfeld. The United States even enabled the use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein’s regime against the Kurds in the 1980s. Portraying the U.S. in a position of moral superiority is, simply, historically inaccurate.

Findings and Significance

In this paper, I have analyzed seven key executive branch documents that have shaped the discourse utilized in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. These documents represent a wide variety of executive branch documents. Significant variation exists in the utilization of the discourse in each document due to differences in audience, speaker, and time of release. Because it was written by military officials specifically for military personnel and high-level politicians, Joint Vision 2020 takes a very straightforward approach to U.S. domination, without the subtlety normally employed in addressing public audiences. This differs significantly from documents like President Bush’s address to Congress after 9/11 and the 2002 National Security Strategy,

122 Ibid., 14.
which are addressed to the American public and utilize the rhetoric of American superiority to justify U.S. policies – for example, lauding the United States for its values and juxtaposing them with the values of terrorists and their supporters. Additionally, these two documents were presented by President Bush, a public figure whose rhetoric is highly scrutinized. These differences in audience and speaker allow for changes in rhetoric; this is why the National Security Strategy contradicts Joint Vision 2020, claiming the U.S. does not pursue “unilateral advantage” while still elevating the U.S. as a superior nation.

Documents also vary in their content and rhetoric according to their time of release. Joint Vision 2020 and the Quadrennial Defense Review were written prior to the 9/11 attacks. The language used in these documents, excluding the introduction to the QDR in which Secretary Rumsfeld discusses the 9/11 attacks and its perpetrators, focuses largely on America as a superior nation, one that uses its power for the pursuit of goodness and freedom throughout the world. President Bush’s address to Congress after 9/11 relies heavily on the binary construction of good versus evil, in terms of actions and morals, a framing that serves to justify the launching of a “war on terror.” The National Security Strategy, which lays out national security issues and a plan to confront them, uses language to portray the “enemy” in the War on Terror as a unique threat and thus justifying a new kind of military response. The document even mentions an unspecified enemy in pursuit of WMDs, a theme that comes to serve as a key justification for the war in Iraq.

The final three documents that I examine explore the WMD issue further. The National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction expounds on the threat that WMDs in the hands of terrorist groups would pose. This threat gains specificity in Colin Powell’s address to the UN, in which he lists the evidence that Iraq is seeking WMDs. He argues that WMDs in the
hands of Iraq could very easily lead to WMDs in the hands of terrorist groups, portraying Saddam Hussein as sharing the same goals as al-Qaeda. Those two documents play key roles in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq. Finally, in his address to the 9/11 Commission, Secretary Rumsfeld praises the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars for their successes and emphasizes the importance of using any means necessary to fight terrorism, including preemptive methods. Rumsfeld’s address paints the War on Terror up until that point as a success. He argues this success will only prove to be valuable if the U.S. continues to make the effort to eliminate terrorism.

Despite the variation between these documents, I argue that the similarities outweigh the differences, and that, collectively, these documents construct a unified rhetoric that has served the executive branch in justifying the War on Terror, in particular the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. First, several overlapping themes appear throughout the documents. Many use language that establishes a binary of good and evil, in which the U.S., American allies, and American values represent “good,” while “terrorists,” the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Saddam Hussein, or the “enemy” more generally represent “evil.” Some documents, such as President Bush’ address to Congress after 9/11 and the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction, portray the Taliban, terrorists, and countries that are not “like-minded” as Other, or distant, different, and inferior. A key component of the inferiority of terrorists, as expressed by the speakers, is their disdain for freedom. The binary of the U.S. and allies versus the terrorist enemy centers around each side’s opinion of freedom: the U.S.’s support and exemplification of freedom, and the terrorists’ disdain for it.

Most of the documents also portray the uniqueness of the terrorist threat or the security environment in some way. Bush’s address to Congress after 9/11 characterizes the threat posed
by al-Qaeda as unique due to its particularly destructive goal and its widespread, popular, and highly organized nature. Several documents portray the security environment as distinctive because of the relationships between terrorist organizations and authoritarian regimes, as well as the potential for these groups to gain access to weapons of mass destruction.

