Strategic Misrepresentation or Something More Sinister? Deception in George W. Bush's War Rhetoric on Iraq

Cassandra D. Hightower  
cassandradhightower@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations

Part of the Communication Commons, and the Rhetoric Commons

Recommended Citation
https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/allgraduate-thesesdissertations/7111

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research & Artistry at Huskie Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Huskie Commons. For more information, please contact jschumacher@niu.edu.
ABSTRACT

STRATEGIC MISREPRESENTATION OR SOMETHING MORE SINISTER? DECEPTION IN GEORGE W. BUSH’S WAR RHETORIC ON IRAQ

Cassandra Hightower, MA
Department of Communication
Northern Illinois University, 2021
Ferald J. Bryan, Director

Presidential war rhetoric is an incredibly complex and far-reaching genre of political rhetoric, and the consequences of such rhetoric can often lead to mass destruction and death. Based on the continuously changing rules of warfare and the increased use of deception in political communication, this study aimed to analyze this usage of deception more closely in presidential war rhetoric. This project examined the case study of George W. Bush’s war rhetoric on the Iraq War from 2003 to determine if the deception he used fits the “strategic misrepresentation” characteristic that Campbell and Jamieson identified in their landmark 2008 book, *Presidents Creating the Presidency*. By using Campbell and Jamieson’s theoretical framework of the presidential war rhetoric genre, this case study sought to reveal the rhetorical strategies of deception that President Bush used in his public statements that justified military action in the build-up to, that argued for sustainment during, and possibly later attempted to defend the Invasion of Iraq after it was declared resolved.

After a deeper examination of concepts related to deception and strategic misrepresentation, this project revealed Bush’s steady acceleration of strategic argumentation that utilized several deceptive claims to justify war with Iraq between the years of 2001 and
2003, as well as his deflection of accountability after official military operations ended in May of 2003. This study concludes by identifying major areas of consideration for future analysis of deceptive rhetoric.
STRATEGIC MISREPRESENTATION OR SOMETHING MORE SINISTER? DECEPTION IN GEORGE W. BUSH’S WAR RHETORIC ON IRAQ

BY

CASSANDRA HIGHTOWER
©2021 Cassandra Hightower

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

Thesis Director:
Ferald J. Bryan
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am eternally grateful to my committee and the Department of Communication for their endless support and guidance; Drs. Woodyard, Whedbee, Valde, Vazquez, and so many others that have aided me in each step of this process, and have contributed crucial commentary and advice. Thank you Dr. Bryan for being my mentor and introducing me to the world of political communication and presidential rhetoric all those years ago. I do not think there are words to describe how appreciative I am for having you as my chair, so thank you for taking on this project and believing in my perspective on this topic. Thank you to all of my girls—Katy, Nicole, Annie, Starr, Sepideh, Taylor, and Cassandra—for listening to me lament and stress over this project, and for giving me hope in the dark weeks it seemed impossible to finish. Thank you to Joe for your humor and support every step of the way. Thank you to my “in laws” Jenn, John, Grandma and Grandpa Mac for believing in me. Thank you to my mom and family who likely did not understand a word of this project or why I have been so obsessed with President Bush for the last year and a half, but encouraged me and supported me anyway. And lastly, thank you to Mason—your faith in me is endless, and you see my potential when I cannot. Mace, you’re the reason I have been able to accomplish this, and what sparked my interest in this subject to begin with. Thank you and I love you always.
DEDICATION

To myself, to prove that I could.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. DECEPTION IN PRESIDENTIAL WAR RHETORIC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem and Context</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Literature</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rhetorical Criticism of a Genre</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the President Speaks of War</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Oratory of President George W. Bush</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Method</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preview of Chapters</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A DEEPER EXAMINATION OF DECEPTION AND STRATEGIC MISREPRESENTATION</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deceptive Communication</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misinformation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propaganda</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disinformation</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deception and the Truth</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential and Intention to Harm</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disinformation Versus <em>Dezinformatsia</em></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ESTABLISHING A RHETORICAL SITUATION FOR WAR</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background on the Conflict with Iraq</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Analysis of Bush’s Pre-War Rhetoric of 2001</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Containment and Military Defense Rhetoric</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush’s Rhetoric from January 2001 to December 2001</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. BUILDING THE CASE FOR WAR</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Analysis of Bush’s War Rhetoric of 2002</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rhetorical Themes of Presidential Power and Legitimation</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush’s War Rhetoric from January 2002 to December 2002</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame-Shifting and the Unilateralism of the State of the Union</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Continuation of Defense and Containment Rhetoric</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Arguments for Regime Change and Preemption</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Appearance of Debate and Calling for Disarmament</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerating the Need for War</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. BUSH’S RHETORIC OF 2003</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Analysis of Bush’s War Rhetoric of 2003</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prelude to War</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Narrative to Justify the War</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq’s Chemical and Biological Weapons Claims</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Infamous 16 Words</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq’s Links to al-Qaeda and Terrorism</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Benefits of a Liberated Iraq</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving the Final Ultimatum</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining the Deception</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rhetoric of Progress, Objectives, and Durations</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Question of WMDs</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq and the (Alleged) Link to 9/11</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Advancement of Freedom and Peace</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-War Rhetoric and Bush’s Accountability</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Conclusions about Deception in War Rhetoric</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Rhetorical Studies</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Future Research</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

DECEPTION IN PRESIDENTIAL WAR RHETORIC

Introduction

Lying, for all intents and purposes, cannot be said to be a novel feature of politics. Lying has been observed in American politics for as long as we have had American politicians, and that rich history does not exclude lies of American presidents. Presidential lies can be traced as far back as William Henry Harrison, and range anywhere from Clinton’s attempts to disregard sexual scandals to serious matters such as the Iran-Contra deal and the Gulf of Tonkin (Corn 2-3). Arguably, some of the most heinous and catastrophic lies by presidents were made to justify and sustain military action against other nations. With the profound seriousness and complexity that comes packaged with war, it is of little surprise that the discourse about war is thus just as profound and complex.

Attempts to understand war rhetoric have been made since Aristotle and even earlier, with each new work taking one step closer toward a fuller understanding of it despite the continuously evolving rules of warfare. American literary critic Wayne Booth addressed the difficult ties of examining war rhetoric and simplified it into three primary problems:
[1] The banality of both the subject itself and of the most dramatic examples of the good and bad kinds... [2] the inescapable bias of any critic who pronounces any piece of war rhetoric as good or bad, ‘defensible’ or ‘indefensible’... [3] the fantastic complexity of problems, motives, and audiences faced by every sincere political rhetor. (Booth 224)

It is this “fantastic complexity” that motivates this project. However, Booth addresses this complexity as an experience felt by sincere rhetors; meaning, rhetors who do not have the inherent intention to deceive. This research intends to examine war rhetoric that may be insincere, which entails rhetors who may use any variation or degree of deception in their rhetoric to promote, justify, or sustain military action.

Problem and Context

As previously noted, lying in politics has been traced back centuries, so it is not at all new. However, disinformation—the most recent term to describe false information intended to mislead—is described as “newly salient” because the digital age has “changed how such messages are created, circulated, and interpreted, as well as their potential effects” (Freelon and Wells 145). This makes the issue of disinformation a defining issue of modern times particularly because it is perceived as a significant threat to democracy. Disinformation is dangerous in the hands of governments when information may be manipulated and spun to persuade the public of a specific narrative. This is especially alarming when that narrative could assert false claims about foreign nations to legitimize military action. The often impossible challenge of studying disinformation is the requirement of proving an intention to mislead, which means that the scholar must prove that the orator was aware of the falsity of their message. While it is arguably the most extreme and dangerous manifestation of deception, disinformation is only one of the various deceptive strategies that insincere rhetors can employ. Particularly regarding war
rhetoric, deception in its many forms and methods of use should be a significant subject of rhetorical study. When examining war rhetoric that may contain lies, misrepresentation, and even possible disinformation, no better example is the 2003 Iraq War.

The 2003 war in Iraq is shrouded in unanswered questions, finger pointing, and immensely divisive discourse. The legitimacy of the purpose for invading Iraq is one that Bush spent most of his presidency arguing for. However, regardless of what reasons seemed justified at the time of build-up for the war, several investigations, senate hearings, and testimonies in the years following the invasion concluded that the Bush Administration “misrepresented the intelligence and the threat from Iraq” (U.S. Senate, “Senate Intelligence Committee unveils final phase II reports on prewar Iraq intelligence”). The recently declassified 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on the threat of Iraq—whose heavily edited and drastically shortened version was used to convince Congress to grant authorization of military force in October of 2002—clearly states that although the American intelligence community believed that Saddam Hussein did want to reinvigorate his weapons program, he did “not yet have nuclear weapons or sufficient material to make any” (National Intelligence Council, “Iraq’s Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction”). This challenges the primary justification for the war itself; that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and the U.S. needed to intervene before they were used.

Senator Jay Rockefeller, Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said:

In making the case for war, the Administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent. As a result, the American people were led to believe that the threat from Iraq was much greater than actually existed. (U.S. Senate, “Senate Intelligence Committee”)

Exaggerations are not a novel characteristic of war rhetoric, as will later be discussed in Chapter Two. However, much of the justifications after the war pointed fingers at the faulty intelligence
rather than intentional deception. Rockefeller contested this, saying, “There is no question we all relied on flawed intelligence. But, there is a fundamental difference between relying on incorrect intelligence and deliberately painting a picture to the American people that you know is not fully accurate” (U.S. Senate, “Senate Intelligence Committee”).

This project relies heavily on the U.S. Senate investigations into the intelligence used to justify the war and considerations of accountability between the Bush Administration and the intelligence community. Because the Iraq War of 2003 was such a controversial conflict, and the criticism of the conflict goes as far to accuse the Bush Administration of blatantly lying, the U.S. Senate reports on the investigations into the Administration’s culpability were also criticized by some. According to Reuters, while the Senate intelligence committee voted 10-5 to approve the final report in 2008, two Republicans on the committee did accuse the effort to approve the report as a “partisan exercise” (Mikkelsen, “Bush misused Iraq intelligence”).

Curiously, additional declassified documents and testimonies later showed that Bush Administration officials had injurious intentions toward Iraq and Hussein as early as September 11, 2001. Despite the more pressing issue of al-Qaeda, who claimed responsibility for the terrorist attacks on the U.S. the morning of September 11, 2001, the Bush Administration focused on finding ties to Hussein. Declassified notes taken by aide Steve Cambone show that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wanted to find a connection between Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. According to the declassified memo, while staring at the wreckage of the Pentagon that morning of September 11, Rumsfeld asked for “best info fast..judge whether good enough [to] hit S.H. [Saddam Hussein] @ same time—not only UBL [Osama bin Laden]” (“Building momentum for regime change”). In similar fashion, counterterrorism adviser Richard
Clarke claimed that the day after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Bush “testily” asked him to “try to find evidence that Saddam Hussein was connected to the attacks that had occurred just twenty-four hours prior” (Bonn 97). Many testimonies from former State Department, CIA, Pentagon and military officials, weapons inspectors and ambassadors, journalists, and politicians echo these claims, as detailed in Robert Greenwald’s 2004 documentary *Uncovered: The War on Iraq*, produced by the nonprofit film and advocacy organization Brave New Films. The consensus from these testimonies, later reinforced by official senate hearings and investigations, conclude that the Bush Administration had always intended to go to war with Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power, and did so by twisting the intelligence to support their cause.

The Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit and nonpartisan research group, identified at least 935 false statements made by President Bush and seven of his top officials from September 11, 2001 onward (Lewis and Reading-Smith). This sort of war rhetoric that involves misrepresented, or even completely fabricated, information has devastating repercussions.

According to a 2013 study estimating the direct and indirect deaths of Iraqis between 2003 and 2011, approximately half a million deaths could be attributed to the Iraq war (Hagopian et al.). Furthermore, policy analysts like Trevor Thrall and Erik Goepner argue that the War on Terror and the U.S.’s invasion of Iraq actually “destabilized the Middle East while doing little to protect the United States from terrorism,” as well as provided the catalyst for newer terrorist groups like ISIS (Thrall and Goepner 1). The questionable motivations, often unstable justifications, and the astronomical repercussions of this war make it a prime case of war rhetoric to analyze in order to determine the rhetorical uses of deception. Most importantly, because of the recency of this war and the extensive documentation of Bush’s rhetoric, the 2003 Iraq War provides a unique
opportunity to examine exactly how deception was used by examining the deceptive rhetorical strategies that aided the president in persuading the nation to war.

Significance of Study

While there is much scholarship addressing presidential war rhetoric, very little of that scholarship examines presidents who use deceptive rhetoric to promote, justify, or sustain war. At present, the leading literature defining the characteristics of presidential war rhetoric does not give enough consideration to the various forms of deception, nor does it distinguish between these different forms. This study will provide a new and critical examination of this phenomenon that is essential to presidential rhetoric in this modern age without mitigating the reality of manipulative and deceptive discourse that our political leaders have engaged in.

Review of Literature

To analyze the potential limitations of presidential war rhetoric regarding the genre’s lack of consideration for deception, the important functions of genre criticism must first be explained. After which, relevant scholarship on presidential war rhetoric will be reviewed, including what scholars have said about deceptive war rhetoric. Following, scholarship on President George W. Bush’s rhetoric will be detailed to provide a better understanding of Bush as an orator. By providing a solid foundation of this literature, the relationships between genre criticism, presidential war rhetoric as a genre, and President Bush’s rhetoric can be better identified.
The Rhetorical Criticism of a Genre

In 1965, rhetorician Edwin Black made a case for a new form of rhetorical criticism that departed from the classic Neo-Aristotelian form that was dominant at that time: generic criticism. In his landmark book, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, Black argued that there were four main assumptions to be made about rhetorical discourse: (1) that there is a limited number of situations that the rhetor finds themselves; (2) that there is a limited number of ways that the rhetor can respond in a given situation; (3) that the “recurrence” through history of the situation in which the rhetor is in will give detail on how the rhetor can respond; and that (4) these recurrences of situations offer insight to the relationships among them (Black 133-134). Black illuminated the three “factors” of the proposed form of criticism which would help critics identify rhetorical genres: rhetorical strategies, rhetorical situations, and audience effects.

Regarding these three factors, he asserted that:

Rhetorical strategies refer to characteristics of the discourse; rhetorical situations refer to the extralinguistic influences on the audience; audience effects refer to the responses to the strategies in the situations… the fact that these three factors interact suggests that they are constituents of the same phenomenon. (Black 134)

Black argued that it is the recurrence of these strategies, situations, and effects that have given fruit to the idea that there are “congregations” of discourse, or genres, that could offer another perspective to the rhetorical critic (137). It is this “phenomenon” that offers an “alternative frame of reference” on what rhetorical criticism could be.

Lloyd Bitzer published his article, “The Rhetorical Situation,” in 1968, where he defined the rhetorical situation as “a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the
significant modification of the exigence” (Bitzer 6). Two claims were made in Bitzer’s article that are particularly important to this project: that rhetorical discourse comes about as a response to a situation much the same as an answer comes about in response to a question or a solution to a problem, and that the situation invites participation of discourse which alters its reality. The parameters of Bush’s rhetorical situation to call for war in Iraq is one of the specific interests of this project.

In 1978, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson published “Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction,” the introductory chapter to a book containing a collection of generic criticism, *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*. In this chapter, they identified common characteristics of genres, namely that the recurrences of similar forms establish genres, and that genres are “groups of discourses which share substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics,” calling them a “constellation of forms that recurs in each of its members” (“Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism” 16). The significance of this work, as Campbell and Jamieson pointed out, is that generic criticism is argued to “recreate the symbolic context in which the act emerged so that criticism can teach us about the nature of human communicative response and about the ways in which rhetoric is shaped by prior rhetoric, by verbal conventions in a culture, and by past formulations of ideas and issues” (“Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism” 23). Therefore, generic criticism is valuable because it assesses groups of discourse that are paralleled by their significance, eloquence, and contextual characteristics. There are many types of genres, as there are many recurrent situations that require a rhetorical response; though, perhaps one of the most prominent examples of rhetorical genre is the genre of presidential war rhetoric.
When the President Speaks of War

The elements of presidential rhetoric are vast and colorful. Through the creation of the American government, various roles and duties were bestowed upon the presidency. These roles and duties require rhetorical action in order to animate the powers of the presidency. As Campbell and Jamieson noted, the presidency as it currently exists is “an amalgam of roles and practices shaped by what presidents have done” as well as the rhetorical practices that presidents have committed (Presidents Creating the Presidency 4). It is understood that the president shapes social reality through these rhetorical practices and continues to contribute to and define the presidency and its abilities. David Zarefsky identified that this power of presidential definition can be exercised in several ways: (1) by creating associations with other terms, (2) by defining situations using dissociation, (3) by “condensing” symbols in an effort to compress together “different meanings and connotations that otherwise might diverge,” and (4) by shifting the frame of reference in which a situation is viewed, often done by departing from the traditional perspective in order to introduce the desired objective of the president (“Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition” 612-613). There is consistency in these claims through multiple presidential genres of rhetoric, as will be discussed. Much of the literature on presidential war rhetoric, sometimes referred to as crisis rhetoric, addresses presidential power of definition and the manipulation of social reality to justify and sustain military actions.

American political theorist Michael Walzer noted that for “as long as men and women have talked about war, they have talked about it in terms of right and wrong” (3). Much of war rhetoric revolves around the defining and framing of military conflict in order to justify military action; war is “right” because the nation is “good,” and it must defeat those that are “bad.”
Walzer argued that strategic discourse is “a language of justification,” and that the “moral reality of war” is made up of the experiences of which language is descriptive of and the situations in which it is employed (13-15). It is this language about war that shapes our perceptions of it, and therefore manipulates social reality to persuade us to be in favor or against military action.

Wayne Booth argued that rhetoric of war “provides the clearest examples of influential political rhetoric—the clearest examples of how rhetoric makes (and destroys) our realities” (223). Being that the president is one of the most identifiable and prominent leaders of the nation, the president’s rhetoric regarding war has the utmost influence in the shaping of social reality. The progression of literature on presidential war rhetoric keenly identifies and examines this phenomenon.

Robert L. Ivie, who is best known for his research on war rhetoric, asserted in his article, “Presidential Motives for War,” that there is a vocabulary of primary and secondary “god-terms” (rights, laws, democracy, freedom, tyranny, peace, etc.) that are employed by presidents to motivate war. According to Ivie, presidents use these terms to help motivate and justify war, while also using negative “devil-terms” to paint America’s adversaries as evil and lawless. He claimed that war is always made out to be a “moral crisis,” or a “challenge to American ideals,” and that the enemy should be held accountable for this crisis (Ivie, “Presidential Motives for War,” 34). He concluded that the president turns to military action once he demonstrates that peace is not an option. Therefore, the usage of these positive terms describing America allows presidents to then label the enemy with negative, opposing terms and as the perpetrator of the conflict, thus justifying military action.
Richard A. Cherwitz established how presidential rhetoric can draw attention to a crisis situation and define it—thus giving the event significance—and then uses that definition of the situation to promote the use of military force by examining President Lyndon Johnson’s rhetoric regarding the Gulf of Tonkin. Cherwitz asserted that Johnson had several commonalities within his speeches addressing the Gulf of Tonkin incident: his messages were retaliatory, in that he was informing the public of actions taken rather than warning them of actions he would take; his messages were “typified” by dubious factual evidence; his messages contained “vivid and descriptive language” to help dramatize the event; Johnson localized the issue for Americans, though the event happened far away, by globalizing it; and lastly, his messages all built up Johnson’s personal credibility (Cherwitz 97-99). Ultimately, Cherwitz argued that Johnson was able to manipulate the public consciousness by altering realities about the Gulf of Tonkin by defining the situation of the event itself.

Ivie later assessed presidential war rhetoric as depicting the enemy as savage, while the United States retains a contrasting image of being a rational society. In his article, “Images of Savagery in American Justifications for War,” he illustrated a topoi of savagery, which involved three recurrent arguments in crisis rhetoric: force vs. freedom, aggression vs. defense, and rationality vs. irrationality. It is through this topoi of savagery that rhetors are able to justify war through dramatization, as well as maintain that the nation is seeking peace while simultaneously calling to arms. Ivie further argued that the rhetorical factors of the topoi of savagery encourages an inductive mode of argumentation that is expressed through a chronological recounting of events and a “selective use of metaphorical terms rich with depersonalizing and decivilizing connotations” (“Images of Savagery in American Justifications for War” 291). Therefore, we can
view this nation as the victim during military conflict in order to justify our actions against the savage enemy.

In many instances of American history, presidents have attributed the metaphor of war to non-military situations. David Zarefsky outlined how the expectations of war rhetoric can shift via metaphor from military action to policy by examining President Lyndon Johnson’s discourse on the War on Poverty. Zarefsky investigated the rhetorical factors of Johnson’s strategy that shifted the traditional perceptions of war with another nation to a “war” on poverty through policy. He found that the redefining of the “enemy” and the actions that could be taken to combat that enemy were effective in the passing of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. He gave special consideration to social reality as a central role of rhetoric, specifically addressing the power of the symbol on wider audiences (President Johnson's War on Poverty: Rhetoric and History 4). In Johnson’s case, the use of language and symbols effectively reshaped the public’s understanding of war, and thus Zarefsky illustrated how the elements of war can be applied to other instances like policy and the advocacy of those policies.

The purposes behind war rhetoric are examined to manifest in a few different ways. Cherwitz and Kenneth S. Zagacki demonstrated how crisis rhetoric utilizes multiple strategies and tactics influenced by whether the rhetoric has a consummatory or a justificatory purpose. The purpose of this study was to identify differences in rhetorical strategy and tactic between consummatory rhetoric, which is when “presidential discourse initially constituted the only official reply made by the American government,” and justificatory rhetoric, which is where “presidential discourse was from the very beginning part of a larger, overt military retaliation” of the U.S. government (Cherwitz and Zagacki 308). The authors concluded that the messages
presidents send are just as significant, if not more, than the physical and situational characteristics of the event. Ultimately, the situation in which the presidential war rhetoric occurs thus offers that rhetoric as a response to the crisis.

B. Lee Artz and Mark A. Pollock claimed that there is an observable instance when coercion in times of war is justifiable, and that rhetorical critics require the criteria of rhetorical exhaustion and human urgency in order to justify discourse regarding unconditional demands that may lead to physical force. Artz and Pollock argue that “the necessary moment for coercion occurs only when the degree of human urgency meets or exceeds the extent of rhetorical exhaustion,” with rhetorical exhaustion being defined as instances when coercion seems obligatory because “rhetoric has proven impotent” and human urgency referring to “the appropriateness of the situation for a coercive response” (Artz and Pollock 163). In the case of the Gulf War, the unconditional rhetoric that was used to justify military action fell apart under closer scrutiny using rhetorical exhaustion and human urgency. Therefore, George H. W. Bush’s rhetoric commanding unconditional demands regarding Kuwait was not rhetorically justified.

It is Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson who argued that the most vital element of presidential war rhetoric is “the need for the public and the congress to legitimate presidential use of war powers for an end that has been justified” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 101). Campbell and Jamieson outlined five recurring characteristics of presidential war rhetoric, which will be the critical framework of this project. These characteristics of presidential war rhetoric include: (1) an expression of deliberate and thoughtful consideration of the issue; (2) justification that is drawn from dramatic narratives and the chronicle of events, which casts the enemy as the aggressor against the nation’s ideals; (3) an audience who is urged
to unanimously commit themselves to action; (4) the re-establishing and legitimizing of the presidential powers of the commander in chief; and (5) the usage of strategic misrepresentation. Campbell and Jamieson’s framework is the most comprehensive consideration of the nature of presidential war rhetoric, and it is also the only framework that outwardly addresses the prominence and seriousness of falsities said by presidents to invoke or justify war. Therefore, it is this fifth element of “strategic misrepresentation” that is the focus of this study.

Presidential employment of strategic misrepresentation is explained as “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” and that presidents are “inclined to preempt dissent through misrepresentation, for example, by transforming the dramatic narrative justifying the use of force into melodrama” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 118-119). Very little literature of this element, if any, delves into the seriousness and profoundness of this issue. For presidents to be engaging in war rhetoric that utilizes manipulated, misconstrued, or outright false information should be a subject of serious study.

