

PARALLELS IN PREEMPTIVE WAR RHETORIC: REAGAN ON LIBYA; BUSH 43 ON IRAQ

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During the 1980s and the 1990s, scholars in the field of rhetorical studies presented presidential war rhetoric as a genre of public discourse. More recently, some have questioned the genre's continued relevance given the current challenges of U.S. warfare. This essay examines whether preemption conducted in the context of the war on terror alters or reinforces the conventional substantive and stylistic expectations of war rhetoric. Analyzing the public communication strategies of the Bush administration on Iraq and the Reagan administration on the bombing of Libya, it demonstrates that despite changes in the situational exigencies, the nation's leadership uses a heavy reliance on strategic misrepresentation to maintain compliance with the genre's expectations.

The 2002 “National Security Strategy of the United States of America” (NSS) formalized the Bush administration’s doctrine for responding to terrorists and their state sponsors. The report said, “[W]e will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists.”¹ The NSS warned that the United States could no longer rely on the deterrence and containment policies that had worked against nations during the Cold War, because rogue states and suicide terrorist bombers were more likely to take risks, making them less susceptible to U.S. threats of retaliation.²

In the aftermath of the report’s release, a public debate erupted as to whether the Bush administration’s preemptive war doctrine against terrorists constituted a radical change in U.S. security policy. Al Gore dubbed the strategy’s implementation in Iraq “the first preemptive war in U.S. history.”³ The president of the Presidency Research Group of the American Political Science

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Association called it “a bold act of political leadership, providing for the nation a new grand strategy.”⁴ In the midst of such claims, administration spokespersons moved quickly to counter the mounting perception that preemption was a major shift in policy. Secretary of State Colin Powell told a group of reporters, “Preemption has always been part of any national security strategy that I’m familiar with.”⁵ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld compared the NSS strategy to the Cuban missile crisis, maintaining that it was the closest recent analogy to the Bush doctrine.⁶

Whether new or simply newly recognized, preemption applied in the context of the global war on terror provides an opportunity for rhetorical scholars to reexamine conventional understandings of war rhetoric. To discover whether preemption alters or reinforces the conventional expectations of war rhetoric, this essay examines the public communication strategies of the current Bush administration on Iraq and the Reagan administration on the bombing of Libya. It reviews the existing scholarship on war/crisis rhetoric, explicates the situational parallels of the use of preemption against terrorists in the Libyan and Iraqi cases, analyzes the related available public and private papers to discern public strategies for delegitimizing the enemy and legitimizing America’s response, and draws conclusions about the relationship between preemption and war rhetoric.

WAR RHETORIC

War rhetoric is a powerful resource for presidents wishing to move public opinion.⁷ Richard A. Cherwitz uses the case of Lyndon Johnson’s depiction of the Gulf of Tonkin incident to argue that presidential rhetoric can both create an international crisis and limit policy alternatives to the use of military force.⁸ David Zarefsky’s study of Johnson’s war on poverty reveals how the expectations of war rhetoric can transfer metaphorically into other policy arenas.⁹

During the 1980s and the 1990s, scholars in the field of rhetorical studies presented war rhetoric as a genre, embodying a set of situational, substantive, and stylistic expectations that rendered future wartime discourse predictable. J. Michael Hogan and L. Glen Williams maintain that the origins of the war genre occurred during the Stamp Act.¹⁰ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson offer five recurrent elements of the genre after explaining that the rhetorical continuity of war discourse stems from the situational necessity of presidents justifying their assumption of commander-in-chief powers to both the Congress and the public.¹¹ Robert L. Ivie advances the predictability of war discourse by identifying a topoi of savagery: three recurrent lines of argument (force vs. freedom, aggression vs. defense, and rationality vs. irrationality) that permeate crisis rhetoric.¹² Cherwitz and Kenneth S. Zagacki

accept that a genre of crisis rhetoric exists, but explicate multiple strategies and tactics available depending on whether the rhetor has a consummatory purpose (where discourse is the only response to a crisis situation) or a justificatory purpose (where discourse is part of a larger overt military strategy).¹³

More recently, some rhetorical scholars have begun to question the continued relevance of the war genre based on changing situational elements unforeseeable in the history of U.S. warfare. G. Thomas Goodnight argues that the inability of either the victor or the victim to survive a nuclear war without devastating consequences requires a rethinking of the genre.¹⁴ Bonnie J. Dow dismisses the notion of a genre of crisis rhetoric altogether, insisting that the various elements of crisis situations differentiate appropriate rhetorical responses. She distinguishes between five crisis speeches in the Carter and Reagan years to show that some addresses have epideictic purposes (i.e., to fulfill the need for communal understanding), while others have deliberative purposes (i.e., to gain policy approval).¹⁵

Studies focusing on the war rhetoric of the current Bush administration do not address whether the conventions of the genre still apply to preemptive uses of military force in the global war on terror.¹⁶ If different crisis situations can subvert generic conventions as Goodnight and Dow suggest, reexamination of presidential rhetoric used to justify preemptive uses of force in the war on terror is needed. The belief by many that preemption constitutes a new approach for handling the nation's enemies and the oft-repeated claim that the war on terror is a different kind of war suggest that the conventions of war rhetoric may have changed.¹⁷

SITUATIONAL PARALLELS

While others have compared Bush's preemption rhetoric to that related to World War II¹⁸ or the Cold War,¹⁹ this essay focuses on Iraq and Libya because the two cases share notable situational similarities. Both the Reagan and Bush administrations moved to heighten the public focus on preemption after suffering major defeats at the hands of terrorists. The NSS emerged approximately one year after the tragic September 11th terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. The death toll (nearly 3,000 individuals) demonstrated that terrorist networks could harm the United States in devastating ways. Reagan's order authorizing preemption, NSDD 138, likewise emerged approximately one year after a catastrophic terrorist event. In October 1983, 241 Americans lost their lives as they slept when a suicide bomber drove a vehicle loaded with explosives into the U.S. Marine barracks. The 1983 death toll, while small in comparison to the tragic outcome of 9/11, exceeded the combined U.S. casualty count from terrorism for the previous 15-year period.²⁰

Uses of the military in Libya and Iraq were also implemented shortly following an announced U.S. policy of preemption against terrorists and their state sponsors. Bush invaded Iraq on March 8, 2003, only months after the National Security Council's release of the NSS. The Reagan administration bombed Libya two months after publicly announcing its decision to use preemption in a February 1986 *Public Report of the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting [sic] Terrorism*.²¹ Reagan's task force report only briefly mentioned preemption as a possible response option to terrorism, but behind the scenes the administration embraced the strategy. On April 3, 1984, Reagan privately signed NSDD 138 authorizing the United States to conduct preemptory and retaliatory raids against suspected terrorists and their state sponsors, including Libya.²² In July 1985, Reagan's National Security Policy Group planned Operation Rose, a covert preemptive military strike on Libya that included the help of allies such as Egypt.²³ Vice President George H. W. Bush summed up the expansive execution of the approach in a private 1987 letter to Reagan when he wrote, "working unilaterally or with friendly nations we took preemptive action in several hundred instances to stop possible terrorist acts against Americans and American interests."²⁴

Both the Reagan and Bush administrations designated long-standing state sponsors of terror as their targets for preemption.²⁵ Libya had been on the secretary of state's list of state sponsors since the list's official inception in 1979.²⁶ Iraq had also been on the initial list, but the Reagan administration had it briefly removed during the early 1980s. Reagan had hoped to leverage Iraq's need for diplomatic and financial assistance during the Iran-Iraq war to moderate Iraq's support for terrorism.²⁷ Despite Iraq's early movement to rein in the behavior of its associated terrorist groups, it continued to sponsor terrorism, according to intelligence available at the time.²⁸ Iraq subsequently reappeared on the list of state sponsors in the mid-1980s prior to Reagan's military strike.

