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Words as weapons: rhetoric, public opinion and the legitimization of military action in the post-9/11 era in the U.S.

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A mia madre e mio padre,

che ci hanno creduto prima di me.

Al mio sesto senso, che non si è mai sbagliato

e che, in qualche modo, mi ha sempre salvata.

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ABSTRACT

A pivotal moment in American history, the events of September 11, 2001, brought about significant changes in national security strategies and the start of the War on Terror. This thesis investigates the persuasive rhetoric used by American decision-makers and the media to sway public opinion and legitimize military action in the wake of 9/11.

The research centers on important tactics of rhetoric employed in the wake of 9/11 by the media and political figures, most notably President George W. Bush. By analyzing speeches, and media coverage, the study finds the framing strategies, linguistic choices, and narrative construction that helped create and spread a convincing storyline in favor of the War on Terror.

The study explores the psychological and emotional effects of the 9/11 attacks on the American people, evaluating the ways in which trauma and terror were purposefully used to foster an environment that was favorable to military action. In addition, it looks at how patriotism functioned in the discourse, analyzing how calls for a single national identity were used to win support for the War on Terror.

The contentious connection between Iraq and the 9/11 attacks, along with the claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), are given particular focus. The study assesses the veracity of these assertions as well as their influence on the general public's opinion and the level of worldwide support for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

This thesis contributes to a complete understanding of the delicate interplay between rhetoric, public opinion, and policy development in the post-9/11 age by combining these many parts. The findings have implications for our knowledge of the dynamics of information transmission during national crises, as well as its long-term influence on geopolitical decision-making.

The foundational question this thesis attempts to answer is: to what extent did the political rhetoric used in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 influenced/legitimized the start of the War on Terror?

INTRODUCTION

Following the destruction of the Twin Towers in 2001, the world not only witnessed shattered buildings, vehicles, and human bodies, but also an era in global politics, where manipulating language and persuading with words becomes as powerful and essential as any conventional tool of war-making. This thesis investigates how the use of rhetoric, the politically or socially motivated manipulation of language process, function and form, worked on public opinion to create and legitimate U.S. military action and interventions.

The terrorist strikes on U.S. soil led to a radical renewal of international relations and instigated a paradigm shift in studying security policies and military operations. The evocation and use of rhetoric by political leaders, policymakers and the media have been central to these changes, framing public opinion and defining the appropriate response to terrorism. From 'War on Terror' to the construction of 'us' v. 'them' narratives, language had become a powerful tool for justifying an American retaliation.

This thesis investigates the ways in which language was employed to create grounds for military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, in an effort to understand the complex dynamics of rhetorical persuasion in the that era. It seeks to clarify the tactics used to back up military action in the view of both home and foreign audiences by examining important presidential speeches. Furthermore, by analyzing how rhetorical appeals were crafted to attract prevalent feelings and attitudes, this study aims to investigate the function that public opinion had in legitimizing military action.

This work is divided in two chapters, each containing different sections: four for the first and five for the second, respectively. Chapter 1 will be completely focused on the historical context surrounding the United States until the consequent era to the terrorist attacks, since it is crucial to acknowledge the history of the country before delving into the core focus of the analysis this thesis attempts to offer. While Chapter 2 will get to the heart of the examination and will attempt to respond to the research question pertaining to this particular piece of work: to what extent did the political rhetoric used in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 influenced/legitimized the start of the War on Terror?

Section 1.1 will present a general overview of how the United States as the

superpower known today, came to being and will answer an important query regarding the attacks that occurred in the fall of 2001, coming to the conclusion that even though the events of that day are remembered as a turning point, it would be more accurate to describe them as a breaking one, considering the consequences it had both internally and externally.

The second section of the first chapter is completely fixed on providing a reconstruction of the incidents so as to comprehend the gravity of the situation the country found itself in and highlight some of the mistakes made by the government and aviation agencies regarding national security.

1.3 introduces and explains the infamous terrorist organization known as al-Qaeda, alongside its most important personality: Osama bin Laden. The sub-section will endeavor to elucidate the motives behind the attacks and the ideology of hate towards the West on behalf of the affiliates to the terrorist organization. Additionally, a delineation of how al-Qaeda came into being, its structure and the way it operated will be crucial to realize the reason why the organization was different from any other terrorist group on the international stage.