The profoundness of this issue of strategic misrepresentation is demonstrated in an evaluation of Ronald Reagan’s rhetoric on Libya and George W. Bush’s rhetoric on Iraq by Carol Winkler. Winkler addressed how preemptive war rhetoric necessitates a 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, which all heavily rely on strategic misrepresentation. To this extent, the manipulation or complete rewriting of reality can not only be used to justify a reaction to an observed crisis situation, but also be used to justify a crisis situation that has not happened yet.
This project aims to make the argument that the characteristic of strategic misrepresentation is insufficient in addressing the blatant and sometimes unapologetic use of deception to promote, justify, and sustain war, whether retaliatory or preemptive. In doing so, this project will examine President George W. Bush’s rhetoric during the beginning, middle, and end of the Iraq conflict. First, however, it is necessary to revisit literature on Bush’s rhetoric as president and his gravitation toward deception.

The Oratory of President George W. Bush

The oratory of Bush during his presidency is a mixed bag. Professor of political science Harold Bass Jr. wrote that Bush is “among the more rhetorically challenged modern presidents” and that “his speechmaking is not thought to be one of his major strengths” (Bass Jr. 905). He is considered a rather poor orator partly because of his errors in syntax and his “inability to arrange words and phrases into coherent sentences” (Herbert 195). His speech was so often nonsensical that Slate journalist Jacob Weisburg popularized the term “Bushisms,” which refer to his uttered statements that were riddled with faux pas, linguistic errors, unconventional pronunciations, and malapropisms (Weisberg, “The top 25 Bushisms of All Time”). Despite the countless instances of poor rhetoric, Bush is also credited with giving incredibly powerful and persuasive speeches. Bass Jr. points out that Bush was able to find his “presidential voice” to lead the country after the events of the September 11 terrorist attacks and acknowledges that he portrayed effective rhetoric in more informal situations (905).

Still, David A. Crockett went as far to say that Bush disregarded the requirements of the rhetorical presidency as he “served to truncate the deliberative process, ultimately leading to incoherent policy” (Crockett 481). Crockett further argued that the rhetorical presidency requires
deliberation and discussion, and the means by which Bush pushed through his policies after September 11 showcased that he failed the rules of the rhetorical presidency. However, it has also been argued that the classic standards of oratory have evolved because of the turn of the new century, and that Bush was simply adhering the necessities of the modern time (Herbert 196). Regardless of where Bush sits on the spectrum of eloquent and ineloquent speakers, the purpose of this project is to analyze the deception touted in his speeches.

President George W. Bush’s rhetoric has been closely examined for deception and lying by a number of scholars, journalists, and political analysts. Bush’s presidency utilized these tactics of manipulating the truth in several instances, and American journalist David Corn went as far to say that George W. Bush “treated the truth in the manner his predecessor treated an intern” (9). Corn claimed that Bush lied about several things as he campaigned for the presidency: about his past, his record as governor of Texas, about his intended programs as president, and about his opponents (Corn 11-12). Additionally, Bush pushed misinformation (whether knowingly or not) about the recount status of Florida’s votes in the 2000 election (Corn 43). In office, he misrepresented the case against standardized testing to push forward his “No Child Left Behind” legislation, misled working families by claiming that they would benefit from his tax cuts when it was primarily the wealthy that benefited from them, and misreported the supposed “energy crisis” of 2001 in order to push forward Bush’s energy plan, among many other strategically deceptive claims (Corn 65-78). Although lying is not a novel element of politics, President Bush seemed to push the boundaries of how much deception is expected or accepted by politicians.
Jamieson examined the Administration’s full case advocating for the preemptive invasion of Iraq and broke down Bush’s rhetoric leading up to the March 2003 Invasion of Iraq. Her evaluation revealed a number of missteps, namely: (1) the Freudian slips or “verbal leakage” that pointed towards a lack of confidence in the case and intention to “disarm” Saddam regardless of the evidence; (2) the refusal to “accept the burden of proof and shifting it to Saddam Hussein while making it impossible for him to assume it,” therefore effectively avoiding the responsibility of providing evidence which led to (3) the deliberate language used to minimize Bush’s accountability for the evidence; (4) the suggestions that conclusive evidence existed but could not be divulged; and (5) admittance that the case was a “patchwork” (“Justifying the War in Iraq” 251). She concluded that these five elements describe the erosion of Bush’s argument and illustrates how the Bush Administration was either aware or should have been aware that they had faults in their case.

Scholar Douglas Kellner invented the term “Bushspeak,” in reference to Orwellian “doublespeak” where falsity and truth are interchangeable, to describe the systematic engagement in the discourse of deception, manipulation, and lies committed by Bush (Kellner 640). He asserted that Bushspeak accounted for the reframing of the discourse surrounding Iraq so that “war against Iraq is for peace, the occupation of Iraq is its liberation, destroying its food and water supplies enables ‘humanitarian’ action, and the killing of countless Iraqis and destruction of the country will produce ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’” (Kellner 636). Kellner also critiqued the Bush Administrations’ “politics of fear” campaign to push the war and concurrent policies, as well as examined Bush’s “politics of lying” in which he made a critical examination of Bush’s post-Iraq rhetoric to demonstrate the deception which ultimately degrades democracy.
Kellner presumed that the Bush-Cheney Administration utilized a “politics of mass deception and lies” in order to promote and enact policy.

Wayne Booth acknowledged Bush’s use of what he terms “rhetorickery,” or rhetoric meant to deceive. However, he also raised the question as to why anyone would be trustworthy when everyone has implicit bias, asking: “why should any reader trust my claims that too much of Bush's rhetoric is rhetrickery?” (Booth 224). This question was raised as he addressed the bias that critics have when they deem war rhetoric “good” or “bad;” defensible or indefensible. However, as previously discussed, Booth focused his argument on the assumption that Bush was a “sincere” rhetor. This illustrates the importance of the project at hand being a war genre criticism, which will synthesize the use of Bush’s “rhetrickery” with the characteristics of Campbell and Jamieson’s critical framework of presidential war rhetoric.

Critical Method

To evaluate strategic misrepresentation, its shortcomings, and the various forms and methods of deceptive war rhetoric, this study will examine the rhetoric of George W. Bush on the Iraq War of 2003. While the popular uses of generic criticism may be to define and categorize groups of rhetoric and determine what artifacts are included in which genre, this project will examine the case study of Bush’s war rhetoric on Iraq to determine if the deception he used fits the “strategic misrepresentation” characteristic that Campbell and Jamieson identified. Based on the continuously changing rules of war and the increase of use of deception in political communication, this study aims to examine this usage of deception more closely in presidential war rhetoric. By using Campbell and Jamieson’s theoretical framework of the
presidential war rhetoric genre, this case study hopes to reveal the rhetorical strategies of deception that President Bush used in his public statements that justified military action in the build-up to, that argued for sustainment during, and possibly later attempted to defend the Invasion of Iraq after it was declared resolved. Ultimately, this project seeks to answer the following questions:

(1) In the timeline of the 2003 war in Iraq, what deceptive strategies were used by President George W. Bush to justify the war?

(2) How were these strategies rhetorically employed to promote, sustain, and defend the military action?

Preview of Chapters

In the next chapter, the mixed literature of deception and its related concepts are examined, and a more in-depth evaluation of the strategic misrepresentation characteristic is made. Chapter Three will examine President George W. Bush’s pre-war rhetoric of 2001 regarding Iraq to determine where the rhetorical situation for war rhetoric began. Chapter Four will address President Bush’s rhetoric within the year 2002, where he officially started to engage in active war rhetoric in the build-up to the war and where he started making deceptive claims to justify the war. Chapter Five will examine President Bush’s rhetoric during the year of 2003, where Bush articulated war rhetoric both before the invasion, during the U.S.’s military action in Iraq, and after the “official military operations” ended, which will illuminate his deceptive rhetoric of justification, sustainment, and defense for the war. The final chapter will summarize
the critical conclusions presented about war rhetoric and discuss the overall insights contributed by this case study.
A DEEPER EXAMINATION OF DECEPTION AND STRATEGIC MISREPRESENTATION

Lying, disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda are all concepts that are similar and perhaps even interrelated, but are ultimately distinct, have different uses, and manifest under different conditions. When investigating deceptive rhetoric—particularly disinformation—it is crucial to distinguish between these concepts. Blindly grouping these terms together muddles their individual uses and disregards their significance to political communication and rhetorical studies. This is especially important when considering which of these concepts are overtly identified under Campbell and Jamieson’s framework for strategic misrepresentation, which is the primary focus of this project.

First, this chapter will reflect on the different manifestations of deceptive communication, which will include a critical evaluation of lying, misinformation, propaganda, and disinformation. Special consideration will be given to the evolved understanding of disinformation from desinformatsia, and the apparent uses of and suspected motives behind each concept are discussed. Then, a more in-depth look at Campbell and Jamieson’s explanation of strategic misrepresentation is presented. Following, with the newly refined definitions of strategic misrepresentation and deceptive strategies, several examples of presidential strategic
misrepresentation, which Campbell and Jamieson used to showcase the concept, will be revisited. Finally, this chapter will conclude with the significant insights identified from this examination, which will then be applied to the case study of Bush’s war rhetoric in the following chapters.

Deceptive Communication

“Deception” is a deceptively simplistic term. While typically understood as concealing or misrepresenting the truth, most early research equated deception with lying. Hopper and Bell expanded this conception to include “pretense, concealments, practical jokes, hoaxes, and put-ons,” but even this understanding of deception is rather limited. In the simplest of explanations, deception is boiled down to those with agency and those without, where manipulation is employed “as a means to an end” (Rivers and Derksen 635).

Deception can manifest into many different forms such as lying, disinformation, or other related concepts. Lying is the most prevalent form of deception, but there are also what Matthew McGlone and Mark Knapp call “blood relatives,” or linguistic formulations that often aid in the creation of lies. These may include “exaggeration, evasion, indirectness, ambiguity, imprecision, half-truths, euphemisms, and many more” that may be present in the construction of a lie but may also be non-deceptive (McGlone and Knapp 18). There are an immense number of activities that can be considered deceptive, but this chapter specifically focuses on differentiating between lying, misinformation, propaganda, and disinformation.
Identifying a lie is largely dependent on the observer’s perspective. They are “defined by the way people perceive certain features of communicative acts in context,” which means that perceptions of lies differ from person to person (McGlone and Knapp 19). While most early research made the terms “deception” and “lying” as synonymous and interchangeable concepts, Hopper and Bell acknowledge three important characteristics of deception that distinguishes it from lying, and therefore expands the understanding of this phenomenon: (1) one can use truth to deceive; (2) deception is not only a verbal activity, but can also be nonverbal; and (3) the content of deception is not limited to factual information, but can also entail the enactment of a role rather than just making a statement (Hopper and Bell 289). Therefore, lying subverts the truth and is typically a false statement that is expressed orally.

Much academic research of lying focuses on lies that are intended to mislead, though this variation of lying is not the only form of it—just the most overt, and easiest form for social scientists to study. There are many types of lies with varying levels of intention and deception, which range from mistaken errors to omissions, restructuring of events, and exaggerations. Within this discussion of war rhetoric, motivations for lies are fairly innocuous in comparison, which may include a want “to preserve a relationship, to conceal an affair, or to secure a loan” (Fetzer 232). Therefore, while lying can have grave consequences in certain scenarios, it is typically not the most extreme case of deception. Instead, the peculiarity of lying is that it is a prevalent condition of social relations. Researchers found that lying is more apparent to achieve some form of social benefit rather than financial or material benefit, and that lies are often told to gain respect, self-esteem, or avoid conflict (Alterman 9). Though that is not exclusive, lying is
largely better examined in interpersonal social relation contexts and not entirely in the instances of presidential war rhetoric that will be examined in this project.

Misinformation

Similar to lying, misinformation is described as “false, mistaken, or misleading information,” but the classification of misinformation is dependent on the factor of the unintentional or unknowing spread of false information (Fetzer 231). One prime example of misinformation is the spread of fake news on the internet. When a Facebook user shares what appears to be a legitimate news story—but actually contains false or misleading information—they are engaging in the spread of misinformation. A specific instance of this would be the 2016 article that asserted that Pope Francis endorsed and supported President Donald Trump’s election which was shared and liked over 960,000 times on Facebook (O’Connor and Weatherall 3). The Facebook user did not write the story, and whether or not they were skeptical of the validity would not alter the fact that they “liked” the story—or at least the headline—enough to react to the post or share it with their friends on Facebook. This is misinformation at play; there is not necessarily an intention to mislead, but still an action of spreading false information is taking place. However, O’Connor and Weatherall argue that the source of much of this kind of misinformation takes the form of propaganda.
The study of propaganda is where the bulk of the communication discipline has placed its focus. Propaganda is “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Jowett and O’Donnell 7). This definition makes propaganda, as Jowett and O’Donnell argued, any form of intentional persuasion that is used to achieve a desired effect in a person or group of people. The meaning of the word “propaganda” derives from the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, which was a committee of cardinals convened by Pope Gregory XV in 1622, and “refers historically to proselytizing or even education (in a specific doctrine, to be sure)” (MacKay 219). With this understanding, propaganda can be evaluated both rhetorically and pedagogically. While much time and effort has been dedicated to examining the more severe forms of propaganda, it can manifest as both extreme instances like the British psychological warfare used on citizens of other countries in World War I, or it can be fairly innocent like the government giving a public service announcement promoting the washing of hands to reduce the spread of a virus.

As Jowett and O’Donnell wrote, a primary objective of propaganda is “to achieve acceptance of the propagandist’s ideology by both its own and the other side” (292). They noted that in the United States, the dominant ideology is “firmly based on the idea of a participatory democratic political structure and a free enterprise capitalist economic structure” (292). The American propagandist then must employ methods to distribute and enforce this ideology both within the nation and abroad. Edward Bernays, pioneer in the field of public relations and
propaganda, made the argument in his 1928 book, *Propaganda*, that an unseen governing body guides the American public to accept the desired opinion or outcome. He wrote:

> We have voluntarily agreed to let an invisible government sift the data and high-spot the outstanding issues so that our field of choice shall be narrowed to practical proportions. From our leaders and the media they use to reach the public, we accept the evidence and the demarcation of issues bearing upon public questions; from some ethical teacher, be it a minister, favorite essayist, or merely prevailing opinion, we accept a standardized code of social conduct to which we conform most of the time. (Bernays 3)

Bernays examined this concept of manipulating the masses through the exploration of intertwining psychology, democracy, and corporate interest. He asserted that those with the power to create and disseminate knowledge then “control the destinies of millions,” ultimately dictating the shaping of thoughts, values, and responses of the audience (Bernays 22). The powerless masses are then at the behest of the agents with the power, again incorporating the elements of agency (or lack thereof) as previously discussed regarding deception.

Jacquez Ellul furthered this understanding of propaganda by discussing different categories of the concept, including propaganda of integration, sociological propaganda, horizontal propaganda, and rational propaganda. Ellul argued that the majority of people are “easy prey” for propaganda, but that there are two common misconceptions: (1) that propaganda can not only contain lies and “tall stories,” but that truth cannot also be propaganda; and (2) propaganda does not only serve to change opinions, but rather it may also aim to “intensify existing trends, to sharpen and focus them, and, above all, to lead men to action” (Ellul vi-vii). Therefore, propaganda can have truthful messages, and not just change attitudes or behavior, but reinforce what is already believed or done.

A nation’s use of propaganda often includes imagery that promotes that nation’s ideals and frames them in a positive manner. Propagandic messages offer the desired beliefs, values,
attitudes, and behaviors of which the propagandists want the audience to subscribe “to the point that they constitute a set of norms for a society that dictate what is desirable and what should be done” (Jowett and O’Donnell 315). In modern day, with the invention of the internet, this may become an international event that is disseminated instantaneously. Propaganda is often used in the struggle for international power, which has led to nations incorporating propaganda in their foreign policies. The most prominent examples of this would be the Cold War, where the Soviet Union and United States both “sought to establish their political and cultural hegemony in the rest of the world” (Jowett and O’Donnell 302).

Propaganda itself is not necessarily deceptive until it uses the addition of false information in its campaign. As will be discussed, disinformation is when propaganda contains false information. Therefore, propaganda is not inherently deceptive, but it has the potential to become deceptive. The classification of the type of deception depends on the agent in any given scenario. If it is a propagandist who is spreading false information, then it is disinformation because there is intention behind it. If it is a citizen who is a recipient of that false information, such as the Facebook user who unknowingly shares fake news about the 2016 election, then that user is engaging in misinformation because they are likely unaware that the information is inaccurate and henceforth is not deliberately spreading false information to achieve a desired outcome. The Facebook user, instead, is fulfilling the propagandist’s desired outcome by believing and continuing to spread the disinformation.
Disinformation

Although the literature on disinformation spans over multiple disciplines and many decades, research on this concept is small in number and rather fractured. The lack of academic consideration of disinformation, both within and outside of the discipline of communication, as well as the absence of cohesion across what little research there is on disinformation, prevents this phenomenon from having a collective and empirical program of research (Freelon and Wells 146-147). Related concepts such as propaganda and even fake news have rich research history, but it was not until the 2016 United States presidential election that a need for a deeper understanding of disinformation was felt. In recent years, the discipline of communication, particularly the area of political communication, has become motivated to piece together and expand upon the disjointed history of research of disinformation.

In the broadest sense, disinformation “entails the distribution, assertion, or dissemination of false, mistaken, or misleading information in an intentional, deliberate, or purposeful effort to mislead, deceive, or confuse” (Fetzer 231). A more detailed definition of disinformation was established in the report to the European Commission on fake news and online disinformation by a High Level Expert Group, which states that the definition of disinformation “includes all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit” (“Final report”). This definition was created in response to identifying online disinformation, but it could be applied to non-online contexts as well. This is the definition that Freelon and Wells utilize in their evaluation of disinformation as political communication, asserting that this definition contains three critical criteria: (1) deception, (2)
potential for harm, and (3) an intent to harm (145). This distinction is important when examining related concepts, but also when determining the use of disinformation in political rhetoric.

Deception and the Truth

First, the component of deception must be addressed. What is central to this study is that if there is deception, then there must be truthfulness. Truthfulness in communication is understood as “the exchange of information that is known by the communicator to be accurate,” or to “communicate with fidelity” (Kalbfleisch and Docan-Morgan 31). This falls back on the struggle between proving intention—or, whether it is provable that the rhetor knowingly expressed a message they know not to be accurate or true. Therefore, there is the struggle of knowing what is true and what is false, and whether the speaker is aware of the validity of their messages or if they are willingly engaging in deceptive communication. However, evaluating deception utilizing rhetorical criticism, as this project aims to do, is complicated.

There are two assumptions that are considered universal guides to rhetorical criticism and how it is judged: (1) that there is no objective reality and (2) that a critic can only know an artifact of rhetoric through their own personal interpretation of it (Foss 24). Because reality is a symbolic creation, and each individual can interpret a rhetorical artifact with their own unique realities, there cannot be said to be one “right” way of interpreting an artifact. In other words, there is no objective reality that contains the “correct” interpretation of any given instance of rhetoric. Campbell and Jamieson addressed these assumptions when defining strategic misrepresentation in *Presidents Creating the Presidency*, writing:

To put that claim in perspective, we readily acknowledge that no rhetorical act can reveal the whole truth; even highly informative discourse addressed to experts can reflect the
“reality” it seeks to encompass only selectively, obscuring, at least through emphasis, some elements of whatever is being discussed. (242)

Therefore, whatever messages reside within a rhetorical artifact are both subject to the rhetor’s interpretation of the “facts” they express as well as the rhetorical critic’s interpretation when they analyze the message. Regarding this, Kenneth Burke wrote, “‘[t]he same facts’ are reported differently in Moscow and Washington not because the reporters are crooks, but because they have different philosophies, theories of motives, interpretations” (Burke 170). “Facts” are interpretations, and they are assessed through and shaped by individual realities. What must then be studied is the motivations and interpretations of the message.

Political communication also addresses this phenomenon, although not to the extent that rhetorical criticism asserts that there is no objective reality. Political communication scholars view reality as a “social product arising from interaction or communication” and argue that it is therefore “limited, specific, and circumscribed” (Denton Jr. and Woodward 37). Both understandings of reality—and, therefore, message truthfulness—are significant to the understanding of disinformation, for this project is blending the political communication definition of disinformation with the careful message evaluation of rhetorical studies in order to take a new perspective on the rhetorical power of disinformation.

What is critical to address concerning disinformation and deception in the argument of epistemological functions in rhetorical studies is that disinformation may contain *completely fabricated* information that is used intentionally to mislead its audience and potentially harm them. While scholars of rhetoric disagree on whether there is an objective truth, it should still be acknowledged that there are assertions that are assuredly *not* true and only enter social reality because they are spoken into existence. Therefore, while rhetoric and political communication
may contribute to shaping or influencing social reality, perhaps disinformation—as it can be entirely fabricated—invents false realities. However, the study of disinformation by rhetorical scholars may be justified, what is clear is that the pressing concern of disinformation in modern day is arguably too great for this epistemological disagreement to disregard.

**Potential and Intention to Harm**

In addition to deception, the definition of disinformation used by Freelon and Wells identifies a potential for harm and the intention to harm. The primary takeaway is that disinformation is dangerous and that any speaker that is knowingly engaging with disinformation is intentionally putting others at risk for the rhetor’s own benefit. It is not just that the rhetor wants to *do* harm, but that the deception has the capacity to *inflict* harm as well. When in the context of war rhetoric, disinformation is perhaps the most dangerous form of deception because of the sheer expansive reach it has as well as the diabolical destruction war may cause, all based on fabrications. Therefore, it can reasonably be regarded that intentional deception in presidential war rhetoric, given the expansive influence that the president has, can never be harmless.

**Disinformation Versus Dezinformatsia**

Early understandings of disinformation primarily revolve around equating disinformation with propaganda, earning disinformation its second name, “black propaganda,” which is “when the source is concealed or credited to a false authority and spreads lies, fabrications, and deceptions” (Jowett and O’Donnell 21). Stemming from the Soviet-era information warfare tactic of *dezinformatsia*, disinformation was initially only considered to include covert
intelligence operations. Jowett and O’Donnell explained Soviet disinformation as news stories that are “deliberately designed to weaken adversaries and planted in newspapers by journalists who are actually secret agents of a foreign country” (28). Much scholarship on disinformation only considers this phenomenon in this light, focusing on the extreme cases of the phenomenon where the KGB infiltrated non-communist nation’s media to plant falsities, such as the inaccurate story that appeared in over 60 countries which asserted that the United States developed the virus responsible for AIDS as a biological weapon (Jowett and O’Donnell 28). This most severe level of disinformation is practiced by most world powers, but as recent events such as the 2016 U.S. election has shown, disinformation is not always an international, covert operation. The pressing concern of disinformation is that it is starting to be used at higher frequency and on its own citizens, rather than just abroad in strategic warfare media campaigns.

**Uses of Deceptive Strategies**

With these distinctions in mind, it can be seen why highlighting the differences between these related concepts is so important. The type of deception depends on who is sending the message, whether the message contains false information, whether the sender is knowingly spreading the false information, and how small or large of an audience is receiving the message. When examining presidential war rhetoric, any given rhetorical artifact is usually not meant for a small audience, but rather Congress, the American public, and a global audience as well. This understanding underlines the significance of addressing the distinctions between these concepts and informs on the intentions and motivations behind war rhetoric.
Strategic Misrepresentation

American historian and journalist Eric Alterman wrote that the “ability to lie convincingly has come to be considered an almost prima facie qualification for holding high office” (1). As noted in the previous chapter, lying in politics is not a novel concept, as it has been historically documented extensively at all levels of government. However, as this chapter argues, there are different types of deception which have unique uses and influences, and these distinctions are paramount to consider when deception is used in the most prominent office in the land. In Campbell and Jamieson’s framework, strategic misrepresentation broadly covers all forms of deception used by presidents to make military action appealing to the public and prevent dissent. This project aims to determine if strategic misrepresentation is adequate to differentiate between the various forms of deception, particularly disinformation, in presidential war rhetoric. Therefore, a closer inspection of Campbell and Jamieson’s explanation of strategic misrepresentation is needed.