Both administrations also preserved the option of preemptive and preventive uses of force to fight their respective terrorist threats. Preemption conventionally involves striking first to blunt an imminent attack from one's opponent; prevention relies on military force to counter gathering threats that will likely become more ominous and more costly to defend against in the future.²⁹ Reagan's intent to preserve the option to use both approaches was stated explicitly by Secretary of State George P. Schultz in an October 25, 1985, speech when he stated, "Our responses would go beyond passive defense to consider means of active prevention, preemption and retaliation."³⁰ Bush's NSS publicly merged the two approaches by expanding the conventional definition of preemption to encompass prevention. As the NSS argued, "We must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today's adversaries. . . . The greater the

threat, the greater is the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.”³¹ By preserving both preemption and prevention in the U.S. response arsenal, Reagan and Bush claimed wide latitude to counter terrorist threats.

Finally, overlap between the Reagan and Bush foreign policy teams renders the Iraq and Libya cases comparable. In a September 2002 State Department briefing, Powell invoked his long experience in the executive branch to defend the presidential prerogative to use preemption. He remembered, “[A]s national security adviser some 15 years ago, I was responsible for the first document. And I think the way you will see [preemption] portrayed in the national security strategy—I don't know if you've read it yet—it suggests that it has always been an option for the president.”³² Powell's mention of his earlier role in the Reagan administration, his veiled reference to NSDD 138 as the first document to officially sanction preemption, and the substantial number of related personnel working across the two administrations—Powell, Poindexter, Rumsfeld, Bremer, Armitage, Wolfowitz, Reich, Abrams, Maguire, Perle, Feith, and Negroponte—all serve as an impetus for comparing the Libyan and Iraqi examples.³³

For some, Reagan's military strike against Libya may not appear to be an act of preemption; instead, it may seem to be a retaliatory response to the 1986 bombing of a West Berlin discotheque, an attack that killed one American serviceman and injured 50 others. The White House's internal public affairs strategy related to the military strike and Reagan's related public statements, however, characterized the U.S. action as a preemptive strike against future Libyan terrorism.³⁴ Reagan publicly claimed to have evidence that Libya had planned an additional 35 attacks against U.S. citizens to validate preemption as a justifiable response option.³⁵

Another arguable distinction between the two cases involves the length of time the United States utilized military force. On its face the bombing of Libya was certainly a quicker military maneuver, lasting only several hours on the night of April 15, 1986. Nevertheless, the Reagan administration's strategy behind the scenes had included covert military operations to topple Qadhafi's regime dating back to 1984.³⁶ Furthermore, the current multiyear military campaign in Iraq has emerged as a more intractable conflict than originally conceived. Recent accounts offered by U.S. military leaders employed in Iraq have revealed that the Pentagon's civilian leaders initially assumed that the Iraqi operation would be resolved in a matter of only weeks or months, rather than the ongoing struggle it remains today.³⁷

Given the numerous situational parallels between the two cases, the Reagan administration's strike on Libya functions as a useful historical analog to Bush's use of military force in Iraq. By examining the similarities between the two public communication strategies, I will identify U.S. approaches for delegitimizing the enemy and for legitimizing the U.S. response. In both the discussions of the enemy and the response, the essay will identify potential tensions with conventional war rhetoric and will explore if and how the presidents used public strategies to resolve them.

DELEGITIMIZING THE ENEMY

In the conventional genre of war rhetoric, presidents construct narratives that depict enemies as coercive antagonists that impel action. Due to the necessity of avoiding public self-mortification if the United States is at fault, Ivie identifies aggression vs. defense as one of the three fundamental topoi of presidential war rhetoric.³⁸ Campbell and Jamieson explain that portraying an enemy as the aggressor "legitimizes presidential initiatives as actions to defend the nation while exhorting the audience by simplifying and dramatizing the events leading to a decision."³⁹ Even Cold War rhetoric adopts the convention, positing that U.S. presidents have a divine mission to protect fledgling democracies around the globe from the aggressive assaults of their Communist counterparts.⁴⁰

Preemption strains presidential claims that the enemy is the aggressor in the conflict. Responding with military force prior to an attack by terrorists and their state sponsors risks the perception that the United States, rather than the enemy, is the aggressor in a conflict.⁴¹ Further, the absence of a direct attack heightens the burden on the leadership to build the case for war. To be consistent with the genre's expectations, presidents must convince the public that they can credibly predict that the enemy aims to carry out a devastating attack against the United States. They must also offer convincing proof that the terrorist is capable of threatening the nation and the broader civilization.

Complicating the task of portraying the enemy as the aggressor is determining the identity of the enemy. Campbell and Jamieson explain that to effectively build the case for assumption of commander-in-chief powers, presidents must provide "a specific adversary whose aims must be thwarted at all costs."⁴² Frequently, however, the threat from terrorism defies specificity. The actual perpetrators of violence may be isolated individuals, small bands of extremists, or developed collectives. Groups claiming responsibility may use pseudonyms to cover their identity or choose to avoid revealing their identity altogether. The National Foreign Assessment Center of Reagan's Central Intelligence Agency articulated the problem of specifying a single, identifiable

enemy in the fight against terrorism when it stated, “The US is facing terrorist threats from several quarters which, although unconnected, will challenge the US ability to react to widely dispersed and potentially serious international terrorists attacks.”⁴³ Vice President Cheney, recognizing the difficulty of identifying terrorist adversaries, worked in the Bush administration’s early internal meetings after 9/11 to expand the goals of the U.S. war on terror to include state sponsors of terrorism, believing they were easier targets than the more mobile, less identifiable terrorist groups.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the difficulty of pinpointing the specific adversary remains, even when the U.S. leadership focuses on foreign states involved with terrorism. Doug Menarchik, national security assistant to Vice President Bush in the Reagan administration, maintained that even identifying the states involved in terrorism was difficult. He noted, “We have never before faced a situation in which others routinely sponsor and facilitate acts of violence against us while hiding behind proxies and surrogates which claim, they claim [*sic*] they do not fully control.”⁴⁵ Providing convincing evidence of future terrorist plans requires an identifiable enemy to carry out the attacks, but the ambiguous nature of the threat complicates the leadership’s case for preemption.