Moreover, the assumptions embedded within some of the documents contribute to similar overarching ideologies. In his address to Congress after 9/11, Bush assumes that America’s freedom and other values he identifies as “civilized” are the reason the U.S. was targeted in a terrorist attack. He also assumes that these values make the U.S. superior to its attackers. In the National Security Strategy introduction, Bush assumes that terrorists are the enemy of the U.S. and continue to engage in efforts to attack the U.S., and that freedom is a value desired throughout the world. In his testimony to the 9/11 Commission, Secretary Rumsfeld assumes that Afghanistan and Iraq are terrorist states; that wars in terrorist states will increase the safety of the U.S. by reducing terrorism; and that overthrowing leaders of “terrorist regimes” is equivalent to the liberation of those countries’ populations. While the assumptions in these three documents are based in different contexts and events – the first document refers explicitly to al-Qaeda in the 9/11 attacks, the second discusses terrorism more broadly, and the third explains Afghanistan and Iraq’s relationship to terrorism – they contribute to the overarching ideologies of American superiority and exceptionalism. These embedded ideologies arise in each of the seven documents analyzed, either through the assumptions made or through the themes expressed in the rhetoric. When analyzed collectively, these documents and the ideologies they express embody the Bush Doctrine.

Jeffrey Record, a former staff member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, provides a succinct summary of the Bush Doctrine in terms of the threat faced by the Bush
administration and its response to that threat. The administration views the threat as “the combination of ‘radicalism and technology’ – specifically, political and religious extremism joined by the availability of weapons of mass destruction.” While Record frames the Bush Doctrine explicitly in terms of justifying the invasion of Iraq, the three categories of agents that the Bush administration views as a threat clarifies the inclusion of Afghanistan as part of this conflict. They include “terrorist organizations with global reach, weak states that harbor and assist such terrorist organizations, and rogue states.” Because al-Qaeda and the Taliban exemplify the first two threat agents, and particularly because of the administration’s fear of al-Qaeda pursuing a WMD, war in Afghanistan falls into the Bush Doctrine, even though the doctrine was primarily developed and solidified after the 2001 invasion.

Record summarizes the enemy proposed by the Bush Doctrine as “imminent, multifaceted, undeterrable, and potentially calamitous” to the U.S. Because this threat is unprecedented in global history, it must be dealt with using unprecedented tactics. Part of the assumption about the parties that compose the threat is that they are willing to attack the U.S. at any moment. The Bush Doctrine thus declares the ability to utilize “anticipatory self-defense,” or preemption. The Bush administration refers to its strategy as “preemption” rather than “preventive war,” which Record says would be illegal. While preemption can have legal sanction if the threat faced is “instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means and no moment for deliberation,” preventive war is more or less the same as “outright aggression” because the threat posed is “neither certain nor imminent.” Record argues that, despite the administration’s framing of their new strategy, war with Iraq would be a preventive war because it simply cannot be proven that Iraq poses an imminent threat to the U.S. He also notes the Bush administration’s

124 Ibid.
conflation of “Iraqi capabilities” and “Iraqi intentions.” Even if Iraq was pursuing WMDs, the Bush administration simply relied on the assumption that the purpose of these weapons was to attack the U.S., rather than considering the possibility of WMD production as a deterrent against other nuclear states, including the U.S. 

These two components of the Bush Doctrine, threat and response, are repeatedly applied throughout the executive documents analyzed in this paper. The themes in the discourse – the proposition of terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and state actors like Saddam Hussein and the Taliban as “evil,” opposed to American values, and unique and unified – all serve to portray the extent to which this enemy poses a threat to the U.S. The response of preemption is justified in the documents not only through the portrayal of the danger posed by this enemy, but also through the portrayal of the superiority of the U.S. and the values it upholds. The fight against terrorism is described in terms of protecting the U.S. from aggressors; it is also described as a war between competing values, particularly freedom. The “imminent” threat posed by the combination of terrorist networks and state sponsors must be defeated, then, to protect American citizens as well as to uphold freedom and other so-called “civilized” values.

The Bush Doctrine does not only take the form of rhetoric, but it is also embodied in the policies of the Bush administration in the post-9/11 United States – policies that are justified through the executive branch’s discourse. This relationship between discourse and policy is highly documented. In his essay “Critical Discourse Analysis,” Norman Fairclough argues that, in different ways and to varying extents, “social changes are changes in discourse,” and changes in discourse are related to “changes in other, non-discoursal, elements or ‘moments’ of social life.” Social changes (including changes in public opinion and politics) and changes in

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125 Ibid., 6-7, 9.
126 Fairclough, “Critical Discourse Analysis.”
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discourse are thus inherently connected. The change sparked by the attacks of 9/11 gave the Bush administration an opportunity to form an entirely new discourse on international relations and the role of the U.S. in the world. “What happened in the period of mass disorientation after the attacks was, in retrospect, a domestic form of economic shock therapy,” Naomi Klein writes in *The Shock Doctrine*. The administration rushed to “exploit the shock that gripped the nation” to pursue policies of increasing militarism and privatization. This exploitation was possible due to a systematic change in the discourse to justify policy changes to the American public. This is particularly evident in the case of the invasion of Iraq.