Campbell and Jamieson described presidential war rhetoric as having the “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” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 242). They argued that this tendency is not necessarily reflective on the character of the president, but rather reflects the unusual rhetorical situation the president finds themselves in. Because presidents have access to the most privileged of information and intelligence, they have the unique ability to present that information in a misrepresented or misconstrued manner in order to gain a unified response from their audience. It is important here to distinguish between information and intelligence; according to Steve
Dorril, an academic and author who specializes in British intelligence, “Agencies collect information that is collated, processed, analyzed, and then, more often than not, spun into intelligence. Raw, unmediated intelligence is rarely available to the media” (108). This further complicates matters, because intelligence is then shielded by ambiguity. As later chapters will address, intelligence agencies often have different or combating intelligence, and consensus is often hard to achieve. A slippery slope may transform something fairly innocuous into severe justifications for war, depending on the judgment and will of the president. This ability and potential abuse of power, as Campbell and Jamieson noted, was a concern of even Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson and James Madison (Presidents Creating the Presidency 244). There is a clear dilemma that presidents must face when posed with the opportunity and temptation of misrepresenting information in order to justify military action.

There is one potential distinction between disinformation and strategic misrepresentation, and it can be seen in the definition provided by Campbell and Jamieson; as written, strategic misrepresentation is a “tendency to misrepresent the events described,” meaning, there must be an event that occurs that becomes misrepresented by the president. Meanwhile, disinformation, as previously discussed, includes all information that is false or misleading and is intentionally distributed to cause harm. The distinction here is that misrepresentation requires an event or starting point of the discourse to manipulate, while disinformation can simply be a complete fabrication. In order to better illustrate this distinction, five of the six examples of strategic misrepresentation in presidential war rhetoric given by Campbell and Jamieson will be explored in more detail. The sixth example, President George W. Bush and the 2003 Iraq War, will be evaluated at length in the remaining chapters.
Applications of Strategic Misrepresentation

Campbell and Jamieson examined several instances of strategic misrepresentation used by presidents throughout the centuries to promote or engage in military action. It should be noted that when evaluating rhetorical events in history, there are three major considerations to be aware of. Rhetorical historian Kathleen J. Turner acknowledges these considerations in the metaphor of piecing together history like a jigsaw puzzle: (1) one cannot simply look at the top of the jigsaw box to see the full picture; instead, historians are guided “by the conceptions of their time and of themselves;” (2) the jigsaw puzzle does not come with a complete set of pieces and may include pieces from other puzzles, therefore historical research requires “the strength to discard extraneous materials, the serenity and perceptiveness to fill the gaps, and the wisdom to know the difference;” and, lastly, (3) the pieces may be like “amoebas, changing shape and significance depending on the context in which they are placed” (Turner 10-11). Therefore, the further a critic delves into history, the less tangible and sharp the edges of these pieces are. When considering instances of rhetoric as far back as Campbell and Jamieson have, these considerations should be at the forefront of the analysis.

The first example given by Campbell and Jamieson was James K. Polk and his misrepresentation of Mexican aggression that initiated the Mexican-American War that started in 1846. According to Campbell and Jamieson, Polk both “deliberately misrepresented events so as to paint the Mexicans as aggressors” and also prematurely claimed that Congress would support a war with Mexico during a railroad speech, despite the fact that less than an estimated “10 percent” of Congress would have voted for the war after examining all of the facts at that time (Presidents Creating the Presidency 244-245). He claimed that Mexico attacked U.S. soldiers,
but there was a dispute about whether the ill-placed unit of American soldiers were really attacked by Mexicans within Mexican territory. Abraham Lincoln had famously demanded to know the exact “spot of soil” where the skirmish had taken place, which Polk had never answered (Alterman 16). Regardless of this disagreement, Polk effectively spoke a justification for war into existence between the framing of Mexicans as aggressors, falsely declaring Congress’ support, and inflating whatever skirmish happened (or did not happen) in Mexico.

William McKinley’s fame of being one of the four sitting presidents that were assassinated is perhaps rivaled with his fame for his hand in the promotion of the Spanish-American war. “Remember the Maine, to hell with Spain” was the famous battle cry of the Spanish-American war when the ship exploded in the Havana harbor in February 1898. McKinley falsely attributed the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine battleship to the Spanish, despite the exact cause of the explosion never being determined (Editors, The Explosion of the USS Maine). While the battleship could very well have exploded due to faulty boilers that were common on that type of ship, McKinley obtained a declaration of war from Congress by citing the Maine’s explosion as a reason for military retaliation against the Spanish. At the time, sensationalism was rampant, which was the beginnings of “fake news” where misinformation and sensationalized accounts were used to sell papers (Ashley et. al 140). This “yellow journalism,” by such publications as William Randolph Hurst, aided in the spread of this misrepresentation of the Maine’s demise and the fear of the Spanish, which helped garner support for the war.

Woodrow Wilson broke out of his isolationist mindset and became an avid supporter for entering World War I when the Germans sunk the British passenger ship, Sussex, and when British intelligence intercepted the Zimmermann telegram. Campbell and Jamieson wrote that
Wilson “used the fabricated Zimmermann letter to imply a German threat to U.S. sovereignty” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 245). The telegram was sent from German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmermann to the German ambassador to Mexico, Heinrich von Eckardt, and it proposed a military alliance between Germany and Mexico which would then bring World War I to the Americas. A war with Mexico that had support from the Germans at the time of a world war would, in fact, threaten U.S. sovereignty. However, the perception that this telegram was fabricated is actually false, which means it was not necessarily misrepresented by Wilson. Zimmermann publicly stated that the telegram was genuine in a speech on March 3, 1917, and then again stated that it was genuine on March 29, 1917 in a speech to the German parliament (Meyer, “The Mexican-German Conspiracy of 1915”). Whether the threat of the letter was exaggerated is what may qualify this example as strategic misrepresentation, though it is not as dire as other examples provided given that the letter was real, and Germany did offer an alliance with Mexico which would bring conflict to the United States’ front door.

Franklin D. Roosevelt is at the forefront of presidential war rhetoric, being that he is attributed to some of the most profound instances of war rhetoric in one of the most significant wars of the world’s history. However, he was not immune to the use of strategic misrepresentation, as Campbell and Jamieson pointed out. In a radio speech to the nation on September 11, 1941, Roosevelt “described an incident in which a German U-boat had fired torpedoes at the destroyer U.S.S. Greer,” and claimed that “the Germans had committed an act of piracy” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 246). In actuality, Greer had been tracking the German U-boat for three hours and conveying its location to British conveys to aid in the sinking of the boat. This trailing of the U-boat is provocation, which Roosevelt conveniently left out of
his speech, instead claiming that “the German submarine fired first… without warning and with deliberate desire to sink her” (Alterman 17). This event is a well-documented instance of strategic misrepresentation of presidential war rhetoric for there was an initial situation that occurred that was manipulated to suit the goals of the president, and of which was later replicated by Lyndon B. Johnson with the Gulf of Tonkin.

Campbell and Jamieson discussed at length the instance of “Nayirah” and her compelling narrative that was used by George H. W. Bush repeatedly in his justifications for military action against Iraq in 1991. In an appearance before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, “Nayirah” gave testimony about the horrible conditions of Kuwait after the Iraqis infiltrated the country. Her story included the often-repeated event where Iraqi soldiers took babies out of hospital incubators and left them on the cold ground to die. Bush used this testimony in an October 28 speech, where “he said that twenty-two babies had died and that ‘the hospital employees were shot and the plundered machines were shipped off to Baghdad’” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 246). Later, it was revealed that “Nayirah” was actually the Kuwait ambassador’s daughter and a member of the royal family of Kuwait, and that no babies had been removed from incubators (Presidents Creating the Presidency 247). This is another prime example of strategic misrepresentation; as far as the world is aware, it was not George H. W. Bush who encouraged “Nayirah” to go before Congress and spin this narrative. Bush Senior himself did not make up this story, he just used the story, and was therefore not accountable for the lie.

Lastly, Campbell and Jamieson offered the account of George W. Bush and the 2003 war in Iraq as their final example of strategic misrepresentation. They used the particular case of the
famous “16 words,” where Bush claimed that Iraq had purchased yellowcake uranium from Niger in his 2003 State of the Union address. They also documented several comparisons between what Bush had said and what was later revealed, concluding the section by saying that “Once again, the need to mobilize and to gain broad public support for military action produced strategic deception” (*Presidents Creating the Presidency* 248). It appears that even to Campbell and Jamieson, the case of Bush and the Iraq War of 2003 does not neatly fit into the parameters of “strategic misrepresentation.” Given the recency and the complexity of the 2003 Iraq war, as well as the rampant deception that is observable, Bush’s rhetoric that promoted and justified this war will be detailed at length in the following three chapters. In hopes to better understand to what extent does strategic misrepresentation account for deception, a thorough analysis of Bush’s rhetoric involving the justification for war—namely, any mention of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, and weapons of mass destruction—will be presented.

**Summary**

War is complex, and often has a long build-up with many speeches and arguments that give life to the complicated push-and-pull of deciding whether to engage in military action or not. This is true for every one of the examples provided by Campbell and Jamieson; these examples are small events in the grand timeline of each war the United States has engaged in—though the importance of these events is not to be diminished. Many were the catalysts for war, or at least were used to garner enough support by Congress and the public to embark into war. The purpose of the following chapters to examine the full timeline of Bush’s Iraq war rhetoric is to examine, at length, the full picture and not just a single, isolated incident.
As this chapter illustrated, there are a number of notable distinctions that separate the various forms of deception. Most significantly, intention is paramount to distinguishing between different methods of deceit. If the speaker is unknowingly spreading lies or misinformation, they cannot be considered to be “strategically” misrepresenting events, for they are instead accidentally misrepresenting events. Strategic misrepresentation may include both the intentional and unintentional, but that element of strategy is still at play. The length to which the deception goes is what is concerning; is the President giving a white lie? Are they withholding information that the public should otherwise know? Are they blatantly fabricating entire events, or attributing a false cause to an event that later becomes the catalyst for war? These are all important questions when evaluating deception in presidential war rhetoric. Moreover, when it can be proven that presidents deceive knowingly, the question becomes more than just the question of intent; instead, it becomes a question of method.

The question remains as to what extent does strategic misrepresentation and deception overlap. As already addressed, disinformation does not appear to be considered under strategic misrepresentation because it does not necessarily require an initial event that is misrepresented by the president. Therefore, all forms of deception will be evaluated in George W. Bush’s rhetoric on Iraq to determine what forms of deception he used and how, and whether his deceit is adequately explained by the characteristic of strategic misrepresentation or if something more sinister and evolved was at play. In the following chapters, an examination of Bush’s rhetoric addressing Iraq, Saddam Hussein, and weapons of mass destruction detail a timeline of setting up the argument for, sustainment of, and defense of, the 2003 Invasion of Iraq. As discussed in the previous chapter, Congressional hearings and investigations revealed that the Bush
Administration either misrepresented or manipulated information to sell the war to the public and Congress (U.S. Senate, “Senate Intelligence Committee”). The intent of the rest of this project is to determine the exact instances in which George W. Bush set up his pitch, and what forms of deception were used and how he used them.
George W. Bush had five primary arguments that were either baseless or had insufficient intelligence that he utilized in the build-up to the invasion of Iraq. These five claims, as established by the U.S. Senate investigations, were: (1) that Iraq continued to have an active program to develop weapons of mass destruction; (2) that Iraq had active chemical and biological weapons programs; (3) that Iraq or Saddam Hussein had some connection with al-Qaeda; (4) that Iraq would supply weapons to terrorist groups; and (5) the infamous 16 words asserting that Iraq had procured yellowcake uranium from Niger with intent to make nuclear weapons. According to various government investigations, including investigations into pre-war and post-war intelligence on Iraq, all five of these assertions were false at the time of Bush’s presidency or were not supported by American intelligence at the time they were uttered (U.S. Senate, “Senate Intelligence Committee”). This means that whether Bush was fully aware of the falsities of his statements or not, these claims used to support military action were deceitful according to the previously established definitions.

To consider the full extent of Bush’s efforts to justify military action against Iraq, this chapter will evaluate Bush’s rhetoric from his very first year as president. As previously
established, a genre such as presidential war rhetoric is called into being from a recurring situation which requires a response. As this is prior to any official declaration of war efforts against Iraq—and, therefore, prior to any of the major instances of deception committed by the president—this chapter aims to establish the exact origin of the rhetorical situation that called for George W. Bush’s war rhetoric against Iraq. In addition to when this emergence was, an analysis of all of Bush's 2001 rhetoric regarding Saddam Hussein, Iraq, and weapons of mass destruction, should also contribute to the understanding of how this situation came into being. First, the historical context of U.S. relations with Iraq needs to be established. Then, a close analysis of Bush’s rhetoric from press conferences and public addresses throughout the year of 2001 will take place, which will include a discussion of any observable underlying rhetorical themes. Lastly, any major conclusions about the implications seen from this analysis will be discussed.

Background on the Conflict with Iraq

Preceding Bush’s presidency, both George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton’s presidencies had avidly worked toward disarming Iraq from nuclear weapons. H. W. Bush had gone as far as engaging in war in the Gulf War of 1990-1991. Clinton managed to avoid any officially declared war, though he did employ a bombing campaign in strategic areas in the late 90’s. Scholar of international politics Paolo Ruspini explained that much of the United States’ conflict with Iraq stems from active efforts to prevent any one country from becoming powerful enough to control the Gulf’s oil supply. The United States has been engaging in dual containment efforts with Iraq and Iran since the Reagan Administration, though it was not named as such until the Clinton Administration. However, Ruspini identified contradictions to these strategies in 1999, namely
that “the U.S. administration does not want the disintegration of Iraq,” which means that the U.S.
is dependent on Saddam Hussein to counterbalance Iran’s role in the region, yet at the same time,
the U.S. “wishes to weaken, restrain, or remove Saddam Hussein” (Ruspini 95).

Clinton’s strategy of dual containment was “to bring down the regime in Baghdad and
change the behavior of the government in [Tehran],” which was intended to “change the
longlasting balance of power structure in the region based on the concept that Iran and Iraq could
alternatively ‘deter the one from the other’” (Ruspini 93). Since Reagan, the U.S. has teetered
back and forth between which Gulf country was considered the greatest threat to the region;
Reagan first established it as Iran, though the Gulf War of 1990-91 rekindled the fear of Iraq’s
strength when they invaded Kuwait (Ruspini 94). Later, Clinton employed a four-day bombing
campaign in Iraq called Operation Desert Fox in December of 1998, which communicated Iraq
as the greater threat.

Officially, Clinton’s bombing effort was a reflexive action to Saddam Hussein's refusal to
cooperate with United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors, which was meant to
“degrade” any remaining facilities that could be used to create weapons of mass destruction.
However, analyst William M. Arkin argued that Operation Desert Fox was a direct attack on the
Iraqi regime. In his 1999 article in the Washington Post, Arkin pointed out that of the 100
locations attacked in the bombings, 35 locations “were selected because of their role in Iraq's air
defense system, an essential first step in any air war,” 13 were “facilities associated with
chemical and biological weapons or ballistic missiles,” three locations were bases that could
have potentially been used in a repeat invasion of Kuwait, and 49 locations were considered
Hussein’s “internal apparatus” (Arkin, “The Difference Was in the Details”). These locations included:

[A] half-dozen palace strongholds and their supporting cast of secret police, guard and transport organizations. Some sites, such as Radwaniyah, had been bombed in 1991 (Saddam's quarters there were designated "L01" in Desert Storm, meaning the first target in the Leadership category). Other sites, particularly "special" barracks and units in and around downtown Baghdad and the outlying palaces, were bombed for the first time. (Arkin, “The Difference Was in the Details”)

The strategic bombing of these locations, as Arkin argued, was intended to aid in the crippling of the Hussein regime, which is more invasive than simply preventing Iraq from developing nuclear weapons.

Saddam Hussein was president of Iraq from 1979 to 2003, and was convicted and put to death in 2006 at an Iraqi army base. A 2006 article published in the New York Times described Hussein as having had “oppressed Iraq for more than 30 years, unleashing devastating regional wars and reducing his once promising, oil-rich nation to a claustrophobic police state” (MacFarquhar, “Saddam Hussein, Defiant Dictator Who Ruled Iraq With Violence and Fear, Dies”). He was known as a brutal ruler, one that employed a secret police, jailed political opponents, and deployed poisonous gas on the northern Kurdish village of Halabja in 1988. In the gassing, he killed an estimated 5,000 of his own citizens with an additional 10,000 wounded, all for his suspicion that they were disloyal to him (MacFarquhar, “Saddam Hussein, Defiant Dictator”). Despite how horrendous and murderous Hussein was, the United States could not simply remove Hussein from power because of his threat to the power balance of the Middle East and his deplorable actions against his own people.

Pre-war intelligence asserts that Iraq did, in fact, destroy any facilities and materials that could be used to continue their weapons programs. The primary concern regarding Iraq in the
new millennium revolved around the lack of definitive information as to whether Iraq was continuing their weapons program and how real and immediate the threat of Iraqi WMDs were. According to the official press release from the Senate Intelligence Committee that conducted several investigations into the intelligence and claims made regarding the 2003 Iraq War, the Committee concluded that “[s]tatements by the President and Vice President prior to the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate regarding Iraq’s chemical weapons production capability and activities did not reflect the intelligence community’s uncertainties as to whether such production was ongoing” (U.S. Senate. “Senate Intelligence Committee”). Therefore, to give grounds for military action, great lengths had to be taken to make military action against Iraq appear reasonable and justifiable.

**Rhetorical Analysis of Bush’s Pre-War Rhetoric of 2001**

Timelines of Bush’s justifications for a war with Iraq have already been established (Stein and Dickinson; “Justifications for a War Against Iraq;” and “Timeline: Iraq War”), but they mostly only focus on the major events and they fail to further analyze the rhetorical significance of the claims made. As the following timeline of Bush’s rhetoric will show, much of his speech in his first year as president expressed elements of containment and defense. Bush repeatedly raised the issue of containing Iraq’s alleged efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction and Hussein’s apparent affinity for “mischief.” In addition, he led efforts to increase military spending for missile defense against terrorism significantly prior to the September 11 terrorist attacks. These themes of containment and defense, along with elements of Campbell and
Jamieson’s theoretical framework on presidential war rhetoric, constitute the themes observed in Bush’s pre-war rhetoric of 2001.

**Containment and Military Defense Rhetoric**

Rhetoric of containment is not only used in the foreign policy sense, as it has also been applied for domestic issues. Communication scholar Kristen Poirot explained containment rhetoric as the “attempt to tame the threat of alternative views through discipline and confinement, clearly articulating the other as outside of the dominant values and structures of U.S. culture” (Poirot 266). In domestic social contexts, containment rhetoric has been applied to social movements such as the civil rights movement (Murphy, “Domesticating Dissent”), women’s liberation (Anderson, “Rhymes with Rich;” Poirot, “Domesticating the Liberated Woman”), and even third-party political movements (Neville-Shepard, “Containment Rhetoric and the Redefinition of Third-Parties”). Political rhetorician Ryan Neville-Shepard identified the origin of containment rhetoric, pointing to an article published in 1947 in *Foreign Affairs* which was titled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” In the article, which was initially authored anonymously by “X” but later attributed to George F. Kennan, it was argued that in response to Soviet influences, “the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.” In this context, containment was clearly referring to preventing Soviet communism from spreading throughout the world and reflects the dual containment efforts against Iraq and Iran that were previously discussed.
Whether applied in foreign policies or in domestic circumstances, containment rhetoric “functions to discipline those who question hegemonic structures, and it works through a narrative framing certain groups as outsiders” (Neville-Shepard 252). Therefore, in presidential war rhetoric, one could expect those hegemonic structures to be reinforced and for the president to establish a separation of “us” versus “them” in their rhetoric about their foe. These elements may be transferable from classic understandings of war rhetoric, as seen through Ivie’s (“Presidential Movies for War”) framework for rhetorical use of “god-terms,” as well as his topoi of savagery (“Images of Savagery in American Justifications for War”). In these rhetorical frameworks, the enemy would be depicted as savage and evil, while the U.S. would be described as good, just, and moral. Thus, a justification is constructed as to why the “good” nation must constrain or limit the “bad” nation, lest havoc and terror be brought upon the world.

The second theme that prevails in Bush’s rhetoric of 2001 is the increase of government spending on military defense, particularly of missile defense, which occurred both prior to and after the terrorist attacks of September 11. Given that the primary objective of military efforts is the defense against foreign adversaries, defense spending is a chief component of foreign policy. Professor of Communication Philip Wander identified three major concepts relating to the rhetoric of foreign policy: prophetic dualism, technocratic realism, and nationalism. Wander described prophetic dualism in American policy with Vietnam as “moral and spiritual superiority,” which was demonstrated by a set of virtues that consisted of “[r]eligious faith, moral insight, [and] a respect for the laws of God” that not only explained “why those in power deserved to be there, but also why the United States should engage in certain kinds of action abroad” (Wander 342). Wander went on to explain that prophetic dualism divides the world into
two camps; one camp that is good, decent, and acts in accordance with God’s will, while the
other camp is opposite. Thus, between these two camps is conflict, and a resolution of that
conflict is only attained through complete victory over the other (Wander 342). Technocratic
realism, on the other hand, describes a method to negotiation, which is otherwise unachievable
with prophetic dualism. In technocratic realism, “negotiation becomes possible in areas of
mutual interest,” such as avoiding a nuclear war (Wander 349). Lastly, nationalism asserts a kind
of personification over nations, and reinforces an international hierarchy. According to the U.S.,
the one nation at the top of this hierarchy that is superior to all others is the United States. As
Wander explains:

The United States is the manifestation of Truth, Justice, and Freedom placed on this earth
by a God whose purpose it is to make of it an instrument for extending His spiritual and
material blessings to the rest of humanity. The ground on which the rhetoric of American
foreign policy is situated is the Nation. Its personification as an Actor with a sense of
purpose, and important mission in a world of nation, and a moral and spiritual center
raising it above all other nations forms the essential story out of which reasons are given
in support of foreign policy. (353)

It is through these three themes that the rhetoric of American foreign policy is often
administered.

In addition to the elements of containment and military defense rhetoric, some of
Campbell and Jamieson’s characteristics of presidential war rhetoric can be observed in Bush’s
rhetoric that refers to Saddam Hussein, Iraq, and weapons of mass destruction during 2001.
Reviewing previous chapters, these characteristics include: (1) “the momentous decision to resort
to force is deliberate, the product of thoughtful consideration;” (2) action is justified through “a
chronicle or narrative from which argumentative claims are drawn;” (3) the audience is
encouraged to agree unanimously on the purpose and commit totally; (4) both justifies the use of
force and re-legitimizes the “presidential assumption of the extraordinary powers of the
commander in chief;” and (5) the use of strategic misrepresentation as a “function” of these other characteristics (Presidents Creating the Presidency 221). A detailed analysis of Bush’s rhetoric from January of 2001 to December of 2001 will outline the presence of these themes and any other major rhetorical implications observed.

**Bush’s Rhetoric from January 2001 to December 2001**

Since the very first day of his presidency, George W. Bush was warning Americans on the dangers of weapons of mass destruction. In his January 20, 2001 Inaugural Address, he said:

> We will build our defenses beyond challenge, lest weakness invite challenge. We will confront weapons of mass destruction, so that a new century is spared new horrors. The enemies of liberty and our country should make no mistake: America remains engaged in the world by history and by choice, shaping a balance of power that favors freedom. We will defend our allies and our interests. We will show purpose without arrogance. We will meet aggression and bad faith with resolve and strength. And to all nations, we will speak for the values that gave our nation birth. (Bush, “First Inaugural Address”)

Worries about other countries procuring weapons of mass destruction (i.e. nuclear weapons) have plagued Americans since their invention in World War II. As previously noted, discussions of the Middle East and the struggle for power there have been occurring since the Reagan Administration. Therefore, this paragraph of text seems fitting enough for the context in that weapons of mass destruction were a credible and realistic fear for Americans that Bush needed to address in order to establish his power to quell those fears.