Terrorist States

The Reagan and Bush administrations utilized two strategies to convince the public that they could identify a specific, aggressive adversary who required a preemptive response. One method was to rhetorically depict the foreign state’s leader as a terrorist, not the head of a peer government. To accomplish the conversion, both presidents relied on the abusive variant of *argumentum ad hominem*, a common tactic in the epideictic convention of praise and blame. Frans Van Eemeren and colleagues explain, “In the abusive variant, a head-on personal attack, one party denigrates the other party’s honesty, expertise, intelligence, or good faith, so that the other party loses its credibility.”⁴⁶ When referring to Qadhafi, Reagan used the abusive variant to assign the Libyan leader qualities of a stereotypical terrorist. He called Qadhafi “the mad dog of the Middle East,”⁴⁷ “a barbarian,”⁴⁸ an individual “outside the company of civilized men,”⁴⁹ and “the outlaw Libyan regime.”⁵⁰ Reagan reiterated that Qadhafi was insincere and untrustworthy, particularly when he denied his government’s involvement in terrorist attacks against the United States. Bush similarly described Hussein as having “one of the most barbaric regimes in the history of mankind.”⁵¹ His administration reiterated the numerous times that Hussein and the Iraqi regime had lied to the United Nations about their compliance with the 12 resolutions passed after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Reagan and Bush utilized a form of argument that relied on personal attack to stress

the irredeemable evil nature of their enemies who could only await opportunity to produce more havoc and destruction.⁵²

Stressing Hussein's and Qadhafi's brutality against their own citizens reinforced the historical pattern of the two leaders as terrorists. The Reagan administration characterized the Libyan people not as citizens of a foreign state, but as the victims of terrorism directed by Qadhafi. A *Voice of America* editorial opined, "America's quarrel is with Qadhafi, not with the Libyan people. They, as much as Americans and other innocent casualties of terrorist attacks, are victims of a tyrant's designs."⁵³ Reagan established the dictatorial nature of the Libyan regime by revealing that Qadhafi had ordered the murder of his fellow Libyans in countless countries. The State Department white paper "Libya Under Qadhafi: A Pattern of Aggression" exposed the far-reaching range of Qadhafi's effort to kill his own country's people abroad. It stated, "The Libyan Government in 1980 began a concerted effort to assassinate anti-Qadhafi exiles. By the time the first phase ended in 1981, 11 Libyan dissidents living abroad had been murdered. Libya in 1985 sponsored five attacks against exiled Libyan dissidents. Targets of these attacks lived in Greece, West Germany, Cyprus, Italy, and Austria."⁵⁴ By cataloging Qadhafi's persistence in tracking down and killing his enemies, Reagan emphasized the foreign leaders' decision to rule his people by terror.

Like Reagan, Bush emphasized the brutality of Saddam Hussein against his own people. He presented examples of the foreign leader's dictatorial rule as certainties when he stated, "One thing there can't be skepticism about is the fact that this guy was torturous and brutal on the Iraqi people. I mean, he brutalized them, he tortured them, he destroyed them, he cut out their tongues when they dissented."⁵⁵ Rumsfeld catalogued a multitude of horrors that occurred under Hussein's rule before the Senate Armed Services Committee in September 2002: "[Saddam Hussein] regularly assassinates his opponents, both in Iraq and abroad. He's executed a member of his own cabinet, whom he personally shot and killed. He's ordered doctors to surgically remove the ears of military deserters. His regime has committed genocide and ethnic cleansing in Northern Iraq."⁵⁶ Through the use of shocking, grotesque examples, the Bush administration established Hussein's reign of terror over the Iraqi people.

The listing of the horrific past acts of foreign dictators arguably takes on new relevance in preemptive war discourse. In conventional justifications for war, presidents routinely dismiss the unfortunate internal affairs of states abroad as insufficient to warrant the intervention of American military forces. Stalin, Mao, Marcos, Kim, Faud, Franco, and Pahlavi (to name but a few) conducted their affairs of state brutally without their actions rising to the level sufficient to justify an American military response. In preemptive warfare against terrorists, by contrast, the internal practices of dictators become evidentiary

support of characteristic depravity, an unchangeable trait that marks them as continuing threats.

The decision to rhetorically transform the foreign leaders into terrorists also helped resolve the challenge of depicting the enemy as the aggressor in preemptive warfare. Most motivations articulated by terrorists for carrying out their acts of violence go unmentioned in presidential discourse. When faced with terrorist leaders who justify their attacks as retaliation for U.S. acts of aggression and/or as defense measures against unwarranted U.S. occupations abroad, presidents simply claim that nothing justifies terrorism.⁵⁷ When presidents do supply motives for terrorists, they claim that terrorists deplore and want to threaten freedom, democracy, and/or the American way of life. By simplifying the collective motivations of all terrorists into a desire to assault American culture, Reagan and Bush deflected attention from potential U.S. culpability and cast the enemy as the remaining source of aggression.

To transform the internal aggression of the leaders of the terrorist states into external threats worthy of U.S. intervention, both Reagan and Bush publicly accused their enemies of planning to extend their terrorist acts to America. More specifically, they insisted that the two leaders were engaged in an assassination campaign against U.S. leaders. The National Foreign Assessment Center of the Central Intelligence Agency evaluated the assassination plot against the Reagan administration in December 1981, when it noted, "The Libyan campaign against US officials is without precedent, and the potential effectiveness of security, and other deterrent measures is hard to gauge."⁵⁸ Qadhafi's specific targets allegedly included Reagan himself, the American ambassador to Italy Maxwell M. Rabb, the U.S. charge d'affaires in Paris Christian Chapman, and U.S. embassies in London, Paris, Vienna, and Rome.⁵⁹

The information establishing Qadhafi's intent to assassinate U.S. leaders, however, lacked credibility. The CIA Intelligence Directorate did issue a secret report on the assassination plots, but the report was flawed for two reasons. The bulk of the CIA's information came from sources with indirect access to those involved in the plot and the sources had strong motivations to report what the United States wanted to hear. Most of the evidence supporting the assassination plan was traceable to Manucher Ghorbanifar, an Iranian arms salesman, whom the CIA had officially determined to be a "fabricator."⁶⁰ Chapman did come under gunfire, but even he reported that the U.S. Embassy in Paris had no evidence that a specific country was involved and that another group (the Lebanese Slagh el-Misri Group) claimed responsibility for his attack.⁶¹ Ambassador Maxwell M. Rabb was called back to the United States under the threat of an impending attack, but Libyan involvement again went unproven.⁶² As one CIA official recalled, "We came out with this big terrorist threat to the U.S. Government. The whole thing was a complete fabrication."⁶³

The Bush administration, likewise, maintained that Saddam Hussein was targeting U.S. officials. Bush told a group assembled at a Houston fundraiser, “There’s no doubt his hatred is mainly directed at us. There’s no doubt he can’t stand us. . . . After all, this is a guy that tried to kill my dad at one time.”⁶⁴ The incident mentioned by Bush was when Saddam Hussein allegedly targeted George H. W. Bush for assassination while he was on a trip to Kuwait to accept a medal honoring him for liberating Kuwait from Iraqi control.

The evidence used to support the plot to kill George H. W. Bush was also questionable. Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh investigated the administration’s evidence used to support the case against Iraq. He concluded that all of the evidence was circumstantial; the Kuwaiti government (which collected the evidence used in the case) had a track record of making false, public pronouncements about their adversaries; the remote-control firing device used in the car bomb was mass produced and did not carry the signature of similar devices employed by Iraqi forces; the bomb exceeded the sophistication of others used by Iraqi forces; the long delay between arrest and discovery of the car bomb was suspicious; both the physical evidence and trial testimony supported the conclusion that the two confessions obtained from the 13 defendants resulted from torture; the defendants’ stories lacked credibility because they were contradictory; and the failure of the Kuwaiti government to mention their supposed month-old knowledge of the impending attack on officials of the United States was highly suspicious.⁶⁵ A classified CIA report indicated that Kuwait may have “cooked the books” on the Bush assassination attempt.⁶⁶

The use of exaggeration or fabrication within war rhetoric is not new. Campbell and Jamieson maintain that strategic misrepresentation is a standard convention of war rhetoric. They explain, “presidential war rhetoric evinces an unusual tendency to misrepresent the events described therein in ways strategically related to the president’s desire to stifle dissent and unify the nation for immediate and sustained action.”⁶⁷ Yet the form of misrepresentation used to justify preemption against terrorist states may be predictable. Patterns of internal barbarism are, at times, easily documented and, when successful, prepare the public to generally accept a foreign leader as an ongoing violent threat. In such a context, opportunities to exaggerate or even fabricate the future plans of the foreign leader are magnified. The covert nature of assassination plots, in particular, renders analysis of the threat generally outside the realm of public and media scrutiny. Such misrepresentations quell public dissent by elevating the terrorist leader from an extremist who lacks the power to impact the United States into a threat worthy of the attention and actions of the commander in chief.