Much of the literature focuses on the invasion of Iraq as an example of the relationship between discourse and policy. For example, Klein argues that the idea of invading an Arab state gained popularity after 9/11, and the fact that the 9/11 attacks occurred made such an invasion possible. Iraq was selected from many possible states, including Syria, Egypt, and Iran. Iraq was chosen for a number of reasons, including its oil reserves, its prime location for a U.S. military presence in the Middle East, and the benefit of “familiarity”; after all, the Gulf War had taken place a mere decade ago, and Saddam Hussein was remembered as an enemy. And because of the Gulf War and severe sanctions, Iraq’s military capabilities were significantly diminished, making it “the site for the most winnable war.” Pundits who espoused the view that Iraq was attempting to manufacture WMDs and that this would pose a substantial threat to the U.S. essentially believed that the Middle East in its entirety was a hotbed of terrorism, and “since the entire Arab world could not be conquered all at once, a single country needed to serve as the catalyst.”

128 Ibid.
129 Ibid., 329-30, 327-8.
Piotr Cap contends that a stronger rhetorical argument was needed to convince the public of the necessity of invading Iraq than was necessary for Afghanistan. The bombing of Afghanistan was generally considered justifiable by the public, but invading Iraq needed much stronger justification, as there did not appear to be a clear-cut enemy akin to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.\(^\text{130}\) So the Bush administration sought to tie Saddam Hussein to al-Qaeda and the attacks of 9/11 and claimed that war in Iraq was a necessary part of the broader War on Terror. The administration also claimed that Hussein was gathering weapons of mass destruction and was intending to build a nuclear bomb in order to attack the U.S.\(^\text{131}\) However, Mary Cardaras writes that not only did the administration discuss an Iraqi invasion less than a year after 9/11, but also that “there is evidence that a plan to invade Iraq was a war in waiting. It was waiting for the perfect set of circumstances, real or imagined, which would justify such action.”\(^\text{132}\) The circumstances created by 9/11 were ideal to carry out a war in Iraq. By tying Saddam Hussein’s Iraq to the broader War on Terror and even drawing specific ties between Hussein and bin Laden, the government was able to convince the public of the necessity of this war, a war against evil, against terrorism, and for freedom. (Indeed, the invasion was referred to as “Operation Iraqi Freedom.”)

This conflation of Hussein with bin Laden and outright fabrications of the threat Hussein posed to the U.S. “was not an accident,” to be sure.\(^\text{133}\) The Bush administration had to “sell” the Iraq war to the public by manipulating their understanding of reality.\(^\text{134}\) It is likely that if the public had been given more accurate information, less people would have supported an Iraqi

\(^{130}\) Cap, *Legitimization in Political Discourse*, 2.


\(^{132}\) Ibid.


\(^{134}\) Cardaras, *Fear, Power, and Politics*, 31-2.
invasion. However, as it stood, about two-thirds of Americans “believed that Saddam Hussein was somehow linked to 9/11.” Even by 2006, as many as 46 percent of Americans still believed in Hussein’s connection to 9/11. As the nation would learn later, of course, all of the foundational premises justifying the war were false, but they served their purpose for the time being: the discourse surrounding the War on Terror, spurred by the attacks of 9/11, enabled the invasion of Iraq.

The fact that the Bush administration had been planning to invade Iraq even prior to the 9/11 attacks and the notion of a connection between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda reveals a powerful picture of the rationalization of U.S. policy. As the Downing Street Memo, a classified note from a 2002 meeting of British government officials discussing war with Iraq, states, “The facts were being fixed around the policy.” Even though Iraq’s nuclear capabilities were less than North Korea or Iran, President Bush “had made up his mind to take military action” and justified this action through “the conjunction of terrorism and WMD.”

The Downing Street Memo may be the product of a foreign government, but declassified Bush administration documents from the period between 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq support the document’s claim. Of particular note are the declassified talking points from a meeting between Secretary Rumsfeld and CENTCOM Commander General Tommy Franks in November 2001, just two months after the 9/11 attacks. The notes reveal the administration’s intent to invade Iraq and its early attempts to come up with a justification to do so. The first bullet point of the notes is, “Focus on WMD.” The notes offer many options for how to start a war in Iraq, including “U.S. discovers Saddam connection to Sept. 11 attack or to anthrax attacks?” and

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135 Ibid.
136 “The Downing Street Memo,” The Downing Street Memo(s), May 1, 2005.
137 Ibid.
“Dispute over WMD inspections? Start now thinking about inspection demands.” These possibilities for justifying an Iraqi invasion correspond to some of the documents analyzed previously. The Quadrennial Defense Review, 2002 National Security Strategy, and NSPD 17/HSPD 4 all speak to the potential danger posed by WMDs in the hands of terrorists or state sponsors of terror. This rhetoric built up to the announcement of Iraq’s mission to manufacture WMDs and use them against the U.S. Colin Powell’s speech at the UN not only referred to Iraq’s WMD threat, but also drew a connection between Hussein and the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, as well as hinted that Hussein may have been responsible for the anthrax attacks. The Downing Street Memo’s statement that “that facts were being fixed around the policy” seems all too accurate in light of internal documents like the Rumsfeld-Franks meeting notes.