However, in the timeline of his war rhetoric, this excerpt of his speech is significant for two reasons; first, it brings the conversation of WMDs and the enemies of America to the table. Symbolically, America is equated to freedom, and anyone who threatens that freedom is bad and will be punished. The closeness of these two assertions within the speech insinuates that any foreign nation with weapons of mass destruction are therefore enemies of America, and that it is
a threat that may very well come to fruition because it is important enough to mention in an inaugural speech. Secondly, this excerpt of Bush’s first speech as president rhetorically offers him a starting point; it is a warning, which means it gives him a significant point in his presidency that he could refer back to. This is not to say that, at this point in time, he had any semblance of intention to invade Iraq. The exact point of time Bush decided to go to war and his reasons for it cannot be unequivocally known unless he otherwise states. But in terms of the rhetorical timeline and justifications for war with Iraq, whether it was intentional at the time or not, this is his natural starting point.

February of 2001 saw many press conferences where Bush continuously referred to Hussein, the sanctions on Iraq, and the potential threat to peace or freedom. In a joint press conference with Mexican President Vicente Fox on February 16, Bush answered a question regarding the routine enforcement of the no-fly zone on Iraq. He said:

Saddam Hussein has got to understand that we expect him to conform to the agreement that he signed after Desert Storm. We will enforce the no-fly zone, both south and north. Our intention is to make sure that the world is as peaceful as possible. And we’re going to watch very carefully as to whether or not he develops weapons of mass destruction, and if we catch him doing so we'll take the appropriate action. (Bush and Fox)

Here, Bush does two things: he equates any action by Hussein as anti-peace, therefore anti-American, by claiming that America’s goal is to maintain world peace and any of Hussein’s actions would infringe on that peace. This contributes to the perception of America’s role as a world power being a peacekeeper, whose foreign activities are to spread or maintain freedom. Secondly, it reinforces Bush’s power as president, and his specific use of “we” reinforces America’s military power. Both of these evaluations are supported by Campbell and Jamieson’s framework for presidential war rhetoric, which assert that presidents’ rhetoric characterizes enemies as an aggressor against America’s ideals and that requires the re-legitimating of
presidential powers of the commander in chief to then combat that enemy (Campbell and Jamieson 221).

In two additional press conferences that month, Bush repeatedly answered questions about Iraq where he alluded to Hussein’s interest in developing weapons of mass destruction and asserted that the United States would enforce consequences on Hussein if he were to do so (Bush, “Press Conference by the President, Feb. 22, 2001;” Bush and Blair, “Remarks by the President and Prime Minister Blair in Joint Press Conference”). At this point, furthering his remarks in this inaugural address, these statements classify as the containment of Iraq’s perceived efforts to challenge or disregard the sanctions enforced on them by the United Nations. In these press conferences, Bush spoke about Hussein as a potential threat and legitimizes the fear that Iraq could develop weapons of mass destruction without saying how real of a threat it is. By continuously saying that Iraq should not develop weapons of mass destruction—such as in the February 23 press conference in which he said there are active efforts being made to “make it clear to Saddam Hussein that he shall not terrorize his neighbors, and not develop weapons of mass destruction” (Bush and Blair, “Remarks by the President and Prime Minister Blair in Joint Press Conference”)—it contributes to a rhetorical situation where it is assumed that Hussein must be attempting, or at least thinking, to do so. Therefore, Iraq was a growing threat.

In his February 27 Address of the President to the Joint Session of Congress, Bush made the ambiguous argument for why the United States needs increased missile defenses. In his speech, he said:

Our nation also needs a clear strategy to confront the threats of the 21st century—threats that are more widespread and less certain. They range from terrorists who threaten with bombs to tyrants in rogue nations intent upon developing weapons of mass destruction. To protect our own people, our allies and friends, we must develop and we must deploy
effective missile defenses. (Bush, "Address of the President to the Joint Session of Congress")

In this excerpt, he outright acknowledged that these threats he spoke of are “less certain,” but still managed to successfully describe these threats ranging from terrorists to tyrants. Those aware of recent history and paying attention to Bush’s press conferences earlier in the month would already be making the connection of Hussein with the “tyrant” comment. The argument for increase of missile defenses suggested to the public that these threats against America are growing and should be of immediate concern, and also continued to frame the United States as the good savior of democracy-loving nations worldwide. Therefore, the issue of containment on these threats was given immediacy and the prophetic dualism of United States foreign policy efforts was fortified.

In speeches to the National Defense University and the U.S. Naval Academy in May 2001, Bush made repeated references to Hussein, terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction. He referred to the greatest threats to the United State being less-responsible “states for whom terror and blackmail are a way of life,” after which he immediately retold the United States’ efforts to combat Hussein when Iraq invaded Kuwait (Bush, "Remarks by the President to Students and Faculty at National Defense University"). This then links Iraq and Hussein with “blackmail” and perceptions that Iraq is a moral-less country. In this speech, he also stated that, “Like Saddam Hussein, some of today's tyrants are gripped by an implacable hatred of the United States of America. They hate our friends, they hate our values, they hate democracy and freedom and individual liberty,” after which he asserted that “Cold War deterrence is no longer enough” (Bush, “Remarks by the President to Students and Faculty at National Defense University"). The United States was continuously depicted as the democracy- and freedom-
loving nation that is good, and these states of terror like Hussein’s Iraq stands for everything opposite to the U.S. Because of this dualism, “deterrence is no longer enough,” meaning an alternate method to containment may be on the horizon.

He again alluded to Hussein’s intent to disobey sanctions in a commencement speech to the U.S. Naval Academy where he said, “Another 3,800 sailors and Marines stand guard nearby with the Boxer amphibious ready group, deterring any mischief Saddam might contemplate” (Bush, “Remarks by the President at U.S. Naval Academy Commencement”). The repetition of remarks claiming that Hussein was a threat who is looking to cause trouble continues to establish a growing and immediate threat in the public’s mind, reinforcing a growing problem that must be dealt with. By now, Bush has repeatedly established his attitudes toward Hussein and Iraq and has attempted to justify those views to the nation. He also demonstrated current efforts being made in response to those attitudes, which means that his views on Hussein and Iraq are also America’s views.

Continuing this routine, Bush repeated the threat of weapons of mass destruction and accelerated his criticism of Hussein in two press conferences held in June and August of 2001. In a joint press conference with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar on June 12, Bush commented that, “Those new threats are terrorism, based upon the capacity of some countries to develop weapons of mass destruction, and therefore, hold the United States and our friends hostage. It is so important we think differently in order to address those threats” (Bush and Aznar). This again established Bush’s desire for an increase of missile defense and the threat of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, but exactly how “differently” the U.S. needed to think about these threats was not elaborated upon. In August, Bush said, “As I said, Saddam
Hussein is a menace, he's still a menace and we need to keep him in check, and will,” and then continued with, “He's been a menace forever, and we will do—he needs to open his country up for inspection, so we can see whether or not he's developing weapons of mass destruction” (Bush, “Remarks by the President to the Pool”). According to a chronology of inspections of Iraq’s facilities listed by the Arms Control Association, years leading up to Bush’s August 2001 statement saw that Iraq was somewhat cooperative with allowing scheduled investigations of declared facilities. However, it was true that the country was not entirely “open” (“Iraq: A Chronology of UN Inspections”).

On August 24, 2001, Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld offered remarks in their joint announcement of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At one point of the address, Bush responded to a question from the press, stating:

One of the threats that faces America is the threat of blackmail as a result of some rogue nation having a weapon of mass destruction. And that not only is a threat to our own land, it's also a threat to our forward-thinking foreign policy. Take, for example, some nation in the Middle Eastern area developing a weapon of mass destruction and then threatening the United States if we were to move troops into an area to protect an ally. So, in other words, the ability to have a weapon of mass destruction not only affects our people living in America, because some of these weapons have now got longer ranges than ever anticipated, but also affects our foreign policy. It could be used as an attempt to isolate America and we're not going to let that happen. (Bush and Rumsfeld)

At this point, Bush had made enough connections between “rogue” nations and Iraq to make it clear which country he is referring to, especially in regard to his National Defense University speech where he persistently made comments about blackmail, tyrants, rogue nations, and Hussein. Here he also elaborated on the kind of consequences this hypothetical scenario could cause; the isolation of America is precisely against what Bush declared in his inaugural address where he reasserted America’s place as a world power. Therefore, “rogue nations” with WMD
capabilities were not only a threat to American freedom, but they were also a threat to America’s rightful place as a powerful, liberty-spreading country.

Following the September 11 terrorist attacks, Bush stepped into his role as a wartime president. During his several speeches in September, he attempted to use his presidential power to define the social reality Americans now faced after being attacked. He tried to rhetorically associate Islam with peace, what he calls the “true” nature of Islam (Bush, “Islam is Peace”). Contrary to this true nature, Bush said that the terrorists “don’t represent peace. They represent evil and war.” In this speech, as J. Maggio argued, Bush treated terrorists as an “amorphous group, almost like a primordial force of evil” (Maggio 827). Because of this treatment, Bush transformed the concept of these terrorists from tangible and real people to an empty signifier. They become “a symbol that can be used and employed as a placeholder for ‘evil or ‘enemy,’” (Maggio 827). His “Islam is Peace” speech was in reaction to the September 11 attacks, which mean much of his rhetoric addressed those responsible for the attacks. However, because of this rhetorical transformation of meaning, Bush could shift the meaning of “terrorists” and “terrorism,” which he later made use of in his justifications for war in Iraq.

Additionally, Bush began to create one of his main justifications that he later used for war with Iraq in his September 20 speech to a joint session of Congress. In his speech, he officially connected certain nations with terrorism, specifically linking al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Afghanistan. However certain these accusations were, he also made the curious assertion that, “[o]ur enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and any government that supports them” (Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People”). Continuing this thought, he later said:
We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime. (Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People”)

The infamous, polarizing line of “You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists,” offered Bush an almost carte blanche from which to make any argument he wished against any nation that could have terrorists within their borders—or, perhaps, even simply a nation who was geographically within the vicinity of another nation that harbored terrorists. The simple yet incredibly complex fear of terrorists and terrorism that had been made into a blank signifier for “evil” and “enemy,” coupled with this assertion that there was no distinction between the terrorists and the countries they reside in, rhetorically offered Bush his toehold to justifying the Iraq war in the following two years.

Towards the end of his first year in office as president, Bush gave a short speech remarking on national missile defense efforts. Within the speech, Bush discussed his and Russian President Vladimir Putin’s agreement to do away with the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, which was a treaty signed 30 years prior between the U.S. and the Soviet Union that limited the creation and accruement of anti-ballistic missile systems. In this speech, Bush again addressed the threat of terrorism, saying:

We know that the terrorists, and some of those who support them, seek the ability to deliver death and destruction to our doorstep via missile. And we must have the freedom and the flexibility to develop effective defenses against those attacks. Defending the American people is my highest priority as Commander in Chief, and I cannot and will not allow the United States to remain in a treaty that prevents us from developing effective defenses. (Bush, “President Discusses National Missile Defense”
It is not to be forgotten that al-Qaeda attacked the United States in a devastating terrorist attack, and that Operation Enduring Freedom had already started in October. Therefore, his war rhetoric after September 11 certainly pertains to al-Qaeda and Afghanistan. However, there is a separation of the issues between hunting down the known terrorists that used passenger planes as weapons against the U.S. and groups or nations that are actively seeking missiles and WMDs that could be used on the U.S. in future attacks. This distinguishes between retaliatory war rhetoric, which is what the September 11 rhetoric consists of, and preemptive war rhetoric, which may be departing from referring to Afghanistan and al-Qaeda.

By the end of just his first year, Bush had rhetorically established a growing threat of foreign entities wielding terrorism and weapons of mass destructions. These entities were not entirely identifiable, though he had repeatedly addressed Saddam Hussein and Iraq as menacing, non-negotiable pests that did not follow orders set forth by the U.N. and had an avid interest in procuring weapons. In this last speech of 2001, Bush re-asserted himself as the one who has America’s best interests in mind and who will put a stop to this immediate threat. Through repetition and a steady increase to the immediacy and severity of this threat, Bush had effectively laid the foundation for making his case for military action against Iraq.

Summary

As this chapter demonstrated, it appears that through the application of some of Campbell and Jamieson’s characteristics of presidential war rhetoric and through Bush’s rhetoric of containment of and defense against Iraq, he effectively managed to create the foundation on which he would later build his justifications for war. In his first year of presidency, Bush created
a rhetorical situation of war prior to any semblance of reason for a war with Iraq to take place. This is important to note because Bush did not pull his argument for war with Iraq out of thin air; he had been building his justifications for war with Iraq, whether intentionally or not, since his first inaugural address. Repetitive assertions throughout the year about the threat of Hussein, the necessary containment of Iraq, and the duty of the United States to be a peacekeeper of the world rhetorically constructed a social reality from which Bush could later draw from.

To do so, Bush first established an argument for containing Iraq and Saddam Hussein using elements of containment rhetoric. This included reinforcing hegemonic structures and by creating a perception of “us” versus “them” between America and Iraq. He then argued for increased military defense spending, which took place significantly before the September 11 terrorist attacks, that accelerated and intensified the threat of Iraq. All the while, Bush utilized several of the characteristics of presidential war rhetoric that Campbell and Jamieson identified, despite no advocation of war to signal it as war rhetoric. By creating this situation through repeated utterances of the threat of Iraq, steadily amplifying both the immediacy and severity of that threat throughout the year, Bush managed to establish a starting point where the American public could begin to understand his reasons for war with Iraq. Bush’s rhetoric of 2001 slowly but surely created the rhetorical situation from which Bush could root his official war rhetoric in.

As far as deceptive rhetoric goes, the most one could argue against Bush is that he may have exaggerated the severity and immediacy of Hussein being a threat. During 2001, at least, no major deception took place because all of Bush’s assertions consisted of “ifs” and hypotheticals; he had not yet claimed that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction, just that they wanted to and framed the situation as if the United States was actively keeping Hussein from
doing so. However, the significance of this analysis showcased that even if no major deception occurred in his first year, it can still be argued that Bush was laying the groundwork for war rhetoric, specifically in regard to Iraq, before the public or Congress could even fathom a reason to go to war with Iraq. Meaning, the war rhetoric significantly preceded any discussion of war with Iraq, which may have later benefitted Bush when he began his official war rhetoric. This makes sense because any type of deception would need to appear as truthful, so whatever groundwork laid for his deception or misrepresentation must appear as if it is true, thus the expected themes of war rhetoric should take place. In the next chapter, Bush’s rhetoric of 2002 will be evaluated to determine whether this foundation of war rhetoric laid in 2001 helped any deceptive rhetoric Bush engaged in to promote and justify the war.
CHAPTER 4

BUILDING THE CASE FOR WAR

By the start of 2002, Bush had already managed to prime his argument for going to war with Iraq through his continuous warnings of the threat that Saddam Hussein was seeking weapons of mass destruction. As detailed in Chapter Three, much of 2001 was dedicated to repeatedly making these claims, though no major deception had yet taken place because Bush primarily spoke in hypotheticals and warnings. The year 2002 found an official declaration for the need to enter this military conflict with Iraq, as well as an acceleration of this argument which incorporated some deception to legitimize the need for action. As previously noted, five deceptive claims were used to justify the war in Iraq, as established by U.S. Senate investigations. These were: (1) that Iraq had active programs to develop weapons of mass destruction; (2) that Iraq had active chemical and biological weapons programs; (3) that Iraq or Saddam Hussein had some connection with al-Qaeda; (4) that Iraq would supply weapons to terrorist groups; and (5) the infamous 16 words asserting that Iraq had procured yellowcake uranium from Niger with intent to make nuclear weapons (U.S. Senate, “Senate Intelligence Committee”).
As the intensifying prelude to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, this chapter will analyze all of Bush’s war rhetoric regarding Iraq, Saddam Hussein, and weapons of mass destruction throughout 2002, paying close attention to the rhetorical strategies used for justifying war and the deception that helped support it. To do so, the overarching theme of presidential power and legitimation will first be examined to determine how deception may be believable. Then, a careful analysis of the timeline of the year will take place, focusing on the president’s use of unilateralism in his “axis of evil” State of the Union address, the continuing argument for containment and defense, the introduction of justifications for regime change, preemption, and disarmament, and finally the accelerating reasoning for military action toward the end of the year. The chapter will conclude with the assessment of the major implications of the analysis.

Rhetorical Analysis of Bush’s War Rhetoric of 2002

As will be discussed, 2002 saw what could be considered the beginning of the official war rhetoric regarding the 2003 Iraq war. If Chapter Three assumptions are true and Bush’s rhetoric from 2001 primed the rhetorical situation for war, then it is argued in this chapter that Bush was able to officially begin his war rhetoric. However, the President’s justifications for and legitimacy of the war was still murky, especially when the question remains as to how Bush used deception to persuade the country to war. To assess how Bush could sway the nation, the rhetorical themes of presidential power and legitimation through enactment will be examined. Following, the rhetorical analysis of the full timeline of 2002 will occur.
The Rhetorical Themes of Presidential Power and Legitimation

Zarefsky made the argument that a key function of presidential rhetoric is the presidential power to define social reality (“Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition”). As covered in previous chapters, Zarefsky claimed that a president can define a situation by creating associations with other terms, by using dissociation, by using condensation symbols, and by frame shifting (612-613). As an example, Zarefsky offered Bush’s metaphor for war in response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11 when Bush simply said, “We are at war,” (617). Typically, war is fought between two nations. Since it was a nationless terrorist organization that attacked the country, saying that America was then “at war” was a metaphor. He wrote that “defining the situation as war helped to clarify what responses were appropriate: national unity, quick response without debate or deliberation, rallying around the president, overt displays of patriotism and national pride” (617). This careful guidance helped the country conclude what Bush wanted them to, and therefore shaped the social reality in which the Americans lived.

This presidential power to define social reality “lies in setting the limits of debate and/or reality,” and therefore “to ‘define’ is to assert without argument that something is ‘true’ or ‘real,’” (Maggio 812-813). To realize this presidential definition, presidents must enact their power through legitimation. According to Campbell and Jamieson, the rhetoric of investiture as Commander in Chief legitimizes this role “in the face of the identified threat and seeks support for its assumption from Congress and the public” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 234). In presidential war rhetoric, presidents must reassert their status as supreme commander of the military to demonstrate that they are the only one with the status to make such decisions regarding military action. Through this legitimation, the use of force is justified (Campbell and
Jamieson, *Presidents Creating the Presidency* 221). It is Congress, of course, that holds the power to declare war as granted by the Constitution, but according to Campbell and Jamieson, “the new model that has developed over time, however, is that of a president assuming that role and then asking for congressional ratification” (*Presidents Creating the Presidency* 239). This will be observed at length in this chapter, where Bush first made the case to take military action against Iraq first and then asked Congress for authorization.

Presidential war rhetoric contains both of these themes of definition and legitimation of power, and George W. Bush’s war rhetoric on Iraq is no exception. In fact, that deception is used in Bush’s war rhetoric makes these themes particularly important. Bush can effectively define the parameters of the Iraq war and justify this use of force through his presidential powers of both definition and through the enactment of this power. His status as Commander in Chief is legitimized, granting him the power to assert such a definition. The question remains of how exactly he uses deception in this mixing of presidential powers, which is the purpose of the remainder of this chapter.

**Bush’s War Rhetoric from January 2002 to December 2002**

**Frame-Shifting and the Unilateralism of the State of the Union**

January 29, 2002 saw the President’s first State of the Union address, in which Bush spoke about their success of tracking down terrorists, as well as the U.S. and Afghanistan’s unification against terror. At this point in time, combined efforts in Afghanistan had dispersed al-Qaeda and the Taliban, making good progress on bringing to justice those that were behind the
terrorist attacks of 9/11. While addressing the successes of these military efforts and the nation’s progress in “winning the war on terror,” Bush claimed that the work was only starting:

Our cause is just, and it continues. Our discoveries in Afghanistan confirmed our worst fears, and showed us the true scope of the task ahead. We have seen the depth of our enemies’ hatred in videos, where they laugh about the loss of innocent life. And the depth of their hatred is equaled by the madness of the destruction they design. We have found diagrams of American nuclear power plants and public water facilities, detailed instructions for making chemical weapons, surveillance maps of American cities, and thorough descriptions of landmarks in America and throughout the world. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” Jan. 29, 2002)

Here, Bush began to express the severity of fighting a war on terror; that terrorists are everywhere, and they are very dangerous. As pointed out by Zarefsky, the terrorists that attacked the U.S. on September 11 were not affiliated with any one singular nation. None of the terrorists were even Afghan nationals; Afghanistan was merely the location of the al-Qaeda base (“The U.S. War in Afghanistan”). This was where Bush began to use frame shifting through his power of definition. According to Zarefsky, frame shifting occurs when a president postulates “a different frame of reference from the one in which the subject normally is viewed” (613). In this case, Bush began to introduce a shift in Americans’ understanding of the war in Afghanistan caused by the 9/11 terrorists to a war fought somewhere else. While the U.S. was making great progress in capturing those behind 9/11, there were still countless more terrorists out there, waiting for their chance to strike. He continued this fear appeal in saying:

Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” Jan. 29, 2002)

Bush was giving the American people the purpose to continue in the efforts fighting this war on terror. Despite the ambiguity of who these terrorists are and where they may be operating, they are dangerous and must be stopped. Motivating this is the threat of “outlaw regimes” which are
opposite to everything our democratically elected government stands for. Bush succeeded in describing these terrorists supported by regime-led states as everything the United States stood against, but more importantly he was shifting the frame of the war from just Afghanistan to wherever terrorists may be. By extending the image of the enemy terrorists to Iraq, Bush could then justify extending the War on Terror to Iraq.

Bush referenced back to the good work Americans had done in effort to win this war on terror but forewarned that there was still so much work to be done. To continue this pursuit, Bush outlined his plan of attack:

Our nation will continue to be steadfast and patient and persistent in the pursuit of two great objectives. First, we will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” Jan. 29, 2002)

It is not far-fetched to again make the connection between regimes, Hussein, and Bush’s claim that Iraq was in want of and has the potential to reinvigorate their weapons programs. Bush had been warning about Hussein and his wants to obtain weapons of mass destruction for an entire year. Here, he was making a connection between terrorists like those that caused 9/11 and dictators of regimes like Saddam Hussein. By making this connection, he could set up the official rhetorical shift in focus from Afghanistan to Iraq:

Our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the 11th. But we know their true nature. North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens. Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom.

Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens, leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime
that agreed to international inspections, then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” Jan. 29, 2002)

In comparison with his shorter remarks on North Korea and Iran, it can reasonably be deduced that Bush meant to make Iraq the most pressing and dangerous threat to the United States. While these arguments about chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons were at one point true, they were only true leading up to the Gulf War of 1990-91. As established in Congressional investigations (U.S. Senate, “Senate Intelligence Committee”) and the chronology of Iraq inspections (“Iraq: A Chronology of UN Inspections”), the exact severity of Iraq restarting their weapons programs was disagreed upon by intelligence communities and was all-together not well known. A 1999 report by UNSCOM claimed that the bulk of Iraq’s weapons capabilities were disposed of by 1998, but the exact capacity to reclaim their capacities was not known (“Iraq: A Chronology of UN Inspections”). Regardless of the uncertainty of these claims, Bush spoke confidently as if they were true and not controversially disagreed upon.

If the American public had been audience to Bush’s rhetoric during 2001, they would already be familiar with these claims. Bush had expressed his attitudes toward Iraq and Saddam Hussein in detail, but much of what he had said was in hypotheticals. While Hussein may have wanted weapons of mass destruction, no clear evidence proved that he was actively seeking them out at this time. In this speech, Bush made the argument that despite the accomplishments of the Gulf War and the successful weapons inspections led by UNSCOM, Hussein was still pursuing weapons of mass destruction and it was only a matter of time before he got his hands on them.

Bush asserted that Hussein and dictators like him would cause mass destruction to the world:

States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave
and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” Jan. 29, 2002)

Bush had finally given a name to the ambiguous terrorists he warned about at the beginning of the speech. By directly associating Hussein and Iraq with the 9/11 terrorists, there was now a new enemy in this War on Terror. Strategically, no mention of al-Qaeda was made when discussing Iraq because al-Qaeda had no connections with Iraq. Political science scholars Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushn argued that “by consistently linking Iraq with terrorism and al-Qaeda he provided the context from which such a connection could be made” (525). But the association of Iraq with terrorism, and the context of the war in Afghanistan to track down terrorists involved with 9/11, would lead the audience to associate al-Qaeda with Iraq. Despite al-Qaeda and the Taliban being the true perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, the U.S.’s sights were now set on Iraq.