State Sponsors of Terrorism

A second strategy used by the Reagan and Bush administrations for delegitimizing the enemy involved a focus on state sponsorship of terrorism. Here, foreign states become the specific adversary because of their relationships with others willing to commit acts of violence. The conceptual foundation for applying the national response option of preemption to state sponsors of terror emerged during the Reagan administration. Menarchik produced a macro-analysis of terrorist organizations in which he maintained,

The terrorist organization can be conceptualized as a series of concentric circles with the terrorist action cadre at the core. The terrorist action cadre are the “true-believers” of the organization, those fanatics “who are willing to give their all for the holy cause.” This core of true believers makes the policy, designs the strategy, plans and, at times, executes the terrorist attacks. The next circle contains the specialists, such as medical, explosive, legal, and technical experts, who functionally assist the action cadre. The third circle contains the functionaries who provide the logistical, surveillance, intelligence, and other ancillary support. The fourth circle is comprised of the sympathizers.⁶⁸

The core of the action cadre in Menarchik’s model was a charismatic leader, who functioned as the hub surrounded by spokes of individual members who executed terrorist actions out of fierce loyalty to the leader. In his view targeting the action cadre was the best hope for dissipating the support for terrorism in the remainder of the concentric circles.⁶⁹

The Reagan administration worked covertly to use the option of preemption to strike at the action cadres described in Menarchik’s model.⁷⁰ Robert McFarlane, Reagan’s national security advisor, advocated minimal public disclosure of the use of preemption to counter the threat from terrorism. In a memo to Attorney General Edwin Meese, he explained, “No copies of the NSDD have been provided [to House and Senate Intelligence Committees, the Foreign Affairs/Relations Committees, and the Armed Services Committees]. Throughout, we have sought to minimize the attention placed on pre-emptive covert activities in order to preclude adverse reactions which could constrain our options.”⁷¹

In public, Reagan focused on preemption as the preferred response to the functionaries (or state sponsors) in Menarchik’s model. Reagan reasoned that foreign states had an obligation to regulate the behavior of extremists operating in their spheres of influence. Menarchik and Don Gregg, another national security assistant to the vice president, noted, “Just as the Barbary powers were held responsible for their piratical actions as well as the actions of independent

pirates who exploited the permissive environment, the US could bring pressure to bear on state actors to 'police' their spheres of influence."⁷² At the 1986 Tokyo Economic Summit, Reagan sought and received support from the meeting's participating nations to hold states responsible for acts of terrorism occurring in their midst.

The current Bush administration adopted Reagan's approach of holding states responsible for terrorist groups operating within their spheres of influence. Bush announced, "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them."⁷³ The Bush strategy dovetailed with public opinion polling after the attacks of 9/11 that showed an American public willing to discipline nations who harbored or supported terrorism.⁷⁴

The decision to focus on state sponsors of terrorism, while having the benefit of identifying a specific state as cause of the hostilities, was still fraught with complications for determining the aggressor in the conflict. Establishing that a given terrorist group with documented ties to a foreign state was planning to attack the United States posed a challenge. Reagan's own task force report acknowledged, "The motivations of those who engage in terrorism are many and varied."⁷⁵ Terrorists operating specifically in the Middle East during the Reagan era harbored various causes, most of which were local or regional in focus.⁷⁶ Iraq's historical record of attacking its neighbors in the region similarly placed the terrorist targets arguably outside of the common purview of the U.S. commander in chief.

Given the challenges of such a context, both administrations relied on their enemy's verbal statements to establish the terrorists' intent to attack the United States. In the absence of a direct attack against the United States, threatening words replaced actions in the administrations' public case for war. Reagan announced that Qadhafi had publicly supported the Abu Nidal terrorist group and had labeled their attacks on Vienna and Rome "heroic actions."⁷⁷ He told European journalists that Qadhafi and the other leaders of Libya "have been quite open and public in declaring that we are a target."⁷⁸ Reagan's repeated references to Qadhafi's verbal support for terrorism targeting America characterized the foreign leader as a member of the action cadre, rather than the more removed functionary within Menarchik's model.

While Reagan referenced Qadhafi's public support for terrorism in general terms, his State Department recounted the Libyan leader's actual word choice. By charting Qadhafi's use of particular phrases and utterances, its white paper depicted the Libyan leader as a more vivid adversary threatening the United States. To illustrate Qadhafi's dangerous objectives, the State Department announced,

During the past 18 months, Qadhafi has made several public references to expanding his terrorism campaign to cover US targets. In a June 1984 speech, for example, he told his Libyan audience that “we are capable of exporting terrorism to the heart of America.” During a speech last September observing the 16th anniversary of his takeover, Qadhafi remarked that “we have the right to fight America, and we have the right to export terrorism to them . . .” Qadhafi recently threatened in a press conference on 2 January to “pursue US citizens in their country and streets” if the United States takes action in response to Libya’s alleged involvement in the Rome and Vienna terrorist attacks.⁷⁹

By recounting Qadhafi’s actual statements espousing his intent to harm the United States, the white paper encouraged the public to consider the Libyan leader a dangerous charismatic in the Menarchik model.

Unlike Reagan, Bush did not face a foreign leader who publicly called for terrorism. Contained by U.S. military aircraft operating in Iraqi no-fly zones and a regimen of UN economic sanctions dating back more than a decade, Hussein did not risk making public terrorist declarations against U.S. targets. In order to advance the case against Hussein, the Bush administration returned to its public framing of a merged, homogenous collective of terrorists and their state sponsors. The administration used the words of Osama bin Laden and his high associates in the al Qaeda network to establish the threat to the United States. The CIA leaked tapes of intercepts of bin Laden planning to commit Hiroshima against the United States.⁸⁰ The U.S. Defense Department subsequently released a highly evocative videotape of bin Laden laughing with his associates about the extensive damage caused by the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center.⁸¹ Intermittent administration references to subsequent al Qaeda videos reinforced the ongoing threat from terrorism to the United States.

Credibly presenting the expressed intentions of bin Laden and other members of al Qaeda as a valid justification for the use of force against Saddam Hussein, however, was disputable. Saddam Hussein was a secular leader in the heart of the Arab world who arguably had contrary interests to bin Laden, the self-professed global leader of all Muslims. Colin Powell, nevertheless, made the connection between the two in his speech before the UN General Assembly. In short, Powell argued, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, a bin Laden collaborator from the Afghanistan training camps, had based his terrorist operations in northern Kurdish areas of Iraq, with safe haven offered by Baghdad.⁸² Rather than acknowledge that Hussein was constrained from entering the Kurdish areas by the Kurdish military and U.S. no-fly zones, Powell’s logic followed the Menarchik model of a terrorist organization. Al-Zarqawi functioned

as a member of the action cadre deeply loyal to his charismatic leader, Osama bin Laden. Hussein occupied the role of a functionary that supplied logistical and ancillary support for the broader al Qaeda network. With al-Zarqawi committed to bin Laden and Hussein allowing al-Zarqawi's continued presence in Iraq, bin Laden's words spoke for the Iraqi leader.