The last section of Chapter 1 will, instead, dwell on what had been the responses of the United States to the horrific acts performed by al-Qaeda, meaning the Afghan and Iraqi conflicts. As the latter have been among the longest wars that America has ever participated into, both will be described through the strategies of the four U.S. presidencies that ended up being involved in handling them: former presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald J. Trump and the current president Joseph Biden respectively.

Moving forward to the first section of the second chapter, the focus will be on giving a general overview on rhetoric, hinting back to its ancient origins in Greek and Roman societies. This sub-section will be limited to an introduction of some of the rhetorical elements that have been selected in order to support the thesis' focal points, which will be found in sub-chapter 2.3.

After this presentation and brief clarification, the subsequent sections 2.2 and 2.3 will provide four selected presidential speeches and will split their rhetorical examination between the identification of the religious and historical elements that have been skillfully used by the Bush administration, and, on the other hand, the semantical

tools utilized to convey its message even more. The semantical tools will refer to selected figures of speech, Aristotle's canons of rhetoric and the concepts of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*.

Section 2.4 will examine the rhetoric employed by the presidential administration surrounding specifically the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003, underlining the issues encompassing the decision to initiate a war with Saddam Hussein, particularly, two assumptions made by the U.S. government tailored with the objective of convincing that a pre-emptive approach in the name of security, would have been the only valuable strategy in the campaign against international terrorism. The analysis will also include more information on the 'us' v. 'them' ideological binary to shed light on what it means and how influential it can be in that specific situation.

The final section of the chapter will be completely dedicated to the individuation of the role of the media and news world in this context. The sub-chapter will determine that newspapers, televisions, as well as radios, have been the sounding-board of Bush's rhetoric during that time through the lenses of disinformation and propaganda. A definition of the latter will be provided, as well as its application to the case study at hand to render it clearer.

The overall purpose of the thesis is to make an effort to stress the importance of rhetoric in the international relations realm, since nowadays there is a vacuum in the literature and research regarding its role. By offering a thorough analysis of the topic and applying it to a particular case study – the United States and the terrorist attacks of 2001 – this text seeks to close that gap and demonstrate that the traditional understanding of rhetoric, propaganda, disinformation, or persuasion as exclusively belonging to the past is not entirely accurate. These strategies are still present and employed to this day by both authoritarian or democratic governments of the world.

The choice of the case study was not made arbitrarily; 9/11 marked a momentous and transformative period for the United States, let alone for the globe at large. The occurrences of that catastrophic day had a profound impact on global politics and security, as well as foreign policies and relations. They signaled a major shift in the nature of terrorism and acted as a wake-up call for nations worldwide to reevaluate their approaches to international cooperation and counter-terrorism tactics.

While many nations followed the United State's lead, others had challenges with

their alliances. Above all, its ramifications are still felt on a worldwide scale and are among the factors that contributed to the current geopolitical situation. It serves as a point of reference for understanding some of the contemporary challenges.

1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Introduction

The events of September 11, 2001, represent a crucial moment in modern history that forever changed the trajectory of the United States as well as the global community. The terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center skyscrapers in New York City and the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, not only claimed countless innocent lives but also catalyzed a seismic shift in the geopolitical landscape, precipitating far-reaching consequences that continue to reverberate to this day.

Embarking on an exploration of the historical context surrounding the 9/11 attacks, it is imperative to acknowledge the profound impact they had on American society, politics, and international relations. By dwelling on the events which culminated with that fateful day and the broader socio-political dynamics at play, the aim is to gain deeper insights into the complex web of factors that culminated in this unprecedented act of terrorism.

This chapter serves as the basis for understanding the sequence of events, underlying tensions, and policy decisions that preceded and followed the attacks. Situating these events within their historical context, helps to elucidate the broader societal, ideological, and geopolitical currents that shaped the United States in the years before this transformative moment.

Through a critical examination of key historical developments, including America's foreign policy interventions, domestic security measures, and socio-cultural dynamics, the chapter endeavors to unravel the intricate tapestry of factors that converged to create the conditions ripe for such a catastrophic event. Moreover, the aim is to contextualize the subsequent responses of the U.S. government and the American public, shedding light on the multifaceted repercussions of the attacks and their enduring legacy.

By tracing the historical antecedents and ramifications of the 9/11 attacks, this section seeks to offer a thorough comprehension of the broader context in which they occurred. Delving into the complexities of America's pre- and post-9/11 landscape, invites readers to embark on a journey through time, exploring the intersecting forces that shaped a nation on the eve of one of its darkest days.

1.1 9/11: A TURNING OR BREAKING POINT?