Additionally, the argument of increased missile defense returned. However, this argument for more and improved missile defenses and national security was pushed even further with the new argument for unilateral action if necessary. Bush said:

We will work closely with our coalition to deny terrorists and their state sponsors the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver weapons of mass destruction. We will develop and deploy effective missile defenses to protect America and our allies from sudden attack. And all nations should know: America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” Jan. 29, 2002)

Cultural studies scholar Tina Sikka argued that by “discursively connecting the missile defense shield with terrorism and 9/11, the Bush Administration successfully undermines opposition by connecting those who object to his defense shield as hostile to any attempt to secure the nation and, by corollary, on the side of the terrorists” (127). Bush’s framing justified his argument for
unilateralism, which then gave the United States a singular route to deal with the alleged threat of Hussein and the WMDs. When he said, “And all nations should know: America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security,” it was a warning to other nations that America would act alone in this conflict if forced. In other words, Bush was making the declaration that whether the world agreed with him or not, America would still act. This constitutes unilateral action, which echoes his September 20, 2001 speech when he famously said, “You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists,” (Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People”) but he was now speaking about Iraq rather than al-Qaeda.

Interestingly enough, Bush first asserted the work being done with a “coalition,” as if making the point that America was not working alone in the War on Terror. This was a common characteristic of his unilateral rhetoric; he attempted to assure the audience that the United States was not working alone, but if needed, America would work alone in order to win against terrorism. Historian Stephen Graubard wrote that “[t]hough the administration spoke constantly of the coalition, this was largely a figment of their imagination” (548). In actuality, the “coalition” Bush touted was rather small; very few nations actually supported the United States’ intentions against Iraq, and yet still Bush repeatedly highlighted nations that were in his coalition. This may have given the audience more confidence in this mission against terrorism, as Bush made it appear that the world was behind the United States while simultaneously boasting unilateralism. This speech, and the unilateral frame-shifting argument within, laid the foundation for Bush’s evolving justifications for war with Iraq for the rest of this prelude to 2003.
A Continuation of Defense and Containment Rhetoric

The months following the president’s “Axis of Evil” speech saw a continuation of both rhetoric of containment and rhetoric promoting national defenses. In a press conference with President Musharraf of Pakistan on February 13, Bush spoke about the United States and Pakistan’s joint efforts in the “coalition against terror.” In the press conference, Bush said:

Yet President Musharraf has made an even broader commitment. He has declared that Pakistan will be an enemy of terrorism and extremism, wherever it exists, including inside his own border. He understands that terrorism is wrong and destructive in any cause. He knows that his nation cannot grow peacefully if terrorists are tolerated or ignored in his country, in his region, or in the world. He is committed to banning the groups that practice terror, closing their offices and arresting the terrorists themselves. (Bush and Musharraf)

Bush was rhetorically achieving two things in this press conference; for one, he was offering an example of what the United States could consider a “good” Muslim nation that did not support terror. Secondly, by adding Pakistan to his “coalition against terror” and showcasing the work Pakistan was doing to fight terror in its own country, Bush created the impression that Pakistan supported the U.S.’s dealings with terrorism in the Middle East. For Pakistan, joining the coalition was a strategic move; According to Suba Chandran, a professor of international conflict and security studies, “Had Pakistan not joined this war, it would have been bracketed under the category of ‘rogue’ states or the ‘axis of evil.’ By joining the coalition against terrorism, Pakistan was able to mobilize much-needed external economic support” (Chandran 1). At this point in time, Pakistan was not an official and permanent member of the United Nations, so good relations with the U.S. benefited them greatly. Despite this, Pakistan did not support a U.S.-Iraq war. Therefore, Bush’s coalition was more of a symbolic stance against terrorism than it was a list of countries that would support the U.S.-Iraq war. However, this symbolic coalition gave the
appearance that the United States had more support for their war on terrorism abroad than they truly did.

A few days later, on February 16, Bush rallied the troops in Alaska with a speech again addressing the threats of terrorism. Regarding the continued fight in the war on terrorism, Bush said:

This is about fighting terror wherever it hides. This is about defending America and our friends and allies, defending values. The world must understand that this nation won't rest until we have destroyed terrorism, until we have denied the threat of global terrorism. (Bush, “President Rallies the Troops in Alaska”)

This added to the characterization of the War on Terror as persistent and potentially never-ending. Bush had already noted several times that the War on Terror would be a long one, but by describing the war in such a way—one that is already an ambiguous war on a concept, with few faces to associate with the enemy—it rhetoricly gave Bush the ability to determine the parameters of the war. Bush’s status as Commander in Chief had already been established, and if he could define the state in which action must be taken and war must be declared, then he also had the power to decide how long that state lasts. This was later reinforced when he said:

And it doesn't matter where they try to hide, there is no calendar, there is no deadline. There is no if you don't do it by now, we're just going to go home and take a nap. That's not the way it works. Now that they have laid down the gauntlet, we're going to pursue them. And we're going to get 'em. And when we do, the world will be a safer place. (Bush, “President Rallies the Troops in Alaska”)

By attributing this ambiguous war with the objective to potentially eradicate all terrorism in the world, it gave Bush an infinite timeline for his war. So long as there were enemies that promoted terrorism—enemies that he himself defined—the war continues.

He went on to again reestablish his association of terrorism and the need for weapons of mass destruction:
But we've got a bigger task than that. One of the most dangerous things that can happen to the future of our nation is that these kind of terrorist organizations hook up with nations that develop weapons of mass destruction. One of the worst things that could possibly happen to freedom-loving people, whether it be the United States or our friends or allies, is to allow nations that have got a dark history and an ugly past to develop weapons of mass destruction like nuclear weapons or chemical weapons, or biological weapons which could, for example, be delivered by long-range missile, to become a part of the terrorist network. And there are such nations in the world. (Bush, “President Rallies the Troops in Alaska”)

This was a rhetorical claim that Bush used before, even just days prior in the press conference. It was an association that made almost compulsory appearances throughout the year. This was a warning to the American people that he was making; a threat he wanted to neutralize before it occurred. He pressed on:

Of course, we'd like for them to change their ways, and we'll continue to pressure them to do so. We'd like for them to conform to normal ways of treating their own people, plus their neighborhood, plus the world. We expect there to be transparency. People who have got something to hide make us nervous, particularly those who have gassed their own citizens in the past, for example. (Bush, “President Rallies the Troops in Alaska”)

The references to gassing one’s own citizens was, of course, a reference to Saddam Hussein and Iraq. Bush made repeated attempts to connect this association; that terrorists, like al-Qaeda, were trying to team up with rogue regimes, like Hussein in Iraq, to develop weapons of mass destruction. He again framed this threat as a decision that is in the hands of the rogue regime:

And so we expect them -- and so do other freedom-loving countries -- to change their behavior. But if they do not, the United States will do what it takes to defend our freedom. Make no mistake about it. (Bush, “President Rallies the Troops in Alaska”)

In the grand scheme of this narrative, the United States will save the day—but only after the enemy forces Bush to make the decision to use military action. He was offering these regimes to choose the right decision, and to not make him decide for them.

A March 11 speech marked six months since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Following the same pattern, Bush said: “Now that the Taliban are gone and al-Qaeda has lost its home base for
terrorism, we have entered the second stage of the war on terror—a sustained campaign to deny sanctuary to terrorists who would threaten our citizens from anywhere in the world” (Bush, “President Thanks World Coalition for Anti-Terrorism Efforts”). He again emphasized the ambiguity of this war, with no deadline and no specific or tangible enemies. He then said:

Here is what we already know: some states that sponsor terror are seeking or already possess weapons of mass destruction; terrorist groups are hungry for these weapons, and would use them without a hint of conscience. And we know that these weapons, in the hands of terrorists, would unleash blackmail and genocide and chaos. (Bush, “PresidentThanks World Coalition for Anti-Terrorism Efforts”)

Reasonably, a connection can be made between Iraq and the “states that sponsor terror” from his previous remarks on the matter. He was again reinforcing this connection between Iraq and terrorists and their desire for weapons of mass destruction. He continued:

These facts cannot be denied, and must be confronted. In preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, there is no margin for error, and no chance to learn from mistakes. Our coalition must act deliberately, but inaction is not an option. Men with no respect for life must never be allowed to control the ultimate instruments of death. (Bush, “President Thanks World Coalition for Anti-Terrorism Efforts”)

By illustrating this threat as immediate, Bush was propelling the need for action against these states. Bush had so far made this threat appear perilous, authentic, and imminent. He characterized this threat in such a way to bring it closer to its boiling point; he was trying to give these “states that sponsor terror” a chance to change their behavior and make the right decision, but if they made the wrong decision then Bush’s hand would be forced to take military action. He constructed the situation in such a way that put the United States in a position where tensions were unbelievably high, and the point at which the decision must be made was rapidly approaching. This was heightening fears in a speech that was already recalling profound pain and trauma from the terrorist attacks.
As Campbell and Jamieson identified, justification is “embodied in a dramatic narrative from which, in turn, an argument is extracted,” and “central to this justificatory rhetoric is the president’s power to characterize the circumstances impelling action” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 224). Bush was forcefully asserting that inaction is “not an option,” despite the many options he is considering in his careful deliberation, which will be addressed later in the chapter. Campbell and Jamieson’s first characterization of war rhetoric, the decision to go to war after “thoughtful deliberation,” makes the appearance that the president is spending an ample amount of time in this life-or-death decision (222). And yet, Bush outright decried that inaction could not be a factor in this careful deliberation, further pushing the country toward military action.

Just two days later in a press conference on March 13, Bush was again asked about what action he planned to take against Iraq. The reporter made note of the efforts of Vice President Dick Cheney to gain support for military action against Iraq, and whether the president would act against Iraq unilaterally. Bush responded:

One of the things I've said to our friends is that we will consult, that we will share our views of how to make the world more safe. In regards to Iraq, we're doing just that. Every world leader that comes to see me, I explain our concerns about a nation which is not conforming to agreements that it made in the past; a nation which has gassed her people in the past; a nation which has weapons of mass destruction and apparently is not afraid to use them. (Bush, “President Bush Holds Press Conference,” 13 March, 2002)

According to a 2004 Senate investigation on prewar intelligence, there was no evidence of Iraq having weapons of mass destruction, whether they be chemical, biological, or nuclear. The report stated that the judgements that Iraq had these weapons were “either overstated, or were not supported by, the underlying intelligence reporting provided to the Committee” (U.S. Senate, “Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq”). While it is unclear exactly what weapons of mass destruction that Bush was referring to, using chemical
agents on a country’s own citizens was not necessarily the same as using nuclear weapons on other countries. Bush’s framing here meant to justify military action against Iraq. He continued:

And so one of the—what the Vice President is doing is he's reminding people about this danger, and that we need to work in concert to confront this danger. Again, all options are on the table, and—but one thing I will not allow is a nation such as Iraq to threaten our very future by developing weapons of mass destruction. They've agreed not to have those weapons; they ought to conform to their agreement, comply with their agreement. (Bush, “President Bush Holds Press Conference,” 13 March, 2002)

Bush again asserted that Iraq is, indeed, in possession of these weapons, and that they are an immediate threat to the United States. Curiously, no mention of terrorists was made with respect to the comments on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction this time, despite the frequent associations between the three in previous speeches and press conferences. Still, Bush continued to assert that Iraq must comply, or Bush would act.

In the following months before what turned into a dynamic summer, Bush appeared at the Virginia Military Institute on April 17 to give an address on the current war efforts. In the speech, he resumed his argument that Iraq must be contained and increasing American defense, while making it appear as if the world was waiting for Hussein to decide. He said:

And, finally, the civilized world faces a grave threat from weapons of mass destruction. A small number of outlaw regimes today possess and are developing chemical and biological and nuclear weapons. They're building missiles to deliver them, and at the same time cultivating ties to terrorist groups. In their threat to peace, in their mad ambitions, in their destructive potential and in the repression of their own people, these regimes constitute an axis of evil and the world must confront them. (Bush, “President Outlines War Effort”)

Bush had already identified Iraq as one of the most dangerous nations in this so-called “axis of evil,” and was again making the argument that Iraq was either in possession of, or was developing, weapons of mass destruction. This continued the rhetoric of containment by reinforcing this Iraqi threat that must be neutralized. However, as assessed in previous excerpts,
it is claimed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction already. This back and forth between “developing” and “possessing” does not help attribute the exact time in which the Bush Administration identified Iraq as having weapons of mass destruction, and what kind. In his “Axis of Evil” speech, Bush asserted that Iraq had chemical and biological weapons. It would not be unreasonable to now deduce that Bush used “weapons of mass destruction” to refer to either chemical, or biological, or nuclear weapons, despite nuclear weapons being the only true weapon of “mass” destruction. To use these interchangeably confuses the audience about what kind of weapons Iraq had and allowed Bush to imply that the audience should assume the worst.

Also, without outright naming Iraq, Bush was able to speak in hypotheticals and ambiguities. He did not explicitly claim that it was Iraq that was building the missiles or cultivating ties to terrorists, but it was heavily implied based on his past repeated remarks on the matter. He had already successfully made this association, and he continued to refer back to this association without needing to explicitly spell it out for the audience. While pinpointing the exact time and utterance that these words all become synonymous is likely not possible, after a year of repeatedly associating Iraq, terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction, these words become homogeneous.

Beginning Arguments for Regime Change and Preemption

Up until this point, Bush had primarily made the arguments for unilateral action against Iraq, for increasing missile defense, and for continuing containment strategies to keep this supposed threat from being realized. But in a May 26 press conference with President of France
Jacques Chirac, Bush made the argument for elevating to the next step: regime change in Iraq. In response to a reporter’s question about Bush’s plans for the Iraqi regime, he said:

Let me start with the Iraqi regime. The stated policy of my government is that we have a regime change. And as I told President Chirac, I have no war plans on my desk. And I will continue to consult closely with him. We do view Saddam Hussein as a serious, significant -- serious threat to stability and peace. (Bush and Chirac)

While removing Saddam Hussein from power—therefore changing the regime in control of Iraq—could be seen as being heavily implied in speeches and press conferences since that January, the president had not outright admitted that removing Hussein from power was an objective of this War on Terror. Removing a ruler from power is significantly more involved than deterring terrorism or preventing certain countries from obtaining nuclear weapons and would require considerably more justification. This declaration for regime change is an important next step in Bush’s strategy as Commander in Chief to persuade the country to go to war with Iraq. However, Bush then reasserted that there were no plans for war, again appealing back to the notion that it was up to Hussein as to whether a war occurred or not. This also gave Bush the appearance of careful deliberation, which is one of Campbell and Jamieson’s characteristics of presidential war rhetoric that began to make a frequent appearance from this point onwards.

The following month saw a turning point in this prelude to war that the world did not foresee. In a June 1 speech at the United States Military Academy graduation at West Point, Bush appealed to the traditional American values of freedom, peace, and liberty. He spoke about obtaining this “just peace” as America’s duty, and how this duty was being entrusted into the graduating men and women of the academy. Then, Bush began to make his argument:

In defending the peace, we face a threat with no precedent. Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger the American people and our
nation. The attacks of September the 11th required a few hundred thousand dollars in the hands of a few dozen evil and deluded men. All of the chaos and suffering they caused came at much less than the cost of a single tank. The dangers have not passed. This government and the American people are on watch, we are ready, because we know the terrorists have more money and more men and more plans. (Bush, “President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point”)

In this excerpt, he established that this threat is new and that the enemy no longer needs as many resources to carry out attacks as they once used to. Despite this, the United States was preparing for future attacks. He continued:

The gravest danger to freedom lies at the perilous crossroads of radicalism and technology. When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology—when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our enemies have declared this very intention, and have been caught seeking these terrible weapons. They want the capability to blackmail us, or to harm us, or to harm our friends -- and we will oppose them with all our power. (Bush, “President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point”)

Though there were many nations considered threats at this time, the dangers of the ambiguous enemies he mentioned have all been associated with Iraq continuously throughout the last year and a half. Bush identified Iraq as one of the biggest threats in his “Axis of Evil” speech. However, it was unclear whether the unnamed enemies actually “declared” any ill intentions toward the United States like he claimed. If Bush was in fact speaking of Iraq—which, context suggests that he was—then it was untrue that Iraq declared any intentions to use weapons against or blackmail the United States. Further in the speech, he said:

For much of the last century, America's defense relied on the Cold War doctrines of deterrence and containment. In some cases, those strategies still apply. But new threats also require new thinking. Deterrence—the promise of massive retaliation against nations—means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend. Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies. (Bush, “President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point”)

Since the “Axis of Evil” speech in January, Bush had been alluding to the ineffectiveness of the Cold War era containment strategy. By accelerating the threat of Iraq, the increase in spending for military defense, the “different” methods needed for dealing with this special threat, and the declared need for a regime change, the next stage would then be that the containment strategies could no longer contain the threat. Bush justified a response moving beyond containment by noting how new this threat was and how much the enemy had evolved.

Finally, in culmination of this steady build-up, he argued:

We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best. We cannot put our faith in the word of tyrants, who solemnly sign non-proliferation treaties, and then systematically break them. If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long. Homeland defense and missile defense are part of stronger security, and they’re essential priorities for America. Yet the war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act. (Bush, “President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point”)

Carol Winkler pointed out that in presidential war rhetoric, presidents typically describe the enemy as aggressors, but “[p]reemption strains presidential claims that the enemy is the aggressor in the conflict” (308). Winkler additionally noted that in order 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,” and that they “must also offer convincing proof that the terrorist is capable of threatening the nation and the broader Civilization” (308). By looking at all of Bush’s rhetoric leading up to this speech, it can be concluded that Bush had been making a clear case that Iraq was a very real and dire threat to America. He achieved this by making the threat of Iraq as dangerous and imminent, but also by “rhetorically transforming” foreign leaders into terrorists in order to “resolve the challenge of depicting the enemy as the aggressor in preemptive warfare” (Winkler 311). This speech, in
addition to the May press conference that debuted the objective of regime change, marked not only a hastening of the argumentation to go to war, but a radicalization of war justification for the genre of presidential rhetoric itself.

An Appearance of Debate and Calling for Disarmament

In the time leading up to the first anniversary of 9/11, discourse about Iraq and their weapons of mass destruction increased exponentially. With the trauma of the terrorist attacks still fresh, Bush began to increase the occurrence of his war rhetoric. He relied on his new pattern of containment, unilateralism, and missile defense before again rising to a new level for his justifications. In an August 16 press conference, he fell back on his usual argument when asked about the politicians who do not support his intentions to “deal with dictators who gas their own people.” He said:

Yes, I appreciate that question. First of all, I am aware that some very intelligent people are expressing their opinions about Saddam Hussein and Iraq. I listen carefully to what they have to say. There should be no doubt in anybody’s mind this man is thumbing his nose at the world, that he has gassed his own people, that he is trouble in his neighborhood, that he desires weapons of mass destruction. I will use all the latest intelligence to make informed decisions about how best to keep the world at peace, how best to defend freedom for the long run. (Bush, “President Discusses Iraq, the Economy and Homeland Security”)

The comments Bush made elevated the disagreement to a more intellectual debate that he asserted he was still undecided on, despite the continuous assertions that Hussein must be dealt with. This echoes Campbell and Jamieson’s characteristic of portraying careful deliberation before deciding whether to engage in military action. This appearance of openness of conversation—rather than declaring that a decision has already been made—may have helped the audience believe that they had more agency in the decision than they actually did. He went on:
We'll continue to consult. Listen, it's a healthy debate for people to express their opinion. People should be allowed to express their opinion. But America needs to know, I'll be making up my mind based upon the latest intelligence and how best to protect our own country plus our friends and allies. (Bush, “President Discusses Iraq, the Economy and Homeland Security”)

This excerpt further illustrates this faux-conversation Bush was seeming to allow the audience. This was a tactic Bush started to use more frequently in September. On several occasions, Bush evoked the need for discussion and debate throughout September. In a September 4 letter to Congress, Bush wrote that the possibility of war with Iraq was an “important decision” that he encouraged “debate and discussion” for (Bush, “America intends to lead”). This echoed past comments made to the press and in speeches where he appealed to Hussein to make the right decision, where he made references to the intelligence and other countries that needed to be consulted, and where he encouraged discussion to take place. This pattern also continued throughout the rest of the year, with Bush citing in a September 26 speech that he and Congress were “engaged in a deliberate and civil and thorough discussion” (Bush, “President Bush Discusses Iraq with Congressional Leaders”) and in the October 16 signing of the Iraq Resolutions where he said, “Like the members of Congress here today, I've carefully weighed the human cost of every option before us” (Bush, “President Signs Iraq Resolutions”).

Most pertinent of all, Bush repeatedly claimed that he had yet to make a decision. Professor of Communication Gordon Mitchell argued that these statements that Bush made “would seem to constitute ‘external’ evidence that Bush sought to enter into a critical discussion on optimal US policy toward Iraq” (Mitchell 325). In other words, Bush was portraying himself as being committed to principles of advancing standpoints, welcoming counterarguments, acknowledging differences of opinion, and wanting to work toward resolving those differences (Mitchell 325). This appearance lead the audience to believe that Bush was in active search for
all options (despite earlier saying that inaction was not an option) to handle this Iraqi threat and that he was carefully deliberating every possible outcome before officially making his decision.

The issue with the appearance of deliberation is that according to the following accounts, Bush had every intention to go to war with Iraq. First, the infamous Downing Street memo was published by a British newspaper in May of 2005. The memo was written by a British foreign policy aide and recorded several statements by the head of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) regarding Bush and the war in Iraq on July 23, 2002. According to the memo, the head of MI6 said, “Military action was now seen as inevitable... Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD,” and that “It seemed clear that bush had made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing was not yet decided” (Shuster, “Downing Street Memo explained”). Additionally, another leaked memo stated that Bush had said to Blair in January of 2003 that Blair could expect the war to start around March 10, 2003, despite Bush still insisting that no decisions were being made that January, and even February (Mitchell 326).

Mitchell argued that Bush’s appearance for “debate and discussion” during 2002 and up until the invasion, in which he stated multiple times that he had not made up his mind about going to war, “was a strategic maneuver, one designed to improve rhetorically his position in the unfolding argument” by “projecting a generous deliberative posture” (Mitchell 326-327). This gave an appearance of offering a debate when the outcome of the debate had already been decided, which was deceptive. The leaked memos also contribute additional evidence that Bush could have had the intention to deceive. Because the deliberation on to go to war was apparently
just for appearances, Bush was therefore intent to go to war for some time—at least as early as the summer of 2002, almost eight months before the war began.

Complicating this apparent open discussion on whether to go to war, Bush joined British Prime Minister Blair in a September 7 press conference and made a false claim about the capabilities of Iraq acquiring a weapon of mass destruction. Bush said:

We just heard the Prime Minister talk about the new report. I would remind you that when the inspectors first went into Iraq and were denied—finally denied access, a report came out of the Atomic—the IAEA that they were six months away from developing a weapon. I don't know what more evidence we need. (Bush and Blair, “President Bush, Prime Minister Blair Discuss Keeping the Peace”)

This alleged “new” report he and Blair speak about in this press conference did not exist. However, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) did release a 1999 report saying that in 1991, Iraq could have developed weapons of mass destruction in 6 to 24 months, but those capabilities were destroyed by UN inspectors by 1998 (Pfiffner 29). The president and the prime minister were citing a 1999 report on Iraq’s weapons programs from the early 90’s and passing it off as recent intelligence—which at this point, was at least three years old, and was reporting on information a decade prior. Reasonably, if the president was aware of privileged information and yet he selectively quoted portions of an outdated report from the 1990’s, it can be deduced that this was in fact a blatant act of deception.