To support the contention that the United States had to respond to the threatening words of the terrorists, both the Reagan and Bush administrations depicted their enemies as having confirmed patterns of violent behavior against Americans. After terrorists killed 16 airline passengers at U.S. and Israeli checkpoints in Rome and Vienna, Reagan announced that he had evidence demonstrating that Libya was both the host to the terrorist training camps and the headquarters of Abu Nidal, the terrorist leader responsible for the airport attacks.⁸³ The State Department revealed that senior Libyan officials had met with Abu Nidal three times during 1985.⁸⁴ Reagan indicated that Qadhafi was training and financing terrorism using U.S. and European banks.⁸⁵ Press backgrounders announced that Libya had aided Abu Nidal in the Rome and Vienna attacks by providing his group passports and the use of Qadhafi's diplomatic missions for logistical assistance.⁸⁶ In short, the Reagan administration linked Qadhafi to each of the activities characteristic of its operational definition of state sponsors of terror.⁸⁷

Reagan's linkage of Qadhafi to the Rome and Vienna attacks, however, was questionable. The only surviving member of the Rome bombers insisted that he and his colleagues had trained in Syrian-occupied areas of Lebanon and planned the final preparations for the attack in Damascus.⁸⁸ Many in the United States believed that Abu Nidal's actual safe haven was in Syria, a factor acknowledged by Mitch McConnell, then a member of the Senate Committee on Intelligence, and by Paul Bremer, a prominent administration official working on terrorism.⁸⁹ Qadhafi had moved \$1 million to an Abu Nidal bank account in Bulgaria. However, the transfer occurred several years earlier, calling into question its relationship to the Vienna and Rome bombings.⁹⁰ Finally, the administration's claim that the Libyan government had been involved with the three passports used to transport the terrorists to Vienna again was suspect. As Hersh explained, "One had been lost in Libya by a Tunisian laborer eight years earlier and two had been seized by Libyan officials from Tunisians as they were expelled in mid-1985."⁹¹ After examining the available evidence for the terrorist attacks committed within their borders, Italy and Austria concluded that Syria was the actual state sponsor of the airport attacks.⁹²

The Reagan administration bolstered its case against Qadhafi by blaming the Libyan leader for the 1986 bombing of the West Berlin discotheque. The bombing of the discotheque, a location frequented by off-duty U.S. military personnel, functioned as the administration's proof that terrorists supported

by Libya were targeting U.S. citizens. Reagan's public evidence of Qadhafi's involvement included an intercept the day before the bombing from the Libyan People's Bureau of East Berlin to Tripoli saying that the attack would happen the next day and a follow-up communication bragging about the success of the operation.⁹³

Examination of the intercepts and their handling during the aftermath of the attack again raised questions about the reliability of the administration's interpretations. The text of the intercepts did not include a Libyan order to conduct the terrorist operation and did not specify a site for the attack. The U.S. government violated its own routine routing procedures for handling intercepts by never permitting Mideast or North African specialists at the National Security Council to analyze their contents. Finally, the decision of the involved terrorists to use radio communications was not characteristic of Qadhafi, who generally preferred the use of personal envoys.⁹⁴

Echoing the Reagan approach, the Bush administration maintained that Iraq served as a functionary for a terrorist network that had future plans to attack the United States. Cheney explicitly referred to Iraq as a "terror-sponsoring state."⁹⁵ Bush insisted, "Iraq is a part of the war on terror. Iraq is a country that has got terrorist ties. . . . It's a country that trains terrorists, a country that could arm terrorists."⁹⁶ Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld referenced intelligence showing "senior al-Qaeda [leaders had] been in Baghdad in the recent period"⁹⁷ and "very reliable reporting of senior-level contacts going back a decade."⁹⁸ Operating within the sphere of influence theory, Saddam Hussein was responsible for the members of al Qaeda housed within Iraq's borders.

The evidence supporting the claim that Hussein was housing and training terrorists within Iraqi borders, however, also surfaced as questionable. The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Defense Department eventually backed away from the secret memo, written by Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith. This memo had sufficed as the primary source for the claim the Hussein and al Qaeda were working together to attack the United States. The story that an operational training camp, Salman Pak, was serving as a focal point for directing attacks against the United States turned out to be the product of an Iraqi National Congress-supplied defector. U.S. intelligence agencies could not corroborate the defector's claims, and instead discovered that Iraqi security forces were utilizing the camp to practice their response strategies against future skyjackings, not to train terrorists. The other known Iraqi terrorist training camp existed in the Kurdish region, and thus was not accessible to Hussein given the no-fly zone parameters established by the United States at the conclusion of the 1991 Persian Gulf War.⁹⁹ After a thorough review of the evidence, the 9/11 Commission concluded that there was no evidence that Iraq

had cooperated with al Qaeda in carrying out attacks against the United States and no evidence of a “collaborative operational relationship.”¹⁰⁰

Both Reagan and Bush attempted to limit public debate about their claims of state sponsorship by insisting that their conclusions, drawn from top-secret intelligence, were “certain,” “irrefutable,” and “clear.” If reporters raised questions about the currency, amount, or quality of the evidence in support of their claims, both administrations balked at having to defend their data. Spokespersons refused to reveal the basis of their cases, arguing they could not speak further in public because of the need to protect intelligence methods and sources.¹⁰¹

Having portrayed Iraq and Libya as state sponsors of dangerous terrorist groups, both administrations amplified the threat in an effort to further cast the enemy as a target worthy of a preemptive response. Campbell and Jamieson maintain that amplification is a recurrent element in generic war discourse because of the need to rebuff concerns about self-interest.¹⁰² The need to magnify the threat is particularly demanding with terrorists because of their historical stereotype as groups of extremists that lack sufficient means to pose an imminent threat to U.S. national security. While the tragic events of 9/11 showed that terrorists could threaten thousands of U.S. lives, the prevailing stereotype that such enemies could easily be defeated in conventional warfare arguably helped the public initially accept the Bush administration’s case for the war in Iraq.

To bolster the nature of the threat, both Reagan and Bush maintained that their enemies had global ambitions that made them dangerous, not only to the United States, but to the civilized community as a whole. Reagan announced that Qadhafi had a “goal of world revolution.”¹⁰³ His State Department made the case that Libya had acted against individuals or governments in the United States, Greece, West Germany, Cyprus, Italy, Austria, Egypt, Sudan, Arab Maghreb, Algeria, Tunisia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, North Yemen, Somalia, Chad, Sahel, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Zaire, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Columbia, Chile, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Philippines, New Caledonia, and the islands of Oceania.¹⁰⁴ All diplomatic posts in the Near East, South Asia, and Europe received a briefing from the State Department that explained the expansive threat Abu Nidal posed to the entirety of the world community. It warned, “The Abu Nidal group is among the most dangerous of the Middle Eastern terrorist organizations. . . . The group has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to operate in any country it chooses. It has staged attacks in over 20 countries on three continents.”¹⁰⁵ Reagan’s message was clear. Qadhafi was not the leader of an ineffectual rogue state that could be ignored; he held global ambitions that he was acting on throughout the world.