Although much of the literature and research has focused on the invasion of Iraq, I argue that the rhetoric used by the executive branch and the Bush Doctrine more generally were also used to justify the invasion of Afghanistan. This justification was primarily retrospective, as the war in Afghanistan was launched less than a month after the 9/11 attacks. And, as Piotr Cap argues, the overwhelming fear and terror generated after 9/11 meant that not much justification was needed to convince politicians or the public of the necessity of war. However, the development of a discourse emphasizing American superiority, particularly in terms of its values, as well as the evilness and “Other”-ness of terrorists and state sponsors of terrorism resulted in an ex post facto rationalization for the invasion of Afghanistan. Since individual members of al-Qaeda committed the 9/11 attacks, and most of these individuals were from Saudi Arabia, the invasion of Afghanistan required further explanation. So, the Bush Doctrine framed the Afghanistan War as justifiable because Afghanistan’s ruling party, the Taliban, fell into the category of a weak state supporting terrorist networks. As such, the Bush Doctrine sanctioned the

139 Ibid.
invasion of Afghanistan on the grounds that the Taliban were a component of the global threat of terrorism.

This justification is wrought with assumptions, in particular the notion that the Taliban would have only provided a safe haven for al-Qaeda out of disdain for the U.S. or its values. Rather than considering any political or sociocultural reasons for the role of the Taliban in securing al-Qaeda’s operations, the executive branch portrayed the Taliban as one party in this ideological battle between good and evil, and as worthy of military action because of the degree of the threat posed by the Taliban having relationships with terrorist networks. The rhetoric of a unified threat, epitomized in the Bush Doctrine’s categories of parties determined to pose a threat to the U.S., served to retroactively justify invading Afghanistan, as well as to give grounds for an invasion of Iraq.

**Conclusion**

The 9/11 terrorist attacks shook America to its core, triggering a rightful sense of vulnerability in the public. However, the Bush administration capitalized on these fears in order to pursue its own agenda – namely, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. In this paper, I have utilized critical discourse analysis to examine the key themes, assumptions, and ideologies expressed in seven executive branch documents released from 2000 to 2004. Despite variation in the speakers, audiences, and the context of releasing each document, several overarching themes and ideologies are present throughout. These include the portrayal of the U.S. as a force for good and terrorists and their supporters as evil and “Other,” as well as the portrayal of the threat posed by these groups as tactically unique, unified, and potent. The overarching ideologies of American exceptionalism and superiority also saturate these documents. I have argued that these elements
of the discourse formed the rhetorical basis for the Bush Doctrine and the policies it entailed, in particular Afghanistan and Iraq Wars.

Although the policy is referred to as the “Bush” Doctrine, the policy of the Obama administration has not seen a dramatic shift. President Obama may have organized a withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, but today, the U.S. is once again bombing Iraq in attacks related to the fight against the Islamic State. President Obama has also delayed a troop withdrawal from Afghanistan once again; several thousand troops still remain there today. Additionally, the Obama administration has utilized drone strikes to an unprecedented extent. In this regard, President Obama has proven to be as willing as President Bush, if not more so, to utilize force against a perceived enemy, and to accept the “collateral damage” that necessarily comes with doing so.

Fourteen years after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. is still actively engaged in a “war on terror.” A recent report released by the Physicians for Social Responsibility entitled “Body Count: Casualty Figures after 10 Years of the ‘War on Terror’” has calculated the casualties of this war in three countries: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The aggregate toll from these three countries alone is about 1.3 million deaths. With troops still on the ground in Afghanistan, bombings in Iraq, the continued use of drones in countries like Pakistan and Yemen, and no sign of a substantial change in policy, this toll is likely to continue rising.

Hegemonic discourses shape the way we understand the world and our role in it. It is my belief that our role is to fight for justice and universal human rights. This ought to start with criticism of the domestic and international policies of today’s nations, particularly the U.S. as a global superpower. In the words of the late historian Howard Zinn, “Dissent is the highest form

141 Ibid.
of patriotism.” The American public must ask questions and criticize unjust policy, and in order to be critical of policy, we must be critical of language. It is only by recognizing patterns in the rhetoric of our country’s leaders and informing ourselves enough to determine the veracity of their discourse that we can hope to challenge and change unjust policy in the United States.
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