Just a few days later, on September 12, Bush appeared before the United Nations general assembly to give a speech outlining the United States’ demands. Bush began his speech speaking about the various ways that the United States had a “commitment to human dignity,” by noting the U.S.’s support for an independent and equal Palestine and the decision to rejoin United
Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), but he then dedicated most of his speech to the pressing threat of Iraq. First, he said:

Above all, our principles and our security are challenged today by outlaw groups and regimes that accept no law of morality and have no limit to their violent ambitions. In the attacks on America a year ago, we saw the destructive intentions of our enemies. This threat hides within many nations, including my own. In cells and camps, terrorists are plotting further destruction, and building new bases for their war against civilization. And our greatest fear is that terrorists will find a shortcut to their mad ambitions when an outlaw regime supplies them with the technologies to kill on a massive scale. (Bush, President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly”)

The rhetoric of a growing threat and Bush’s “greatest fear” had been repeated for much of the year. He addressed this fear and growing threat—speaking as either a hypothetical event that was feared to happen or as an ambiguous enemy that was working toward realizing this fear but had not achieved it yet—in order to then shift and say that it was becoming reality. He said: “In one place—in one regime—we find all these dangers, in their most lethal and aggressive forms, exactly the kind of aggressive threat the United Nations was born to confront” (Bush, President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly’’). This was a common tactic of Bush’s that has been observed repeatedly in this project: a problem is spoken about as a possibility, and is the “worst fear” that must be curbed before it becomes true. But then it is said that Iraq is already realizing this worst fear and is making it come true. All along, it was Iraq being described.

Bush continued the speech listing his grievances against Iraq, primarily citing that Iraq broke its promises in correcting their human rights violations, returning prisoners from the conflict in Kuwait, and renouncing terrorism. Bush argued that “[i]n violation of Security Council Resolution 1373, Iraq continues to shelter and support terrorist organizations that direct violence against Iran, Israel, and Western governments” (Bush, President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly’’). According to the Council of Foreign Relations, while Iraq
did sponsor some terrorism, they were not as prominent as their neighbors in terms of supporting terrorist groups. CFR wrote that Iraq was “one of seven states that sponsor terrorism, but experts say Iran, Syria, and, at least in the past, Pakistan, all surpassed Iraq in support for terrorists” (“IRAQ: Iraqi Ties to Terrorism”). Curiously, none of these other countries with proven ties to terrorism were at the forefront of the War on Terror like Iraq was.

Finally, Bush made his argument that Iraq was seeking weapons of mass destruction:

We know that Saddam Hussein pursued weapons of mass murder even when inspectors were in his country. Are we to assume that he stopped when they left? The history, the logic, and the facts lead to one conclusion: Saddam Hussein's regime is a grave and gathering danger. To suggest otherwise is to hope against the evidence. To assume this regime's good faith is to bet the lives of millions and the peace of the world in a reckless gamble. And this is a risk we must not take. (Bush, President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly)

Bush again used his presidential power to define the “evidence.” The same reports he quoted in his speech also state that the inspections done throughout the 90’s did see to the majority of Iraq’s weapons programs destroyed. His argument was that because Iraq sought weapons of mass destruction in the past, then Iraq was still seeking them now. He complicated this argument by declaring that making the wrong decision about Iraq would endanger millions of lives. He placed the audience in a high-stakes scenario in which they must agree with Bush’s argument or they would be culpable when Hussein used his weapons to wreak havoc on the world. He concluded his speech with proposing an ultimatum to Iraq: seek peace and resolve these grievances that Bush has laid forth or suffer the consequences.

The day after his United Nations speech on September 13, Bush responded to questions in a press conference. In response to a question about whether Hussein would meet Bush’s demands, Bush said:
I am highly doubtful that he'll meet our demands. I hope he does, but I'm highly doubtful. The reason I'm doubtful is he's had 11 years to meet the demands. For 11 long years he has basically told the United Nations and the world he doesn't care. And so, therefore, I am doubtful, but nevertheless, made the decision to move forward to work with the world community. And I hope the world community knows that we're extremely serious about what I said yesterday, and we expect quick resolution to the issue. And that's starting with quick action on a resolution. (Bush. “President Bush Discusses Iraq with Reporters”)

The doubt could have very well been genuine. The issue, however, was that Bush declared demands that likely could not be met because they had mostly already been met in 1998. By framing his argument that Hussein had to destroy his weapons programs therefore asserted that Hussein had weapons programs to speak of. There was already documentation in the UNSCOM report that the majority of the weapons were destroyed in 1998 (“Iraq: A Chronology of UN Inspections”).

The rest of September followed much of the same argument, but Bush repeatedly increased doubt that Iraq would comply and intensified his discourse surrounding Iraq during an emotional anniversary of 9/11. In a September 14 radio address, Bush amplified that Hussein was seeking the components needed to restart his nuclear weapons program (Bush, “President Discusses Growing Danger posed by Saddam Hussein's Regime”). In a September 18 press conference, Bush argued that Hussein’s attempts to discredit Bush’s calls for resuming weapons inspections were a “ploy” (Bush, “President Discusses Iraq, Domestic Agenda with Congressional Leaders”). On September 19, Bush said that “there are no negotiations to be held with Iraq” and that he “doesn’t trust Iraq,” which continued to promote skepticism and discredit Iraq’s ability to meet Bush's demands (Bush, “President Bush to Send Iraq Resolution to Congress Today”). He again gave a speech in New Jersey on September 23 expressing the need to remove Hussein and protect America’s freedom, and then on September 24 urged Congress to
pass the Iraq Resolution quickly (Bush, “President Bush Calls on Congress to Act on Nation's Priorities;” and Bush, “President Urges Congress to Pass Iraq Resolution Promptly”).

Near the climax of his argument, Bush responded to reporters in a joint press conference with President of Columbia Alvaro Uribe. Answering a question asked about the threat differences between Hussein and al-Qaeda, Bush said:

That's a—that is an interesting question. I'm trying to think of something humorous to say. But I can't when I think about al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. They're both risks, they're both dangerous. The difference, of course, is that al Qaeda likes to hijack governments. Saddam Hussein is a dictator of a government. Al Qaeda hides, Saddam doesn't, but the danger is, is that they work in concert. The danger is, is that al Qaeda becomes an extension of Saddam's madness and his hatred and his capacity to extend weapons of mass destruction around the world.

Both of them need to be dealt with. The war on terror, you can't distinguish between al Qaeda and Saddam when you talk about the war on terror. And so it's a comparison that is -- I can't make because I can't distinguish between the two, because they're both equally as bad, and equally as evil, and equally as destructive. (Bush and Uribe Velez)

Bush had already symbolically linked Hussein with al-Qaeda, but he was now outright declaring the connection he had been making months prior. Not being able to “distinguish between al-Qaeda and Saddam when you talk about the war on terror” meant that Hussein was no better than al-Qaeda, because they were so similar that they were essentially the same thing. This reinforced the shift from the terrorists of 9/11 to Hussein and strengthened Hussein as the face of the enemy in this War on Terror.

In culmination of this whirlwind September, Bush spoke at a Congress luncheon in Denver, Colorado on September 27. In his speech, he claimed:

For the sake of freedom, you have got a choice: You can hold him to account. And for the sake of freedom, he has got a choice: He can disarm. There's no negotiations, by the way, for Mr. Saddam Hussein. There's nothing to discuss. He either gets rid of his weapons and the United Nations gets rid of his weapons -- he can either get rid of his weapons and the United States can act, or the United States will lead a coalition to disarm this man. (Bush, “President Presses Congress for Action on Defense Appropriations Bill”)
This excerpt contains much of the argument that Bush had been working toward all year and the increasing justifications that he had been making throughout the month. Reflecting Wander’s prophetic dualism discussed in the previous chapter, there is the good nation and the evil nation, and only action can solve the conflict between them—no negotiations are possible (Wander 342). But more importantly, Bush officially made the assertion that Iraq must be disarmed. The argument for disarmament inherently affirmed that Iraq was armed, and therefore actually possessed weapons of mass destruction rather than simply appealing back to his previous claims that Iraq was vying for weapons or had the capacity to develop them. Because of the past associations confusing the distinctions between nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, any assertion that Iraq was “armed” would automatically assume that Iraq was armed with nuclear weapons.

**Accelerating the Need for War**

For the remainder of the year, Bush almost recurrently asserted the threat of Iraq, the threat of Hussein, the need to act and disarm Iraq, and the inability to negotiate with Hussein. October saw elevated discourse surrounding the passing of the U.S.’s Iraq Resolutions. In an October 2 speech, Bush urged that the Iraqi regime was “a threat of unique urgency,” and used its pre-Gulf War history to justify why Iraq was likely to use their “stockpile” of weapons to kill millions of people (Bush, “President, House Leadership Agree on Iraq Resolution”). He went on to convey the urgency, saying:

> We know the methods of this regime. They buy time with hollow promises. They move incriminating evidence to stay ahead of inspectors. They concede just enough to escape -- to escape punishment, and then violate every pledge when the attention of the world is turned away. (Bush, “President, House Leadership Agree on Iraq Resolution”)
His remarks contributed to the already vast distrust America felt toward Iraq. His words meant to increase that skepticism, which was possibly why when Iraq made repeated statements that they had no weapons of mass destruction, it did not deter American support for war. Polls showed that leading up to the war, “support for the war was high among both Republicans and Democrats, both men and women” (Gershkoff and Kushner 525) even after Hussein said that “Iraq does not have nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, despite Washington’s ‘noisy propaganda’” in a letter to the UN in September (Farley, “Hussein Denies U.S. Charges in Letter to the General Assembly”).

To assess the need for military authorization that Bush was asking for, Congress demanded a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which is the intelligence community’s “most authoritative written judgment concerning a specific national security issue…. Intended to provide policymakers in both the executive and legislative branches with the best, unvarnished, and unbiased information” (U.S. Senate, “Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community,” 9). As detailed in the Robert Greenwald’s 2004 documentary Uncovered: The War on Iraq, the 2002 NIE that was presented to Congress was a shorted and heavily edited version of the actual 93-page report. Important word and phrase changes made the threat of Iraqi weapons more dire than what the actual report documented (Uncovered, 12:04-13:43). The U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee’s 2004 report on the NIE concluded:

The major key judgments in the NIE, particularly that Iraq ‘is reconstituting its nuclear program,’ ‘has chemical and biological weapons,’ was developing an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) “probably intended to deliver biological warfare agents,” and that “all key aspects—research & development (R&D), production, and weaponization—of Iraq’s offensive biological weapons (BW) program are active and that most elements are larger and more advanced than they were before the Gulf War,’ either overstated, or were not supported by, the underlying intelligence reporting provided to the Committee. (U.S. Senate, “Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community” 14)
Despite the inaccuracy of the NIE, this report propelled Congress to pass the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002, also known as the Iraq Resolutions, on October 16, 2002. According to an article titled “The Iraq War, ‘Sound Science,’ and ‘Evidence-Based’ Educational Reform,” the NIE “was a key part of an escalating body of ‘evidence’ on Iraq’s WMD presented by the Bush Administration in the months preceding the war” (Gordon et al. 176). Following, the United States managed to persuade the U.S. Security Council to pass Resolution 1441 on November 8, which “outlined an enhanced inspection regime for Iraq’s disarmament” (Corn 208).

The Iraq Resolutions granted Bush the authority to use military action, though he said on several occasions that “War is not my first choice. It’s my last choice” (Bush, “President Outlines Priorities;” and Bush, “President Condemns Attack in Bali”). At the same time, Bush repeatedly asserted that it was only up to Hussein as to whether the U.S. would go to war with Iraq (Bush, “President Discusses Foreign Policy Matters with NATO Secretary;” Bush, “Remarks by the President at Bangor, Maine Welcome;” and Bush, “President Condemns Attack in Bali”). Bush constructed a decision to go to war around a complicated antithetical argument: Iraq was addressed as a threat and was ordered to follow Bush’s demands, and it was up to Hussein to decide whether the United States enforces action on Iraq or not. According to Bush, a coalition of major nations were working with the U.S. against terror, but the United States would take unilateral action if necessary. Finally, Bush did not want to go to war, and Hussein was the one who must make the decision—but at the same time, it was Bush’s decision whether or not to go to war. This set up Bush in a scenario of a sort of faux-forced hand, by simultaneously saying...
that he was the only one with the power to decide to go to war, and yet the blame would be placed on Hussein for deciding to go to war.

**Summary**

Thus far, a detailed timeline of Bush’s war rhetoric leading up to 2003 has been evaluated. The purpose of doing so is to illustrate precisely how Bush managed to rhetorically make his case for a war with Iraq, and specifically how this case was constructed to allot for any deception he used. In the year of 2002, Bush did make several deceptive claims regarding Iraq and Saddam Hussein, namely that Iraq had some connection to al-Qaeda, that Iraq had active weapons programs to develop chemical and biological weapons, and that Iraq was in possession of these weapons. While these claims were either false or unsupported by intelligence at the time, how these deceptive claims were able to be believed relied on the rhetorical setting of the foundation of Bush's war rhetoric. This included Bush’s repeated associations of Iraq, Hussein, and weapons of mass destruction; his declaration for unilateralism in the name of protecting American freedom and security; the frame-shifting from al-Qaeda terrorists in Afghanistan to “outlaw regimes” and terrorists in Iraq; asserting the need for regime change in Iraq; arguing for the possible need for preemptive attack in the name of national security; and the assertion that Iraq needed to disarm, which therefore made the claim that Iraq was armed.

One of the primary means in which Bush was able to set the foundation for deception was the use of hypothetical and ambiguous language. As seen in Chapter Three, he spoke at length of the dangers of Saddam Hussein, calling Hussein a rogue dictator, and speaking about how deeply Hussein wanted weapons of mass destruction. In this chapter, it has been demonstrated that Bush
increasingly spoke in ambiguous language about foreign enemies that were dangerous, who wanted to pair up with terrorists, and desired to wreak havoc on the United States and their allies. The association he achieved through connecting the physical enemy of Hussein and the ambiguous enemy of the War on Terror helped create the basis for his deception. By speaking about the dangerous regime of Hussein and the dangerous regimes that wanted weapons of mass destruction to cause harm, he could then outright say that Hussein was a dangerous regime that had weapons of mass destruction.

While previous scholarship has evaluated landmark war rhetoric of Bush’s such as the “Axis of Evil” speech and his speech at West Point, this chapter offered a comprehensive picture of Bush’s strategic rhetoric that was used to set up his final justifications for war with Iraq before entering 2003. At this point, Bush went to exhaustive efforts to persuade the public that Iraq was indeed a wicked enemy that was in search of, or was already in possession of, weapons that would bring terror upon the United States and the world. Additionally, Bush went to great lengths to legitimize himself as Commander in Chief; meaning, it was he who made the case to go after Iraq, and now after the Iraq War Resolutions, it was he who had the power to officially begin the attack. Regarding Campbell and Jamieson’s framework for presidential war rhetoric, many of the characteristics are observable between the first and second year of Bush’s presidency. Additionally, the “strategy” component of their “strategic misrepresentation” is also evident. However, the year of 2003—which contains pre-war, intra-war, and post-war rhetoric—still needs to be considered before any other major conclusions can be drawn.
CHAPTER 5
BUSH’S IRAQ WAR RHETORIC OF 2003

In the final months before the U.S. invaded Iraq, Bush’s deceptive rhetoric at last reached its boiling point. Thus far, the rhetorical situation for the Iraq war rhetoric has been established, as well as the detailing of rhetorical strategies that aided in the use of deception in the expanding war rhetoric of 2002. In 2003, pre-war rhetoric, sustained war rhetoric during the invasion, and post-war rhetoric after Bush declared the end of “major military operations” all occurred in the one year. With tensions high and the brink of war at the feet of Americans, much of the deception committed was within the first three months of this year. As previously noted, the five deceptive claims as identified by the U.S. Senate committee hearings were: (1) that Iraq had active programs to develop weapons of mass destruction; (2) that Iraq had active chemical and biological weapons programs; (3) that Iraq or Saddam Hussein had some connection with al-Qaeda; (4) that Iraq would supply weapons to terrorist groups; and (5) that Iraq had procured yellowcake uranium from Niger with intent to make nuclear weapons (U.S. Senate, “Senate Intelligence Committee”).

In this chapter, the presidential war rhetoric of the final prelude, climax, and later defense of the Iraq war of 2003 is evaluated. First, Bush’s pre-war rhetoric leading up to his March 17 ultimatum is examined. Then, the war rhetoric used to sustain and justify the military invasion between March 19 and May 1 and then, following, Bush’s rhetoric defending the invasion of Iraq
after it was declared over is analyzed. Finally, major conclusions regarding the deceptive rhetoric used in 2003 to promote, justify, sustain, and defend the war is discussed.

**Rhetorical Analysis of Bush’s War Rhetoric of 2003**

**The Prelude to War**

The nation was brought into 2003 still suspended in the dramatic prolusion to war, uncertain as to whether Bush would decide—or whether Hussein would force Bush to decide, as Bush had claimed repeatedly—to engage in war with Iraq. Leading up to the State of the Union on January 28, the country believed Hussein to be building Iraq’s weapons programs, and claims were made that Hussein was supporting terrorist organizations. Until this point, much of the deception that Bush engaged in was ambiguous; he linked together hypothetical situations—like rogue regimes with nuclear weapons partnering with terrorists—and made continuous associations until terrorism, Hussein, Iraq, and weapons of mass destruction all seemed synonymous. Additionally, Bush inaccurately cited outdated reports like UNSCOM’s 1999 report as current intelligence (Pfiffner 29). Thus far, not all of the deceptive claims as outlined by the Senate report had yet made an appearance, but Bush was building up to what would become one of his most disreputable speeches: his 2003 State of the Union address.

**The Narrative to Justify the War**

In this address, Bush again repeated all the previous deceptive claims, but also upped the ante by making several more outrageous and unsupported statements. Leading up to these claims, he said:
Today, the gravest danger in the war on terror, the gravest danger facing America and the world, is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. These regimes could use such weapons for blackmail, terror, and mass murder. They could also give or sell those weapons to terrorist allies, who would use them without the least hesitation. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003)

These are assertions that Bush had been making for the past two years as president. As previous chapters documented, he made continual associations between Iraq and “outlaw regimes,” “blackmail,” “weapons of mass destruction,” “terror,” and “mass murder.” Echoing the patterns of previous speeches, Bush addressed these indistinct threats before finally connecting them with real faces.

In his 2002 State of the Union, he had said almost identical words before calling North Korea, Iran, and Iraq the “Axis of Evil.” In this 2003 State of the Union, he outlined how each of these threats required different courses of action; in Iran, Bush said that “Iranians, like all people, have a right to choose their own government and determine their own destiny—and the United States supports their aspirations to live in freedom,” (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003). Despite Iran being a member of the so-called “Axis of Evil,” the U.S. would only support the Iranians that seek to “determine their own destiny.” Similarly, North Korea was developing to be a nuclear threat, but to respond to this threat Bush said that “America is working with the countries of the region--South Korea, Japan, China, and Russia—to find a peaceful solution, and to show the North Korean government that nuclear weapons will bring only isolation, economic stagnation, and continued hardship” (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003).

Therefore, it was only Iraq who was the true threat to the world, and it was only Iraq that required immediate military intervention.

Bush, calling Iraq an “even greater threat,” recounted Hussein’s harrowing past as a “brutal dictator” who had a history of “reckless aggression,” “ties to terrorism,” and “great
potential wealth” (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003). Dissimilar to previous statements on the threat of terrorists who operated on very little resources, Bush’s emphasis on addressing Hussein’s “potential wealth” conveyed that it was something to be feared. In his June 1, 2002 speech at West Point, Bush made the argument that one of the more terrifying characteristics of terrorists was that they do not need profound wealth to cause destruction. He said, “All of the chaos and suffering they caused [in the 9/11 terrorist attacks] came at much less than the cost of a single tank” (Bush, “President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point”). In this State of the Union, by emphasizing Hussein’s wealth, it implies that Hussein’s riches were paradoxically now an additional threat. Terrorists could operate on very little, but because Hussein had the resources and had these ties to terrorists, it therefore meant that Hussein had the wealth to fund weapons programs and these terrorists he was supposedly harboring. This was later reinforced in Bush’s February 26 speech when he said, “The passing of Saddam Hussein's regime will deprive terrorist networks of a wealthy patron that pays for terrorist training, and offers rewards to families of suicide bombers” (Bush, “President Discusses the Future of Iraq,” 26 Feb., 2003).

Continuing, Bush said:

Twelve years ago, Saddam Hussein faced the prospect of being the last casualty in a war he had started and lost. To spare himself, he agreed to disarm of all weapons of mass destruction. For the next 12 years, he systematically violated that agreement. He pursued chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, even while inspectors were in his country. Nothing to date has restrained him from his pursuit of these weapons -- not economic sanctions, not isolation from the civilized world, not even cruise missile strikes on his military facilities. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003)

In this excerpt, Campbell and Jamieson’s characteristic of narrative is demonstrated almost perfectly. They write:
The justification is embodied in a dramatic narrative from which, in turn, an argument is extracted. That argument claims that a threat imperils the nation, and indeed, civilization itself; that the threat emanates from the acts of an identifiable enemy; and that, despite a patient search for alternatives, the threat necessitates a forceful, immediate response. (Campbell and Jamieson 224).

This justification for war was essentially a continuation of George H. W. Bush’s war in 1990. As established in Chapter Three, there was not a specific event that triggered George W. Bush’s war rhetoric. Even prior to September 11, Bush was vigorously making an argument against Iraq, though then it did not expressly imply war. After September 11 and the war in Afghanistan, Bush was able to shift the frame of war from al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to ambiguous terrorists and Hussein in Iraq, as discussed in Chapter Four. While no specific rhetorical situation called for this war rhetoric, Bush managed to create a rhetorical situation by continually repeating his claims and frame-shifting from the war in Afghanistan. According to Campbell and Jamieson, if the dramatic narrative gives the justification for war, then Bush’s narrative depicts his justification for war being a continuation from where America left off in the Gulf War a decade prior. As the world now knows, it was a justification based on deception, which means deception built the rhetorical situation for the war rhetoric.

Iraq’s Chemical and Biological Weapons Claims

Following his narrative, Bush engaged in a misleading argument for how he knew Iraq was an armed threat. He used the United Nations’ reports on Iraq’s weapons from 1999, and argued that because there was insufficient evidence of Iraq destroying all of those weapons, then it therefore meant Iraq was still armed. He said regarding the “biological weapons sufficient to produce over 25,000 liters of anthrax” that Iraq had in the 1990’s, that Hussein “hasn't accounted for that material. He's given no evidence that he has destroyed it” (Bush, “State of the Union
Address,” 28 Jan. 2003). The “materials sufficient to produce more than 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin” had also not been accounted for, nor had the “materials to produce as much as 500 tons of sarin, mustard and VX nerve agent” (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003). There are two parts to this deceptive argument: first, Bush was not exactly saying that Iraq actually had these tens of thousands of liters of chemical and biological agents—just that Iraq had the material capabilities to make them, or rather, Iraq at one point had the ingredients to the recipe. Second, Bush argued that because there was no physical evidence that these material capabilities were destroyed, that meant that Iraq must have used the materials to create these agents and was therefore actively in possession of them—hence, Iraq was armed with these chemical and biological agents.

By making such an argument, and by asserting that “It is up to Iraq to show exactly where it is hiding its banned weapons, lay those weapons out for the world to see, and destroy them as directed,” it forced Iraq into a no-win situation (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003). As later investigations uncovered, intelligence was inconclusive about whether Iraq was truly in possession of these weapons or not. According to the 2004 report on prewar intelligence, the “intelligence reporting did support the conclusion that chemical and biological weapons were within Iraq’s technological capabilities;” however, “intelligence analysts did not have enough information to state with certainty that Iraq ‘has’ these weapons” (U.S. Senate, “Report on U.S. Intelligence,” 14-15). In this State of the Union, Bush took advantage of the unknown: a possibility that Iraq had these weapons therefore justified war, and if Iraq did not offer explicit proof that they did not have these weapons, then there was no way to prevent a U.S. invasion.
In a similar argument, Bush claimed that the “upwards of 30,000 munitions capable of delivering chemical agents” that intelligence estimated Iraq to have in the 1990’s were not accounted for (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003). Inspectors had only accounted for 16 of these munitions, which therefore meant, according to Bush, that Iraq had the other 29,984 hidden somewhere in the country. Again, because at one point Iraq had possessed these capabilities, it meant that they still had them several years later. The basis of this argument was that if the materials capable of making agents, or the munitions capable of delivering the agents, could not or would not be accounted for, that automatically meant that Iraq was in possession of them. It was not that the U.S. had valid proof of the weapons or weapon ingredients, just that there was no proof that Iraq did not have them. According to David Corn, Bush was “blatantly mischaracterizing the U.N. inspectors’ work, as he falsely suggested that the U.S. inspectors believed gargantuan stockpiles of WMDs remained in Iraq” (Corn 210).