The Bush administration similarly maintained that Saddam Hussein had far-reaching goals for world domination. Cheney warned, “Armed with an

arsenal of these weapons of terror, sitting atop 10 percent of the world's oil reserves, Saddam Hussein could then be expected to seek domination of the entire Middle East, to take control of a great portion of the world's energy supplies, and to directly threaten America's friends throughout the region and subject the United States or any other nation to nuclear blackmail."¹⁰⁶ Official spokespersons reiterated Iraq's past record of aggressive acts against nations in the region to document Hussein's broader ambitions. Frequent mention of Iraq's moves on Kuwait, Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia were used to make the case for the aggressive tendencies of the Iraqi leader. By linking Iraq to Zarqawi and the al Qaeda network, Powell expanded the list of targeted nations to include France, Britain, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Russia.¹⁰⁷ With demonstrated past acts against nations on three continents, the Iraqi leader's ambitions shifted from parochial to international concerns.

Both the Reagan and Bush administrations further amplified the threats by focusing on the future destructive potential of the foreign states. In the case of Libya, Reagan administration officials argued that Qadhafi was already one of the preeminent organizers of worldwide terrorism campaigns, regularly involved in the export of terrorism and revolution around the globe.¹⁰⁸ Reagan warned against complacency in the face of such a threat when he stated, "Yet let us not underestimate the reach of Qadhafi's terror. He's tried to subvert half a dozen countries on his own continent of Africa and has had Libyan students and dissidents murdered in faraway capitals. And I would remind the House voting this week that this archterrorist has sent \$400 million and an arsenal of weapons and advisers into Nicaragua to bring his war home to the United States."¹⁰⁹ Internal memoranda defined Libya to be part of destabilization coalitions (anti-Western terrorist or guerrilla groups) targeting various nations in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa.¹¹⁰

The Reagan administration's talking points on preemption stressed two aspects of Qadhafi's plans. The first was that Qadhafi's future attacks would target U.S. citizens and facilities in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Evidence in support of the worldwide nature of the threat included Libyan agents following U.S. citizens who were entering American embassies, reports from unnamed sources that Qadhafi was planning attacks against U.S. citizens and facilities overseas, and the Libyan surveillance of ten U.S. facilities in Africa with plans to kidnap a U.S. ambassador. The second emphasized Qadhafi's intention to inflict mass casualties with his terrorist attacks. The evidence of Qadhafi's destructive intent included that he was targeting high numbers of visa applicants waiting in line at U.S. embassies, the presence of many terrorist groups affiliated with him, and the powerful weaponry and munitions in the hands of the terrorists he supported.¹¹¹

The Bush administration's approach focused on one key point of the Reagan administration's talking points; namely, that state sponsors of terror would enhance the sophistication of weaponry used by terrorists. The primary justification that the Bush administration employed for conducting a preemptive war against Iraq was the need to avoid a gathering nexus of terrorist groups, state sponsors of terrorists, and weapons of mass destruction. Rumsfeld insisted, "There are a number of terrorist states pursuing weapons of mass destruction—Iran, Libya, North Korea, Syria, just to name a few—but no terrorist state poses a greater or more immediate threat to the security of our people than the regime of Saddam Hussein and Iraq."¹¹² Administration spokespersons bolstered the case for Iraq's WMD program by repeated references to a British white paper that catalogued Iraq's chemical, biological, nuclear, and ballistic missile programs.¹¹³ The evidence used to support Hussein's likely use of such weaponry involved Iraq's past use of chemical weapons against both its internal population and its neighbors.¹¹⁴ Both publicly and privately, the Bush administration argued that even a 1 percent chance that Hussein was developing such weapons warranted a preemptive attack on Iraq.¹¹⁵

The lack of veracity in the administration's claim that Iraq had rebuilt its weapons of mass destruction program is now well known. The Iraq Survey Group did not find evidence of an existing Iraqi program of weapons of mass destruction, whether chemical, biological, or nuclear. A report completed for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace concluded, "There was and is no solid evidence of a cooperative relationship between Saddam's government and Al-Qaeda. . . . There was no evidence to support the claim that Iraq would have transferred WMD to Al-Qaeda and much evidence to counter it. . . . Administration officials systematically misrepresented the threat from Iraq's WMD and ballistic missile programs, beyond the intelligence failures."¹¹⁶ Recent revelations about the internal decision-making processes of the Bush administration demonstrate that his CIA analysts even lacked hard evidence that Iraq harbored weapons of mass destruction prior to the onset of military operations in Iraq in 2003.¹¹⁷

Less familiar are emerging questions regarding Iraq's prior use of chemical weapons. Jude Wanniski, who was an economist working in the Reagan administration and an associate editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, laid out the case that claims of Hussein's destructive use of chemical weapons were, at best, exaggerated. His reasons for interrogating common characterizations about Hussein's use of chemical weapons included that the sources used to support the narrative of Iraq's gassing the Kurds—refugees and those with competing political interests—were dubious; the true culprit responsible for the Kurds' deaths was Iran. The CIA has acknowledged that Iraq's use of mustard gas in

the Iran-Iraq war was only used in response to a first strike by Iran (with the help of the Kurds) against Iraq, Iraq's mustard gas was only capable of incapacitating, rather than killing, its victims, and Iran's chemical weapons, by contrast, were powerful enough to result in the fatalities that did occur.¹¹⁸

In sum, portraying foreign leaders both as terrorists and as state sponsors of terrorism were the public communication strategies for specifying an adversary who qualified for the role of aggressor in the two preemptive war contexts. Intent for future terrorist acts against the United States was established through public threats, theories of sphere of influence, and foreign state patterns of serving as members of the action cadres or functionaries in terrorist networks. While amplification helped build public support for assumption of commander-in-chief powers, strategic misrepresentation was prevalent as both administrations linked their enemies' past acts of violence to U.S. targets.

LEGITIMIZING THE PREEMPTIVE RESPONSE

In the conventions of the genre of war rhetoric, U.S. presidents are obliged to present the use of military force as a last-resort option. A posture of forbearance infuses the war narrative to support the thoughtfulness and reluctance the public expects from their leadership in opting for the use of force. Actions taken by the nation's leadership must avoid even the appearance that their actions provoke war.¹¹⁹ Presidents depict themselves as rational actors in abeyance with the rule of law, determined to use military force only after due deliberation of the evidence of the threat.¹²⁰

Preemption, on the surface, would appear to contravene such conventions, as the quick use of military force might supplant a more reflective path to decision making. The absence of an attack opens space for the continued exploration of alternative means for resolving conflicts. Developing acceptable evidentiary standards for concluding that a future attack is imminent is difficult.¹²¹ Certainly, both administrations examined here came under stiff international scrutiny for not showing sufficient forbearance. The European foreign ministers refused to impose stiff economic sanctions against Libya in the run-up to the U.S. attack and 21 nations condemned the bombing afterwards.¹²² UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described the Bush war with Iraq as an illegal violation of the UN Charter and many nations were reluctant to join the coalition of the willing.¹²³

Despite the challenges, both the Reagan and Bush administrations presented preemption as a course of action that adhered to the convention that the decision to use military force has been thoughtful and deliberate. Adopting the traditional approach that military force was an option of last resort, the Reagan administration reiterated that it had tried diplomatic pressure and

economic sanctions to no avail. The White House talking points on Libya catalogued Reagan's statements threatening Libya with further action dating as far back as July 1985.¹²⁴ A *Voice of America* editorial broadcast to the Libyan people in English and Arabic insisted, "In the case of Qadhafi, we tried economic sanctions, political pressure, public diplomacy, and a limited demonstration of military strength. This clearly was not enough."¹²⁵

The Bush administration similarly announced that the Iraqi government had been properly forewarned about an impending military response. Bush and his other White House spokespersons repeatedly mentioned the 12 UN Security Council resolutions that Iraq had to heed or face a military response. When Iraq offered to allow unfettered inspections of its WMD program in response to Arab League pressure, Powell dismissed the move as another Iraqi ploy, typical of their handling of the United Nations since the 1991 Persian Gulf conflict.¹²⁶ He reminded the public that the resolutions not only required Iraq to disarm its weapons of mass destruction, but that they also "spoke of terrorism, of human rights, and the return of prisoners and property."¹²⁷

Both administrations worked to inoculate the public against charges that they had not been appropriately deliberative by attempting to produce clear evidence that Libya and Iraq were the aggressors. Covertly, both Reagan and Bush took steps to provoke their enemies into attacking the United States. Dirk Vandewalle argues, "From the beginning of his tenure in office, Reagan attempted to destabilize the Qadhafi regime through covert actions, in addition to pinprick military confrontations over the Gulf of Sirt."¹²⁸ Likewise, Michael Isikoff and David Corn reveal that the Bush administration embarked on Anabasis, a covert operation devised in late 2001 in which U.S. forces staged phony incidents in Iraq in an effort to tempt Hussein to respond by flying troops into southern Iraq. If successful, U.S. fighter pilots could respond to the violation of the no-fly zones and administration officials could argue that Hussein had triggered a full-scale war.¹²⁹ If the covert strategies had worked, Reagan and Bush would have avoided the need to publicly justify preemption, and instead could have presented their military actions as comparable to the earlier deliberative actions of their predecessors.

Since the covert strategies failed to prompt Iraq or Libya to commit significant acts of aggression against the United States, both administrations rhetorically merged defensive and offensive approaches in the labeling strategies for their security policies. Reagan's task force report publicly referred to preemption as one of its "active defense measures."¹³⁰ Bush's "National Security Strategy" warned that the United States was willing to exercise its "right of self-defense by acting preemptively."¹³¹ Condoleezza Rice defended the Bush administration's decision to have preemption as an option, owing to the fact that the United States had asserted its right to "anticipatory self-defense"

under the UN Charter in crises ranging from the Cuban missile crisis to the conflict on the Korean peninsula.¹³²

They further blurred the line between offense and defense by adjusting their narrative timelines. Both administrations maintained that their uses of force were continuations of ongoing wars that had existed for years, not the initiation of new conflicts. Reagan described the bombing in West Berlin as “the latest in a long series of terrorist attacks against United States installations, diplomats and citizens carried out or attempted with the support and direction of Muammar Qadhafi.”¹³³ Rice made the case that the United States had been at war with Saddam Hussein since the 1991 Persian Gulf conflict. She recalled that the war had begun in defense of Kuwait, continued with further acts of hostility in the Iraqi no-fly zones, and had even prompted the Clinton administration to have to engage in air strikes against Iraq for persistent weapons of mass destruction programs. After 12 years of sanctions without Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions, Rice concluded, “Now, the Iraqi situation, I would argue, was hardly a case of preemption. . . . It’s, I think, not a preemptive action, but whatever you want to say about whether it is or is not, this problem had been there too long.”¹³⁴ By depicting the start of their narratives several years before the public insertion of military forces, both administrations worked to reinforce that their enemies were the aggressors in the conflict.

For those members of the public that interpreted the UN Charter’s self-defense doctrine in more conventional ways, both administrations simultaneously presented both a defensive and an offensive rationale for war. For the Reagan administration, the bombing of the discotheque served as the warrant for invoking the self-defense doctrine; Qadhafi’s future plans sufficed as the rationale for preemption. One of the Reagan administration’s White House talking points read, “The attack followed clear and irrefutable evidence that Qadhafi had ordered and helped execute the bombing of a West Berlin discotheque that killed two people and injured 230, as well as confirmed reports of Libyan planning and preparation for numerous additional terror attacks.”¹³⁵

The Bush administration similarly presented its own case for responding to terrorism as a blend of defensive and preventive measures. The most common strategy utilized for establishing the right of self-defense focused on Iraq as a key battlefield in the war on terror. Zarqawi’s past affiliations with bin Laden and al Qaeda, coupled with his presence in Iraq, made the U.S. move on Iraq a portion of the war that began with the attacks of 9/11. Spokespersons remembered 9/11 in virtually all speeches delivered about the impending action against Iraq. While the administration denied ever claiming that Hussein was a participant in the 9/11 attacks, the routine mention of the 2001 tragedies had a public impact. Polls taken in August 2003 revealed that seven

in ten Americans believed Hussein had a role in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.¹³⁶ A recent Zogby poll reported that nearly 90 percent of the soldiers fighting in the war in Iraq believed the action was retaliation for Saddam's role in 9/11.¹³⁷

The Bush administration supplemented its case for self-defense with claims that it needed to preempt future acts of violence. A central claim justifying the U.S. use of force was the future potential of Saddam Hussein to supply terrorist networks with weapons of mass destruction. Hussein's years of attempting to acquire weapons of mass destruction, detailed in the British government's white paper on the subject, was presented by the Bush administration as evidence that the Iraqi government was planning to attack U.S. interests or its allies.¹³⁸ Cheney indicated that there was "no doubt"¹³⁹ that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice warned, "we don't want the smoking gun to become a mushroom cloud."¹⁴⁰ Having amplified both the certainty and the magnitude of the looming threat, the Bush team insisted that preemption was required.

Both administrations asserted the legality of the offensive/defensive merger in their public statements. In his written response to questions submitted by a group of Southeast Asian journalists, Reagan reasoned, "Our preemptive missions against terrorist-related targets was an act of self-defense, fully consistent with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. It was designed to disrupt Libya's ability to carry out terrorist acts and to deter future terrorist acts by Libya. It was both a necessary and proportionate response to an ongoing pattern of attacks by the Government of Libya."¹⁴¹ Reagan's reference to terrorist-related targets demonstrated the broad scope of his interpretation of the self-defense doctrine, namely that he would include state sponsors of terror as targets of his preemptive strategy. Behind the scenes the Reagan team equated the application of the self-defense doctrine to the terrorists and their state sponsors. As Robert C. McFarlane explained to Edwin Meese, "The commission of terrorist violence by one state against the personnel and facilities of another is clearly an unlawful use of force under the U.N. Charter; this includes instigating or assisting private groups or individuals in the commission of such acts."¹⁴² By casting its justification for military strikes against state sponsors as preemption rather than simple retaliation, the Reagan team attempted to avoid the problem of straining the limits of the self-defense doctrine.

Bush spokespersons also took the public position that any military response to Iraq qualified as legitimate under the right of self-defense embodied in the UN Charter. More routinely, Bush spokespersons reiterated that the United States had to defend itself against the dangerous confluence of terrorists, state sponsors, and weapons of mass destruction before the attacks occurred. They maintained that the terrorist attacks of September 11th

required an urgent reevaluation of the UN standard for what constituted an imminent threat in Article 51.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As Reagan and Bush justified the preemptive use of force against the nation's terrorist enemies, their rhetoric did comply with the conventional expectations of the genre of war discourse. The case for preemptive use of force, however, did pose rhetorical challenges for the administrations. The need to cast the enemy as the aggressor, to specify the identity of the enemies, and to depict military force as the option of last resort were all claims that became more attenuated within the context of preemptive war in the global war on terror.