The Infamous 16 Words

Bush then made one of the most infamous statements of his presidency. In his claims that Iraq was seeking to acquire the materials to develop nuclear weapons, Bush said the following 16 words: “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa” (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003). The allegation that Iraq had acquired yellowcake uranium from Niger was one that had caused alarm since October 2001 when the report was first brought to the intelligence community’s attention. Mixed intelligence from the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Department of Energy, and the Department of State’s Bureau of Intelligence considered the report was either “possible” or “highly suspect,” but no definitive evidence was found (U.S. Senate, “Report on U.S.
Intelligence,” 36). The CIA’s assessment on the initial report about Nigerian yellowcake asserted that “there is no corroboration from other sources that such an agreement was reached or that uranium was transferred” and that “the uranium is in the form of yellowcake and will need further processing to be used in an uranium enrichment plant... Iraq has no known facilities for processing or enriching the material” (U.S. Senate, “Report on U.S. Intelligence,” 36-37). The lack of corroboration, the suspect source, and the unlikelihood that the transaction occurred or that Iraq could even process the uranium if they did acquire it, all pointed to the report likely not being true. The concern for this report then resurfaced in February of 2002.

When the report was revisited in February, former U.S. ambassador and diplomat Joseph Wilson was tasked to travel to Niger to investigate the validity of the report. In an opinion piece published in *The New York Times* in July of 2003, Wilson wrote what he had conveyed to the American intelligence community back in 2002:

> Given the structure of the consortiums that operated the mines, it would be exceedingly difficult for Niger to transfer uranium to Iraq. Niger's uranium business consists of two mines, Somair and Cominak, which are run by French, Spanish, Japanese, German and Nigerian interests. If the government wanted to remove uranium from a mine, it would have to notify the consortium, which in turn is strictly monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Moreover, because the two mines are closely regulated, quasi-governmental entities, selling uranium would require the approval of the minister of mines, the prime minister and probably the president. In short, there's simply too much oversight over too small an industry for a sale to have transpired. (Wilson, “What I Didn’t Find in Africa”)  

Essentially, Wilson said that any kind of transfer of yellowcake uranium from Niger to Iraq would have been impossible to do without anyone knowing. Hence, the report that Bush cited in his address was not well supported, and the intelligence community disagreed on its validity.

Curiously enough, the 16 words were actually supposed to debut in Bush’s October 7, 2002 Cincinnati speech. The exact wording that was supposed to have made it in the Cincinnati
speech was: “and the regime has been caught attempting to purchase up to 500 metric tons of uranium oxide from Africa—an essential ingredient in the enrichment process” (U.S. Senate, “Report on the U.S. Intelligence,” 55). However, concerns had been raised by analysts at the time stating that the line on uranium should be entirely taken out. The CIA told the speech writers to “Remove the sentence because the amount is in dispute and it is debatable whether it can be acquired from the source. We told Congress that the Brits have exaggerated this issue” and that “President should not be a fact witness on this issue” (U.S. Senate, “Report on the U.S. Intelligence,” 56). Despite the active measures taken to remove the line from the Cincinnati speech, it somehow made its way into the State of the Union three months later. National Security Advisor Condolizza Rice said in a July 2003 CNN interview that:

And George Tenet rightly says that the agency cleared the [State of the Union] speech, it should not have been cleared with that sentence in. And I can tell you that had there been a request to take that out in its entirety, it would have been followed immediately. (“Rice: 16 words dispute 'enormously overblown'”)

While negligence may have contributed to the deceptive claim about Iraq procuring yellowcake uranium, the inconsistency of appropriate and inappropriate intelligence to include in war rhetoric is evident. The issue of the 16 words showcases how complex and unsubstantiated the justifications for war may be—controversially disagreed upon and disproven intelligence was included in a major presidential address to promote reason to invade another country. Regardless of whose shoulders the accountability for this deception falls upon, Harnett and Stengrim identify Bush’s rhetoric as means to establish Iraq as “a budding nuclear power” (162-163), which he achieved.
Iraq’s Links to al-Qaeda and Terrorism

Later, Bush finally circled back to the argument that began the shift to Iraq in the first place: that Hussein aided and protected terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda. He said:

Evidence from intelligence sources, secret communications, and statements by people now in custody reveal that Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of al Qaeda. Secretly, and without fingerprints, he could provide one of his hidden weapons to terrorists, or help them develop their own. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003)

This claim was again repeated in a February 16, 2003 speech where he said, “This same tyrant [Saddam Hussein] has close ties to terrorist organizations, and could supply them with the terrible means to strike this country” (Bush, “President Discusses the Future of Iraq,” 26 Feb., 2003). As explored in Chapter Four, Bush managed to shift the frame of his War on Terror from al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to Iraq because he drew several associations between Iraq, Hussein, and terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda. As identified by the U.S. Senate investigations, this claim was false, or at least exaggerated (U.S. Senate, “Senate Intelligence Committee unveils final phase II reports on prewar Iraq intelligence”). According to the 2004 report on prewar intelligence, while Iraq did have some ties to Palestinian terrorist organizations, the intelligence agencies “did not have credible intelligence reporting which suggest Iraq had operational control over al-Qaida” (U.S. Senate, “Report on the U.S. Intelligence,” 340). Additionally, the alleged connections between Iraq and the September 11 attackers, including Ahmed Hikmat Shakir and Muhammed Atta, were concluded to be unsupported (U.S. Senate, “Report on the U.S. Intelligence,” 340-341).

Despite this, the constant association between Iraq and al-Qaeda offered a repeated reference back to the terrorist attacks of September 11. These attacks offered a personal and
painful point of reference for the citizens of America, and by continually making this false association, Bush exploited that pain and fear. This exploitation was particularly prevalent when he continued:

Before September the 11th, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents, lethal viruses and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other plans—this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known. We will do everything in our power to make sure that that day never comes. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003)

Again, Bush drew the link between Hussein and al-Qaeda, almost directly attributing the terrorist attacks to Hussein. What would be worse, as Bush argued, would be another attack using weapons of mass destruction that Hussein was in possession of. Bush effectively warned the American public of an Iraqi nuclear terrorist attack—a threat that Hussein had never uttered, nor did he have the capabilities to even carry out.

Through this continuous manipulation of national fear and human trauma, Bush was able to further justify the need for military action. He achieved this through the next portion of his speech, where he returned to his argument for preemption. He said:

Some have said we must not act until the threat is imminent. Since when have terrorists and tyrants announced their intentions, politely putting us on notice before they strike? If this threat is permitted to fully and suddenly emerge, all actions, all words, and all recriminations would come too late. Trusting in the sanity and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option. (Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 28 Jan. 2003)

The preemption was a radical departure from the traditional war rhetoric genre. Carol Winkler argued that Bush had to rely heavily on strategic misrepresentation in order to adequately satisfy the genre’s expectations of war rhetoric, and that the misrepresentation arose “at predictable points where preemption strains conformity to the conventional expectations of the war genre”
According to Winkler, Bush managed to stay within the parameters of war rhetoric despite the argument for preemption because of his use of strategic misrepresentation. Since the U.S. did invade Iraq two months later, it appears that his strategy to utilize preemption in presidential war rhetoric was a success.

The Benefits of a Liberated Iraq

In his February 26 speech, Bush outlined his plans for Iraq. Bush employed a dichotomous narrative that envisioned a free Iraq. Despite making the claim that he would only use military action if Hussein did not surrender his WMDs, Bush detailed the benefits of a liberated Iraq. The disjunction in this claim was that up until this point, Bush had only said he would be forced to disarm Iraq, and that he did not want war. He had not made an official decision to invade Iraq until March, so his following claims in February suggest an increased attempt to justify the war. In his speech, he said:

The current Iraqi regime has shown the power of tyranny to spread discord and violence in the Middle East. A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region, by bringing hope and progress into the lives of millions. America's interests in security, and America's belief in liberty, both lead in the same direction: to a free and peaceful Iraq. (Bush, “President Discusses the Future of Iraq,” 26 Feb., 2003)

The prevailing hegemony of American ideals was reinforced as the “right” ideals to have, which will be used to “free” Iraq. While Hussein was certainly a dictator and committed atrocities on his own people, this argument for “saving” the people of Iraq through American values is a classic neoconservative argument. According to Wendy Brown, neoconservatism is “animated by an overtly avowed power drive, by angst about the declining or crumbling status of morality within the West, and by a concomitant moralization of a certain imaginary of the West and its values” (Brown 697). Bush utilized American values like freedom, liberty, and peace to justify
why Iraq should also have those values—but it would only be achievable through American military intervention.

Bush continued:

The first to benefit from a free Iraq would be the Iraqi people, themselves. Today they live in scarcity and fear, under a dictator who has brought them nothing but war, and misery, and torture. Their lives and their freedom matter little to Saddam Hussein -- but Iraqi lives and freedom matter greatly to us. (Bush, “President Discusses the Future of Iraq,” 26 Feb., 2003)

Again, while Hussein was a dictator, the interference with another nation’s government cannot be solely justified by the claim that the people of that nation would be better off. As mentioned in Chapter One, a 2013 report analyzing the consequences of the Iraq war between 2003 and 2011 found that approximately half a million Iraqi deaths could be attributed to the Iraq war (Hagopian et al.). Ironically enough, Bush later said in the speech, “The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values, because stable and free nations do not breed the ideologies of murder” (Bush, “President Discusses the Future of Iraq,” 26 Feb., 2003). Surely, Bush was not addressing the casualties that the Iraqis would face from U.S. military involvement, only that America would be their saviors.

Giving the Final Ultimatum

On March 17, 2003, Bush addressed the nation with the final overture to his prewar rhetoric. In this speech, Bush gave Saddam Hussein and his sons his final ultimatum to leave Iraq within 48 hours or the U.S. would invade. Bush’s speech began with the expected chronicling of events that led to this momentous decision:

My fellow citizens, events in Iraq have now reached the final days of decision. For more than a decade, the United States and other nations have pursued patient and honorable efforts to disarm the Iraqi regime without war. That regime pledged to reveal and destroy
all its weapons of mass destruction as a condition for ending the Persian Gulf War in 1991. Since then, the world has engaged in 12 years of diplomacy. We have passed more than a dozen resolutions in the United Nations Security Council. We have sent hundreds of weapons inspectors to oversee the disarmament of Iraq. Our good faith has not been returned. (Bush, “President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours”)

Campbell and Jamieson identified this characteristic of narrative as having the tendency “to recast the conflict as aggression by the enemy, while exhorting the audience to action by simplifying and dramatizing the events leading to the decision to wage war” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 224). This tendency is evident through the portrayal of Iraq as a deceptive and distrustful regime that cannot be quelled through peaceful and diplomatic means and by arguing that their inaction was an act of aggression. That this war is a continuation of George H. W. Bush’s Gulf War a decade prior is reinforced and the promises broken by Iraq since then are used as the justification for military action.

Throughout the speech, the characteristic of careful deliberation is observable. In addition to the narrative, Bush expressed that the U.S. had exhausted every other option and that left the only option available. Campbell and Jamieson wrote that this reflects “the posture of ‘forbearance,’ which supports the claim that the decision was arrived at thoughtfully and allows presidents to contend that every other possibility was attempted before they reluctantly opted for the use of force” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 228). The narrative Bush used, as it is an identified characteristic of the war rhetoric genre, prevails as powerful and persuasive because it dramatized and simplified the purpose for war “while providing the evidence and arguments warranting the use of force” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 229).

Later in the speech, Bush appealed to another characteristic of presidential war rhetoric:

The danger is clear: using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country, or any other. The United
States and other nations did nothing to deserve or invite this threat. But we will do everything to defeat it. Instead of drifting along toward tragedy, we will set a course toward safety. Before the day of horror can come, before it is too late to act, this danger will be removed. (Bush, “President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours”)

Campbell and Jamieson’s third characteristic, the exhortation to unified action, describes an appeal to intense commitment. This characteristic attempts to “spur the audience to respond with unanimity, to join a just cause in defense of humanity and civilization… urged to repulse the existing threat with all available resources, assured that, with the help of Providence, right will prevail” (Presidents Creating the Presidency 231). To emphasize this appeal to unity, Bush used “we” 26 times in this four-minute speech. The phrasing of the decision to go to war expressed a nationally-shared decision—one that Bush had put painstaking effort into developing over the previous two years to get to.

The fourth characteristic was very overtly stated in Bush’s February 26 address. The investiture as commander in chief, which was discussed at length in Chapter Four, was simply addressed by Bush when he said:

The United States of America has the sovereign authority to use force in assuring its own national security. That duty falls to me, as Commander-in-Chief, by the oath I have sworn, by the oath I will keep. (Bush, “President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours”)

As detailed in the previous chapter, the presidential capacity to define social reality is a unique and profound power wielded by presidents. This ability is especially consequential when used in war rhetoric. To employ this power, the president must legitimize their status as president and, in the case of war rhetoric, as commander in chief. Such status from the highest office in the land ensures the ability and effectiveness to shape and define the social reality of the nation.
Lastly, the characteristic of strategic misrepresentation is evident throughout the speech, though it is not as overt as it had been in Bush’s 2003 State of the Union. To this point, Bush professed all five of the deceptive claims as outlined by the U.S. Senate investigations as justifications to go to war with Iraq. On multiple occasions, as described at length throughout this project, Bush claimed there was a connection between Iraq, Hussein, and terrorists like al-Qaeda; that Iraq had active weapons programs; that Iraq had active programs to develop chemical and biological weapons; and that Iraq would supply terrorist groups with these weapons. Lastly, in his 2003 State of the Union, Bush spoke the infamous 16 words claiming that Iraq had intended to procure Nigerian yellowcake uranium, which would be used to develop nuclear weapons.

On the precipice of war, according to a March 2003 CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll, 72 percent of Americans supported the Iraq War (Newport, “Seventy-Two Percent of Americans Support War Against Iraq”). With the major justifications for war with Iraq based on proven deception, it is evident that the American people were deceived into war through effective and deceptive war rhetoric. To assess how this deception was sustained during the war and was later defended after the war, Bush’s sustained and post-war rhetoric will be examined in the remainder of the chapter.

Sustaining the Deception

The United States began its invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003. On this day, Bush addressed the nation on Operation Iraqi Freedom to signify the official start of the war. Over the course of the next three months, there were several major characteristics of Bush’s rhetoric as he placated the nation when frustrations and skepticism began to fester. These major characteristics
of Bush’s presidential war rhetoric during an active military operation were the rhetoric of progress, objectives, and duration of time; finding and ridding the country of WMDs; continued enforcement of the links between Iraq and September 11; and the advancement of freedom and peace.

The Rhetoric of Progress, Objectives, and Durations

Going into war, the major justification that Bush offered was that Iraq had to be disarmed from their weapons of mass destruction. Bush reiterated these means for war in his March 22 address on the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom:

Our cause is just, the security of the nations we serve and the peace of the world. And our mission is clear, to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people. (Bush, “President Discusses Beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom”)

These are the primary objectives of the war that the public were familiar with. In his April 10 speech, Bush said rather crassly, “we will not stop until Saddam’s corrupt gang is gone,” and then that “The goals of our coalition are clear and limited. We will end a brutal regime, whose aggression and weapons of mass destruction make it a unique threat to the world. (Bush, “President's Message to the Iraqi People”). However, as the war went on, Bush began to shift the objective from finding weapons of mass destruction to focusing on liberating the Iraqi people. In his April 24 speech, he said:

Our mission -- besides removing the regime that threatened us, besides ending a place where the terrorists could find a friend, besides getting rid of weapons of mass destruction -- our mission has been to bring a humanitarian aid and restore basic services, and put this country, Iraq, on the road to self-government. (Bush, “President Gives Iraq Update to Workers of Tank Plant in Lima, Ohio”)
Zarefsky made note of this, saying “When no weapons of mass destruction were found, he invited listeners to see the war from the perspective of the benefits of eliminating a tyrant, even though that had not been the original justification, rather than from the frame of protecting the United States and other nations against the risk of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons” (Zarefsky 613). This shift from the weapons of mass destruction to the accomplishment of removing a dictator from power would be continually pushed by Bush after the war.

As established in Chapter Four, Bush had hinted on several occasions that the War on Terror did not have a set duration. In his February 16, 2002 address to troops in Alaska, Bush had said, “The world must understand that this nation won't rest until we have destroyed terrorism, until we have denied the threat of global terrorism… And it doesn't matter where they try to hide, there is no calendar, there is no deadline” (Bush, “President Rallies the Troops in Alaska”). On March 22, 2003, he again asserted that this would be a lengthy war with no set deadline:

Now that conflict has come, the only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force. This will not be a campaign of half-measures. It is a fight for the security of our nation and the peace of the world, and we will accept no outcome but victory. (Bush, “President Discusses Beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom”)

This was conveyed several times in these early days of the invasion. On March 23, Bush said, “It is evident that it's going to take a while to achieve our objective, but we're on course, we're determined, and we're making good progress” (Bush, “President Discusses Military Operation”). He urged citizens to understand that the war may take some time:

I know that Saddam Hussein is losing control of his country, that we're slowly, but surely, achieving our objective. It's important for the American people to realize that this war has just begun, that it may -- it may seem like a long time because of all the action on TV, but in terms of the overall strategy, we're just in the beginning phases, and that we're executing a plan which will make it easier to achieve objectives, and at the same time, spare innocent life. (Bush, “President Discusses Military Operation”)
However, less than a month later, Bush was starting to declare success in their mission despite the fact that no weapons of mass destruction were found. In an April 16 speech, he said:

> One month ago -- just one month ago -- the forces of our coalition stood at the borders of Iraq, with orders to advance hundreds of miles through hostile territory, against a ruthless enemy. Today, organized military resistance is virtually ended; the major cities of Iraq have been liberated. (Bush, “President Bush Outlines Progress in Operation Iraqi Freedom”)

Despite the unknown timeline, and despite Bush assuring that this would be a long war, the end was already seemingly in sight. Nonetheless, as the objective in the war had shifted, so, too, would the perceived duration. If the U.S. had kept with its initial mission, then the war would have been over and done with as soon as it was confirmed that there were no weapons of mass destruction. However, because the objective shifted to liberating the Iraqi people of their brutal dictator and spreading democracy, the end date for the war also shifted. On April 28, just days before Bush would announce the end of “major military operations,” he said:

> America pledged to rid Iraq of an oppressive regime, and we kept our word. America now pledges to help Iraqis build a prosperous and peaceful nation, and we will keep our word again. (Bush, “President Discusses the Future of Iraq,” 28 April 2003)

The mixed messaging about the length of the U.S. occupation of Iraq was confusing and vague. The original purpose for invading Iraq—to neutralize Iraq from their weapons of mass destruction and remove Saddam Hussein—was long forgotten, or at least moved to the backburner. Despite this, Bush had still congratulated himself on May 1 when he said, “Operation Iraqi Freedom was carried out with a combination of precision and speed and boldness the enemy did not expect, and the world had not seen before” (Bush, “President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended”). This left the question: what was the actual objective of Operation Iraqi Freedom if not to find the weapons of mass destruction?
The Question of WMDs

Because early understandings of the war had been that Iraq was armed with weapons of mass destruction and had to be prevented from using them, when Bush discussed the “good progress” of the invasion in the early days could have easily been understood as “good progress” on tracking down the weapons. He affirmed this himself when he said in a March 23 press conference:

I am pleased with the progress that we're making in the early stages of a—of the war to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction, and to free the Iraqi people from the clutches of a brutal dictatorship. (Bush, “President Discusses Military Operation”)

At this point, with the State of the Union and “ultimatum” addresses still fresh in the mind, it was still believed that Iraq did indeed have weapons of mass destruction. One reporter questioned the president in this press conference about Iraq not immediately deploying their weapons upon invasion, to which Bush merely shrugged off:

Q: Mr. President, are you surprised the enemy has not used any weapons of mass destruction?

THE PRESIDENT: I am thankful the enemy has not used any weapons of mass destruction. And we will continue employing a strategy to make it difficult for the enemy to use weapons of mass destruction. (Bush, “President Discusses Military Operation”)

Though a month later, when no semblance of any weapons were in sight, Bush had to address the lack of weapons. In an April 24 speech, he made the “progress” in finding these weapons sound optimistic. By emphasizing how well Hussein had hidden the weapons and for the length of time they were hidden, he attempted to justify why they had not been found yet, saying:

Iraqis with firsthand knowledge of these programs, including several top officials who have come forward recently—some voluntarily—others not—are beginning to cooperate, are beginning to let us know what the facts were on the ground. And that's important because the regime of Saddam Hussein spent years hiding and disguising his weapons. He tried to fool the United Nations, and did for 12 years, by hiding these weapons. And so, it's going to take time to find them. But we know he had them. And whether he
destroyed them, moved them, or hid them, we're going to find out the truth. And one thing is for certain: Saddam Hussein no longer threatens America with weapons of mass destruction. (Bush, “President Gives Iraq Update to Workers of Tank Plant in Lima, Ohio”)

To somehow satisfy the lack of evidence of weapons of mass destruction, Bush made sure to include that Hussein was no longer a threat. If regime change of a brutal dictator were enough to warrant a full-scale invasion, that may have been enough satisfaction. However, the war was justified on the notion that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and the U.S.’s hands were coming up empty. Even in his May 1 speech declaring the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Bush said that, “We've begun the search for hidden chemical and biological weapons and already know of hundreds of sites that will be investigated” (Bush, “President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended”). What would come in the following months would be a rightfully relentless interrogation about the reasons for this war, and why the Bush Administration had led the nation to believe that there had been real proof of weapons of mass destruction.

Iraq and the (Alleged) Link to 9/11

One of the major deceptive claims that Bush had touted to justify a shift from Afghanistan to Iraq was the assertion that Iraq had some connection to al-Qaeda and the terrorist attacks of September 11. Despite this claim being unfounded, Bush continued to utilize this narrative in his grounds for war. In almost every speech during the invasion, Bush made an association between September 11 and Iraq;

March 25, 2003:

Eighteen months ago, this building [the Pentagon] came under attack. From that day to this, we have been engaged in a new kind of war -- and we are winning. We will not
leave our future to be decided by terrorist groups or terrorist regimes. (Bush, “President Submits Wartime Budget”)

April 16, 2003:

On September the 11th, 2001, America found that we are not immune to the threats that gather for years across the ocean; threats that can arrive in sudden tragedy. Since September the 11th, we've been engaged in a global war against terror, a war being waged on many fronts. That war continues, and we are winning. (Bush, “President Bush Outlines Progress in Operation Iraqi Freedom”)

April 24, 2003:

In Iraq, we are defending this nation's security. After the attacks of September the 11th, 2001, we will not allow grave threats to go unopposed. (Bush, “President Gives Iraq Update to Workers of Tank Plant in Lima, Ohio”)

May 1, 2003:

The battle of Iraq is one victory in a war on terror that began on September the 11, 2001 - - and still goes on. That terrible morning, 19 evil men -- the shock troops of a hateful ideology -- gave America and the civilized world a glimpse of their ambitions. They imagined, in the words of one terrorist, that September the 11th would be the "beginning of the end of America." By seeking to turn our cities into killing fields, terrorists and their allies believed that they could destroy this nation's resolve, and force our retreat from the world. They have failed. (Bush, “President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended”)

In spite of this connection being one of the more unfounded deceptive claims that Bush had made, he continued to exploit the trauma of the nation and utilize it to justify the invasion when there was no legitimate reason to invade Iraq in the first place.