The challenges faced by the Reagan and Bush teams for satisfying the conventional expectations of war rhetoric emerged uniquely from preemption and terrorism, as well as through a combination of the two situational elements. Challenges related to depicting the enemy as the aggressor and characterizing the U.S. response as a last-resort option stemmed from strains with the exigencies of preemption. Difficulties related to specifying the identity of the enemy arose from the war on terrorism as the context of the discourse. At times, however, the two situational factors combined to help resolve the contemporary hurdles of addressing the genre's conventions. The removal of the terrorists' self-proclaimed motivations for violence from public discussion helped position the enemy as the aggressor in the conflict, despite the juxtaposed tendency to conclude that the instigator of a preemptive attack might more aptly fill that role.

Both the Bush and Reagan administrations worked to resolve any tensions between their own circumstances and the genre's expectations by relying heavily on strategic misrepresentation. The nation's leaders used fabrication, exaggeration, and reliance on questionable sources to sustain their claims about their enemies. While reliance on strategic misrepresentation is an expected trait of war rhetoric, its prevalence and specific application in the discourse of preemption is noteworthy. The points of misrepresentation are not random; they arise at predictable points where preemption strains conformity to the conventional expectations of the war genre.

NOTES

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2. Bush, "The National Security Strategy."

3. Al Gore, "Al Gore Delivers Remarks at New York University on President Bush's Iraq Policy," *FDCH Political Transcripts*, August 7, 2003, 4, <http://www.web.lexis-nexis.com> (accessed June 1, 2006).
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5. Colin Powell, "Secretary of State Colin Powell Stakeout Remarks After Meeting with Russian Foreign and Defense Ministers," Federal News Service, September 20, 2002, 2, <http://www.web.lexis-nexis.com> (accessed June 1, 2006).
6. Donald Rumsfeld, "Defense Departmental Operational Update Briefing," Federal News Service, October 22, 2002, <http://www.web.lexis-nexis.com> (accessed June 1, 2006).
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9. David Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty: Rhetoric and History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1986).
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11. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
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13. Richard A. Cherwitz and Kenneth S. Zagaski, "Consummatory vs. Justificatory Crisis Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 50 (1986): 307–24.
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15. Bonnie J. Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 53 (1989): 294–310.
16. See Michael J. Hyde, "The Rhetor as Hero and the Pursuit of Truth: The Case of 9/11," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8 (2005): 1–30; Denise M. Bostdorff, "George W. Bush's Post-September 11 Rhetoric of Covenant Renewal: Upholding the Faith of the Greatest Generation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 293–319; John M. Murphy, "'Our Mission and Our Moment': George W. Bush and September 11th," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 607–32; Cynthia Willis, "Fighting the Good Fight—Again: The Invocation of Pearl Harbor and the Greatest Generation in the War in Afghanistan," in *Critical Problems in Argumentation*, ed. Charles Arthur Willard (Washington, DC: National Communication Association, 2005), 787–94; Carol Winkler, "Globalized Manifest Destiny: The Rhetoric of the Bush Administration in Response to the Attacks of September 11th," *Controversia: An International Journal of Debate and Democratic Renewal* 1 (April 2002): 85–108; and Joseph M. Valenzano, "The Hoofbeats of History:

- George W. Bush and FDR on the Path to Very Different Wars,” in Willard, *Critical Problems in Argumentation*, 795–801.
17. For a summary and analysis of the administration’s claims that the terrorists and the U.S. war effort are new, see Carol Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism: Presidents on Political Violence in the Post–World War II Era* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).
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 20. Robert C. McFarlane, memo to Edwin Meese III, August 15, 1984, folder “Terrorism Vol. II 1/1/84–8/31/84,” ID #8404913, box 91400, Executive Secretariat, National Security Council: Records, Subject File, Ronald Reagan Library.
 21. Office of the Vice President, “Public Report of the Vice President’s Task Force on Combatting [*sic*] Terrorism,” February 1986, folder “Terrorism,” OA/ID 14923, Bush Vice Presidential Records, Press Office, George Bush Presidential Library.
 22. Christopher Simpson, *The National Security Directives of the Reagan and Bush Administrations: The Declassified History of U.S. Political and Military Policy, 1981–1991* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995), 365–66.
 23. Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981–1987* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).
 24. George H. W. Bush to Ronald Reagan, June 2, 1987, folder “Letter from VP to Reagan on Terrorism June 2, 1987,” OA/ID 23352, Bush Presidential Records, Office of Policy Development, Files of Emily Mead, George Bush Presidential Library.
 25. The U.S. Export Administration Act of 1979, passed in response to the events of the Iranian hostage crisis, gives the U.S. secretary of state power to designate the label of “state sponsors of terror” to foreign nations who have supported multiple acts of international terrorism. Nations placed on the list are subject to various export controls, including no arms-related exports, limitations on dual-use exports, curbs on economic assistance, and financial restrictions on items such as high-cost defense contacts, U.S. government licenses, and tax credits for income earned in the listed countries.
 26. Ronald Reagan, “Letter to the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate on the National Emergency with Respect to Libya,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan 1986* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1988), 1:16.
 27. Nancy Bearg Dyke, memo through Admiral Murphy to Vice President, March 25, 1982, folder “Narco-Terrorism [3 of 5],” OA/ID 19850, Bush Vice Presidential Records, National Security Affairs, George Bush Presidential Library. After a period of waiting for improvement, the administration concluded that removal from the list would not work because of (1) the opposition of Baath Party hardliners, (2) internal Iraqi fears concerning Iraq’s anti-Israeli credentials, (3) worries about Iraq’s resulting vulnerability to terrorism from regional rivals, (4) negative reactions to the 1981 Israeli bombing of Iraq’s nuclear reactor complex in Tuwaitha, and (5) variance between U.S. and Iraqi definitions of terrorism, particularly in relation to Israel and its territories. See Frank McNeil, memo to secretary of state, July 1, 1986, folder “Iraq [2],” OA/ID 02016, Bush Presidential Records, Counsels Office, Files of William Otis, George Bush Presidential Library.

28. Dyke, memo through Admiral Murphy; and McNeil, memo to Secretary of State.
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30. As quoted in memo, Questions and Answers For: John C. Whitehead Confirmation Hearing, [no date], folder "Combatting [sic] Terrorism: Department of State Report (1985) [1 of 2]," OA/ID CF 01573, Bush Presidential Records, Richard Canas Files, National Security Council, George Bush Presidential Library.
31. George W. Bush, "The National Security Strategy," 19.
32. Powell, "Stakeout Remarks," 2.
33. For a more detailed analysis of the shared personnel in the Reagan and current Bush administrations, see Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Henry Holt, 2003).
34. For an example of Reagan's public statements, see Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the United States Air Strike Against Libya," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan 1986* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1988), 1:469. For the talking points, see White House Talking Points, April 16, 1986, folder "Terrorism [1 of 4]," OA/ID 14880, Bush Vice Presidential Records, Press Office, Speechwriter Files, George Bush Presidential Library.
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