The Advancement of Freedom and Peace

Finally, much of Bush’s rhetoric during the war in Iraq celebrated the achievement of peace and freedom as a direct outcome of Operation Iraq Freedom. He said that the U.S. was helping “build a future of freedom and dignity and peace” (Bush, “President Bush Outlines Progress in Operation Iraqi Freedom”) and that “In this battle, we have fought for the cause of liberty, and for the peace of the world” (Bush, “President Bush Announces Major Combat
Operations in Iraq Have Ended”). By appealing to this American hegemony, one that covets American democracy and liberty, it aided in rationalizing a war that lacked a clear and legitimate rationale. However, it is unclear what the “peace and freedom” were a result of; initially, the war was justified because Hussein’s capabilities for weapons of mass destruction were a threat to the world. With no weapons of mass destruction, this then meant that Bush had implied that Hussein was still an international threat even without these capabilities. Removing one dictator who did not have weapons of mass destruction was fighting “for the peace of the world,” which is a profound exaggeration.

Bush identified this achievement as landmark, identifying it as “historic” on many occasions. On April 16, he said “You and I and all the world are witnessing historic days in the cause of freedom” (Bush, “President Bush Outlines Progress in Operation Iraqi Freedom”). He again said on April 24, “You see, it's a chance for me to remind the people of this country that we're witnessing historic days in the cause of freedom. This is a historic moment” (Bush, “President Gives Iraq Update to Workers of Tank Plant in Lima, Ohio”). He attributed this accomplishment as a direct result of America’s own love of freedom.

In a true neoconservative fashion, Bush stated that this spreading of freedom was an American duty. In his March 25 speech, he said:

All the members of the military, abroad, at home, or here in this important building, are bound together by a great cause, to defend the American people and advance the universal hope of freedom. America has accepted this responsibility. (Bush, “President Submits Wartime Budget”)

While earlier rationalizations for war were to neutralize a dire threat, the cause of the Iraq War was simplified to merely fulfilling the American responsibility to advance hope and freedom. The President reinforced this in his April 16 speech when he said “We're seeing the deep and
universal desire of men and women to live in freedom… And all who know that hope, all who will work and sacrifice for freedom, have a friend in the United States of America” (Bush, “President Bush Outlines Progress in Operation Iraqi Freedom”). It can be seen here that because Bush identified the Iraqi people as a freedom-loving people who shared American values, they were no longer an enemy “outlaw state” to the United States. By helping the Iraqi people to see the great light of freedom, the United States helped “save” them and could now consider them allies instead of a conquered people.

Post-War Rhetoric and Bush’s Accountability

After Bush declared the “end” to military operations in Iraq, he refused to acknowledge that his deceptive claims were not true. In spite of the evidence, he continued to assert that Iraq did have weapons of mass destruction and that Iraq had ties to terrorism. In a September 23 speech, Bush said “The regime of Saddam Hussein cultivated ties to terror while it built weapons of mass destruction. It used those weapons in acts of mass murder, and refused to account for them when confronted by the world” (Bush, “President Bush Addresses United Nations General Assembly”). Political scientist James Pfiffner proposed that “The careful phrasing of administration statements implying a link between Saddam and 9/11 suggests that they knew there was no compelling evidence. If there was, they would have made an outright claim for the link, and the argument for war would have been much easier to make” (Pfiffner 28). Thus, it is evident through Bush’s wording in his associations between Iraq and 9/11 that there was no known proof of the link. Despite this, Bush continued to exploit the emotional response that Americans would have when bringing up the 9/11 terrorist attacks.
Bush continued to argue that “The greatest threat of our age is nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons in the hands of terrorists, and the dictators who aid them” (Bush, “President Bush Discusses Iraq Policy at Whitehall Palace in London”). In the speech announcing the capture of Saddam Hussein on December 14, 2003, Bush omitted any mention of weapons, instead celebrating Iraqi freedom and saying that “The war on terror is a different kind of war, waged capture by capture, cell by cell, and victory by victory” (Bush, “President Bush Addresses Nation on the Capture of Saddam Hussein”). Even still, when no evidence supported Bush’s claims, he still asserted that “Saddam was a danger and the world is better off cause we got rid of him,” as if merely removing Hussein from power was justification enough for war (ABC News). Additionally, in an analysis by Raith Zeher Abid and Shakila Abdul Manan, they concluded that Bush spoke of Hussein and the alleged weapons of mass destruction in a different manner after the war. They wrote:

The analysis of WMDs shows that before the war, Bush used tangible evidences, as in the production amount of WMDs in Iraq. However, after the war, Bush only used the idea that Saddam used and perused WMDs because the main excuse of America to invade Iraq was the WMDs and there was no evidence of their existence. (Abid and Manan 724) After the war, Bush spoke about the weapons of mass destruction as if he, too, were hoodwinked by the intelligence community like the rest of the nation was. However, long gone were the deceptive claims he had used as “evidence” that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

To defend his stance that Iraq did, at one point, have weapons of mass destruction, the Bush Administration “conjectured the WMD were all relocated to Syria before American troops arrived” (Gordon et al. 179). In defending his deceptive remarks, Bush’s response to the “escalating crisis of legitimacy was to blame the CIA,” (Hartnett and Stengrim 177). Bush’s primary defense of the war in Iraq was that he legitimately believed all of the statements in his
speeches. In his 2010 memoir, *Decision Points*, Bush wrote that “No one was more shocked or angry than I was when we didn't find the weapons” (262). In his book, Bush also wrote:

In retrospect, of course, we all should have pushed harder on the intelligence and revisited our assumptions. But at the time, the evidence and logic pointed in the other direction. *If Saddam doesn’t have WMD, I asked myself, why on earth would he subject himself to a war he will almost certainly lose?* (Bush, *Decision Points*, 242)

Bush did not acknowledge that he essentially backed Hussein into the war by demanding for proof that Hussein could not provide.

Some scholars have argued that through careful phrasing of Bush’s speeches, Bush’s accountability of his deception was intentionally minimized. Jamieson wrote that “Shifts in the strength of assertions reveal that administration officials decreased the strength of some claims that had been challenged and escalated the strength of the conclusion about the existence of WMD” (Jamieson, “Justifying the War in Iraq,” 258). If Bush’s accountability was effectively minimized, and if there was no proof that Bush intended to mislead the country, then the deception he engaged in cannot rightly be identified as disinformation. However, other scholars have argued that, especially in the case of the 16 words, Bush had to be aware of the faulty evidence. In *Decision Points*, Bush said that “The single sentence in my five-thousand-word speech was not a major point in the case of Saddam. The British stood by my intelligence” (102-103). This was the argument that the Bush Administration went with. In a 2003 CNN interview with Wolf Blitzer, Condoleezza Rice went as far to say “let me just start by saying, it is 16 words, and it has become an enormously overblown issue” (“Rice: 16 words dispute ‘enormously overblown’”). One of the most outrageous and deceptive claims made by Bush in his justifications for war was reduced to being just a “single sentence” and the outrage for that deception was made out to be an “overblown issue.”
Journalist Bob Woodward had an intimate insight into the Bush Administration before, during, and after the war. Woodward’s view of Bush’s culpability has changed throughout the years and through his three books on Bush Jr. While Woodward has outright said in interviews, such as his 2015 interview with Chris Wallace on Fox News Sunday, that in his 18-month investigation, “there was no lying in this that I could find” (Roff, “No Lie”). However in Woodward’s books, particularly his 2004 book *Plan of Attack*, it is illustrated that Bush was able to admit that Iraq did not, in fact, possess weapons of mass destruction. In a December 2003 interview that is documented in the book, Woodward was able to push Bush on whether they had found any weapons of mass destruction, and whether the purpose for invading Iraq was based on lies or not. He asked Bush “what happened” between going from Tenet declaring finding WMDs in Iraq as a “slam dunk” and coming out of the war empty-handed. After Woodward reaffirmed that there were no WMDs, Bush admitted, “But we have found weapons programs… that could be reconstituted” (Woodward 422). For many, a potential for reconstitution does not equate to physical possession of the weapons.

The outrage over the president’s blatant deception was justified. Hartnett and Stengrim wrote that “for a president who cites false information without marking it as such engages in unethical deception—this is lying” (Hartnett and Stengrim 174). Douglas Kellner went a step farther, arguing that “Bush's rhetoric, like that of fascism, deploys a mistrust of language, reducing it to manipulative speechifying, speaking in codes, repeating the same phrases over and over” (Kellner 636). While it is recognized that the president has access to the most classified and protected intelligence that the intelligence communities have to offer, it is a wonder how a sustained campaign like the promotion of war in Iraq could have allotted for the president to be
unaware of the disagreements on the validity of the intelligence that he was sharing as justification for war.

Summary

This chapter analyzed Bush’s war rhetoric in the three dramatic acts of 2003; the final months in the prelude to war, the rhetoric that sustained war in Iraq between March and May, and the defensive rhetoric after the war “ended” and no weapons of mass destruction were uncovered. In the pre-war rhetoric, all five of the major deceptive claims as identified by the U.S. Senate investigations were uttered—sometime repeatedly—by Bush in his rationale for war. Additionally, all five of Campbell and Jamieson’s characteristics of presidential war rhetoric were observed in this period. Following, Bush’s rhetoric during the three months of the Iraq war saw the rhetoric of progress, objectives, and duration of time; the question of WMDs; the continued linking of Iraq and September 11; and the rhetoric attempting to advance freedom and peace as an American responsibility.

Lastly, Bush’s post-war rhetoric was examined to determine how Bush attempted to defend himself after the Administration’s deception came to light. Bush to this day has held that he believed there to be weapons of mass destruction, but he also insisted that the removal of Hussein from power was the paramount achievement that should be celebrated as a result of the war, which minimizes much of the deception that was used to justify the war in the first place. Ultimately, there is no conclusive evidence that Bush willfully intended to deceive the country, though many relevant points are made that he likely was, or at least should have been, aware of the deceit.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Discussion

The purpose of this project was to examine the potential limitations of the genre of war rhetoric, specifically in the characteristic of strategic misrepresentation that is used by a president to justify war. As Chapter One detailed, there is a rich history of scholarship on presidential war rhetoric, which is a prominent genre of rhetoric. In the innovation of genre criticism, Edwin Black identified that the characteristics of genres are rhetorical strategies, rhetorical situations, and audience effects. He argued that the “recurrence” of the strategies, situations, and effects meant that there are “congregations” of discourse, or genres (Black 134-137). Lloyd Bitzer defined the rhetorical situation as “a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence,” and argued that rhetorical discourse occurs as a response to a situation and that the situation invites participation of discourse which alters reality (Bitzer 6). Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson argued that the recurrences of similar forms create genres, and that genres are “groups of discourses which share substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics” (“Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism” 16). These recurrences of
situations that call upon particular rhetorical responses offer the rhetorical scholar a means of identifying overarching characteristics of a genre.

There are many identified themes and characteristics of presidential war rhetoric that were evident in this project. Particularly relevant were Robert L. Ivie’s “god-terms” like “rights,” “laws,” “democracy,” “freedom,” and “tyranny,” which were used to motivate war. Also, David Zarefsky offered a metaphorical take on presidential war rhetoric, where the president can associate non-war events as symbolic “war,” such as Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” initiatives. This metaphorical attribution of war can also be seen in Bush’s “War on Terror” and his use of the term when describing the events after the 9/11 terrorist attacks: “We are at war” (Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” 20 Sept. 2001).

Moreover, Zarefsky established a presidential power of definition, which is used to define social reality. This presidential power is also evident throughout this analysis.

Campbell and Jamieson provide five characteristics of presidential war rhetoric: (1) the appearance of careful deliberation, (2) the chronicle or narrative of events to justify action, (3) the call for unification to unanimously support the need for war, (4) the investiture as commander in chief to reestablish the president’s status as head of military, and (5) the use of strategic misrepresentation (Presidents Creating the Presidency 221). All five of these characteristics have been observed in multiple occurrences of Bush’s war rhetoric. Utilizing Campbell and Jamieson’s theoretical framework, the purpose of this project was to answer the two following questions: What deception was used by George W. Bush in his war rhetoric to justify the war in Iraq? And, how did Bush employ those methods of deception?
In Chapter Two, strategic misrepresentation was contrasted with other forms of deception to paint a full picture on the different methods that could be used to deceive. Deception, as an umbrella term, is identified as an action that is meant to lead the audience to believe something that is not true, which implies an infringement on the audience's agency. Methods of deception addressed in this project include lying, misinformation, propaganda, and disinformation.

According to Freelon and Wells, disinformation requires an intention to deceive, a potential for harm, and an intention to harm. As concluded in Chapter Two, strategic misrepresentation requires some initial event that would allow the president to misconstrue or misrepresent, whereas disinformation can be entirely fabricated. Given the name, *strategic* misrepresentation implies a knowing and strategic means to deceive; therefore, accidental deception like the spreading of misinformation cannot be considered strategic. Finally, the historical instances of strategic misrepresentation in presidential war rhetoric offered by Campbell and Jamieson primarily were concluded to fit the parameters of their characteristic except for the case of George W. Bush and his deceptive rhetoric used to promote, justify, and sustain the 2003 war in Iraq.

Chapter Three aimed to establish the rhetorical situation for Bush’s war rhetoric by analyzing all of Bush’s rhetoric that mentioned Saddam Hussein, Iraq, and weapons of mass destruction in 2001. Because genres require a recurring rhetorical situation, presidential war rhetoric is then called upon as a response to the initial situation. Similarly, strategic misrepresentation, as a function of presidential war rhetoric, requires an initial event to misrepresent. Chapter Three examined a comprehensive outline of Bush’s rhetoric that aimed to establish an appropriate rhetorical situation for war in 2001. By utilizing the themes of
containment rhetoric and national defense rhetoric (also described as foreign policy rhetoric), the analysis concluded that through repeated references of Saddam Hussein as a dictator of a “rogue regime” that intended to do harm, an argument for continuing efforts to “contain” Iraq was made. This containment rhetoric was reinforced through the hegemonic structures of American ideology (such as American democracy and freedom) and by constructing a perception of “us” versus “them” between America and Iraq. Bush also utilized several of Campbell and Jamieson’s war rhetoric characteristics, which suggests that Bush was employing the genre of war rhetoric when discussing Iraq and Hussein prior to his “Axis of Evil” speech where he officially marked Iraq as a national threat. Bush made repeated utterances warning of the threat of Iraq and weapons of mass destruction throughout 2001. He managed to slowly rhetorically construct a narrative that framed Iraq as an international and impending concern, which would later be used to justify war. The American public was effectively primed during this time, and the rhetorical situation to allow for war rhetoric was secured.

Chapter Four focused on evaluating how Bush managed to “sell” his major justifications for war with Iraq and to assess his means of accelerating the need for war from regarding Iraq as a just “rogue regime” into an international threat that had to be neutralized. The analysis determined that by utilizing his presidential power of definition and through his role as commander in chief, Bush was successfully able to shift the frame of the “War on Terror” from hunting al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to needing to remove Hussein from power and destroy Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction. Chapter Four centered attention to the growing deception that Bush touted throughout the year, but also documented the evolving rhetorical themes that Bush used to accelerate his justifications for war; though he continued with containment and defense rhetoric
for part of the year, the president also utilized unilateralism, arguments for regime change, preemptive rhetoric, false appearance of debate, calls for disarmament, and increasing the urgency for action. Additionally, Bush used the means of repeated association to make Iraq, Hussein, and weapons of mass destruction homogeneous in nature to the audience. From this analysis, it was evident that Bush’s rhetoric established the foundation for his war rhetoric and justify a need for war with Iraq.

After the rhetorical situation was established and the foundation for war rhetoric was set, Chapter Five delved into the most heightened war rhetoric of the conflict. The analysis of Bush’s rhetoric from January to March 17 of 2003 showcased his usage of all of Campbell and Jamieson’s characteristics of war rhetoric in addition to numerous deceptive claims. After the official start of the war, Bush continued his war rhetoric despite deteriorating public support and increased media suspicion when weapons of mass destruction could not be found. Finally, the rhetoric used in defense of the war saw another frame shift. Bush’s rhetoric evolved from calling for neutralizing Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction to advocating for the spread of democracy. While the claims of deception used to start the war were spoken with certainly, defensive rhetoric after the end of “major military operations” saw much finger pointing and shifting of blame and accountability away from the top officials onto the intelligence agency.

**Major Conclusions about Deception in War Rhetoric**

It was apparent at the beginning of this study that the Iraq War of 2003 was different from previous U.S. military operations due to the immense amount of deception that was used to justify the war. Because of this, it made for an excellent subject to analyze the state of the
presidential war rhetoric genre. The objective of this project was to determine what deception had been used in the promotion and justification for the Iraq war, and how that deception was used. The answers to these questions would not only help inform the state of the presidential war rhetoric genre but would also enrich the study of political rhetoric in crisis situations. As reviewed in Chapter One and Two, disinformation is a growing concern for this country, especially after the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. While difficult to prove Bush’s intent in many contexts, the consideration of disinformation in rhetorical studies provides a point of reference for future studies. Despite the critical conclusions presented, no definitive analysis is offered concerning the full extent of public disinformation employed by George W. Bush during the Iraq War period.

It is apparent, however, that there were certainly deceptions that were utilized between the years 2002 and 2003. The U.S. Senate investigations, which leant an immense amount of insight to the lengths at which the Bush Administration deceived the nation, concluded in five major deceptive claims used: (1) that Iraq had active programs to develop weapons of mass destruction; (2) that Iraq had active chemical and biological weapons programs; (3) that Iraq or Saddam Hussein had some connection with al-Qaeda; (4) that Iraq would supply weapons to terrorist groups; and (5) that Iraq had procured yellowcake uranium from Niger with intent to make nuclear weapons (U.S. Senate, “Senate Intelligence Committee”). Initially, it was unclear as to who exactly made these claims and who could be held accountable for them. This project detailed each deceptive claim that George W. Bush made, and at least all five of these claims were used by him.
Ultimately, the answer to the initial questions posed in Chapter One are that multiple forms of deception were utilized by George W. Bush in his war rhetoric, and that the means by which these deceptive claims were employed were through the themes discussed above. As Chapter Two established, “lying” does not seem to be an adequate label for this deception due to the severity of the deception told. Therefore, deception spread to large audiences could be simple deception, propaganda, misinformation, or disinformation. Given the strategic element to war rhetoric, misinformation is unlikely for the majority of the claims used, but cannot be completely ruled out—it should be assumed that at least some claims could have been unintentionally told. Additionally, it seems apparent that war rhetoric, in itself, is propagandic. To commit to a sustained, ideologically-driven campaign of promoting and endorsing any action is propaganda. However, identifying how different the Iraq war propaganda is from other military propaganda is beyond the scope of this project. Additionally, once the George W. Bush Presidential Library declassifies the relevant files, future scholars can offer more definitive claims about the nature of Iraq War propaganda.

By giving careful consideration to the entirety of this analysis, from start to finish, it appears that Bush engaged in deceptive foreshadowing, that is a self-fulfilling prophecy laden with duplicity. Since the very beginning, Bush had been warning of a nuclear threat. He began with the ambiguous warning of an outlaw regime with access to nuclear weapons, and then later pinned the face of Saddam Hussein to that threat. Finally, he made the accusation that, indeed, his warnings had come to reality and that Hussein was in possession of nuclear weapons and the United States—and the world itself—was in grave danger. Foreshadowing is a narrative tool, and it appears that Bush used it effectively to first prime and then take advantage of his audience. As
commander in chief, it was Bush’s responsibility to fulfil this prophecy. What is evident is that this deceptive foreshadowing, and the entire war propaganda campaign, is a much bigger component of Bush’s war rhetoric than strategic misrepresentation is to past military operations. In other words, there is a clear difference in the use of deception in presidential war rhetoric, and that calls into consideration as to whether Bush’s war rhetoric of Iraq is an exception to the genre.

Finally, this project offered insight in how to assess different forms of deception in presidential war rhetoric. Because Campbell and Jamieson’s strategic misrepresentation characteristic did not prove wholly adequate to account for all of Bush’s deception, the following are proposed inquiries that future scholars could consider when analyzing deception in crisis rhetoric:

1. What is the situational nature of the deception? Strategic misrepresentation offers an explanation when the rhetor misconstrues an event that occurred, but other forms of deception may wholly fabricate an entire event. The fact of the matter is, there are levels of severity in the situational nature of deception used to justify war. An entirely fabricated tale—such as a rogue regime who had weapons of mass destruction that they intended to use on countries around the world—is a more severe deception than something like the Zimmerman telegram or FDR claiming the German’s committed an act of “piracy” on the U.S.S. Greer.

2. Is the rhetor’s intention provable? The motivations of rhetor should be considered, particularly what the rhetor stands to gain if their deceptions are believed. Additionally, if the rhetor expresses neutrality in the light of the deception—for instance, Bush’s
insistence that he had not made up his mind about going to war with Iraq when
testimonies suggest that he had—then it should be considered if the neutrality is apparent
in their actions as well as their words.

3. Is the deception recurrent? A one-time utterance would be less likely to be strategic
compared to deceptive claims that are continuously touted for months or even years. A
sustained campaign of deception would be considerably more serious than a claim
mentioned once or twice.

The degree of severity of the deception based on its situational nature, the level of awareness the
rhetor has of the deceit, and the magnitude of recurrence of the deception would help inform
what kind of rhetorical deception the speaker is engaging in.

**Implications for Rhetorical Studies**

Strategic misrepresentation is a theme that can be observable in many instances of
presidential war rhetoric. The deception used in Bush’s war rhetoric, which went as far as
potentially utilizing disinformation to promote and justify military action, goes beyond merely
strategically misrepresenting a single event. In Chapter Two, it was discussed how many cases of
strategic misrepresentation utilized a misconstrued event to help justify war, though the entire
campaign for war may not have been solely built on deceitfulness. This does not appear to be the
case for the Iraq War, where the entirety of the rationale for war was built on deception. Though
disinformation requires proof of intention and challenges the traditional assumptions of
rhetorical criticism regarding objectivity, this project has demonstrated that the consequences of
any level of deception in the context of presidential war rhetoric can be catastrophic. If there is
one plea to make as a result of this study, it would be for rhetoricians to contribute more attention to the study of insincere rhetoric, whether it be strategic misrepresentation, deception, or disinformation.

Limitations and Future Research

This project did not come without limitations. While the breadth of artifacts this study examined was intended to be wide and encompassing, there are still countless instances of Bush’s rhetoric that could be examined in regard to the Iraq War. Additionally, this project focused primarily on one rhetorical framework: Kathleen Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s presidential war rhetoric framework as it is detailed in their 2008 book, Presidents Creating the Presidency. Though this framework was chosen because of its comprehensive account of characteristics depicting war rhetoric and, more specifically, for its treatment of the element of strategic misrepresentation that is often left out of criticism of war rhetoric, there is abundant scholarship on the topic of presidential war rhetoric that could have been applied to this study. Additionally, due to the nature of disinformation and the assumed profound number of classified documents yet to be made public, the full scope of the decisions and knowledge behind the Iraq War may not yet be known and therefore the deception cannot be considered as disinformation.

What this analysis has demonstrated is that the rhetoric that justified the Iraq War of 2003 does not fit neatly into the parameters of classically-understood war rhetoric. Many themes and characteristics are observable—in fact, Bush’s war rhetoric on Iraq is an amalgamation of what most war rhetoric scholarship asserts; the good-versus-evil, the god terms, the appearance of careful deliberation, the assertion of presidential power, and the carefully constructed narrative
that leads the American people to unanimous support. However, as this analysis has attempted to showcase, Bush’s war rhetoric also utilized evolved levels of deception. The sheer timeline that Bush had built, which slowly introduced and justified disdain toward Hussein and Iraq while simultaneously fanning the flames of fear of nonexistent WMDs, offers insight into how different Bush’s war rhetoric really was.

Future research in the field of rhetoric should question whether Bush’s deceptive war rhetoric on Iraq is an anomaly or if it will be seen as a blueprint for future presidents who wish to wage war without cemented justifications. Most recently, former Vice President Mike Pence falsely linked Iranian general Qasem Soleimani with the September 11 terrorist attacks to justify his assassination committed by the United States on January 3, 2020 (Yen et al., “AP Fact Check”). What is evident is that the concern for deception and disinformation is ever the more persistent since the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. If the Bush Administration managed to deceive the country into war nearly two decades ago, rhetorical scholars should consider the developing threats of this 21st century and consider a place for evaluating disinformation and other deception under this umbrella of rhetorical scholarship.
Works Cited