September 11, 2001, represents a date in modern history which became so well-known that it may be indicated with the straightforward abbreviation of only two numbers – 9/11[1] – which have brilliantly clarified an underlying truth: "we live in an international system in which the struggle between the rich and the poor, the insiders and the outsiders, the established and the disgruntled powers, never stops"[2].

The September 11 attacks are often labeled a 'turning point' in 21st-century history. However, the use of this particular description may bring up a crucial query: is this depiction genuinely accurate, or should those pivotal moments be viewed more as a 'breaking point'? In order to address this question, it is necessary to clarify the two terms described above and dive briefly into what was the background that led to the infamous autumn of 2001.

A turning point signifies a crucial shift, often ushering in improvement. A breaking point, conversely, indicates a moment where overwhelming issues finally break a system's ability to cope. While both definitions appear applicable to the matter at hand – 9/11 may be viewed as both a significant change and an issue that must be handled – was it genuinely a beneficial shift, or was it just a too much complex issue to deal with for the well-known force to be reckoned with that have been the United States through history?

Examining the historical context prior to 9/11 may help paint a clearer picture. From humble beginnings as a collection of colonies, the United States rose to become a global superpower. A key factor in this remarkable transformation was its unique geography: a vast landscape marked by mountains, sprawling plains, the navigable waterways of the Mississippi Basin, the Great Lakes, and direct access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Nature shaped the nation's development on multiple levels. The abundance of resources fostered economic expansion and fueled innovation. Navigable rivers and extensive coastlines facilitated trade and communication,

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[1] Cox, M. "American Power before and after 11 September: Dizzy with Success?" *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 78, no. 2 (2002): 261–76. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3095681.

[2] Cox, M. "American Power before and after 11 September: Dizzy with Success?" *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 78, no. 2 (2002): 261–76. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3095681.

solidifying a sense of national unity. Additionally, the country's geographical isolation, separated by vast oceans from the historical power centers of Europe and Asia, provided a crucial security advantage.[3]

Across the 20th century, the United States had a crucial influence in shaping the European landscape. Its involvement in major conflicts like the First and Second World Wars, as well as its subsequent economic and political support, helped rebuild and stabilize the continent. During World War I, despite entering late, the U.S. provided crucial manpower and resources that ultimately tipped the scales and helped bring an end to the devastating conflict.

In the same way, during the World War II, the United States had been a key actor for the defeat of Nazi Germany. The Destroyers for Bases Agreement with Britain provided vital support at a critical juncture[4], and the U.S. military presence ultimately proved decisive in the war's outcome. This victory fostered democracy and freedom across Europe. Following the war, the United States emerged as a global leader, leveraging its economic strength to support European reconstruction through the Marshall Plan and its overwhelming military strength[5]. While acknowledging the complex realities of history, indisputable is that the U.S. has been a major player in the shaping of a more stable and prosperous Europe after the devastation of war.

In addition, after the war, Europe and Asia lay in ruins, leaving a global power vacuum. This shift in the world order prompted the United States to abandon its isolationist policy and embrace a more active role in international affairs[6]. This newfound commitment to promoting democratic values inevitably led to a clash with the only major power posing a threat to those principles: The Soviet Union. In 1946, Winston Churchill famously depicted the rising global divide as a "Iron Curtain"[7],

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[3] Marshall, T. (2016) *Prisoners of Geography*. London, England: Elliott & Thompson.

[4] Marshall, T. (2016) *Prisoners of Geography*. London, England: Elliott & Thompson.

[5] Cox, M. (2002) "September 11th and U.S. Hegemony—Or Will the 21st Century Be American Too?", *International Studies Perspectives*, Volume 3, Issue 1, February 2002, Pages 53–70 https://doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.00079

[6] Naranjo, R. (2023). *Historical Analysis of the Cold War | OSU EHISTORY*. The Ohio State University. https://ehistory.osu.edu/articles/historical-analysis-cold-war

[7] "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations

splitting the West from the East. This period, known as the Cold War, was characterized by indirect conflict through means like espionage, propaganda, and alliance building, rather than direct military confrontation.

The 1949 formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) between the U.S. and some European countries, together with the Truman Doctrine, championed by former President Harry Truman, embodied this new bipolar world. It proclaimed that the United States would aid countries endangered by communist's further progression. In a pivotal speech, Truman warned that economic hardship and suffering provide fertile ground for the rise of totalitarian regimes. Without intervention, he argued, the hope for a better life would die, jeopardizing not only global peace but also the well-being of the United States itself. The rapid changes in the world, Truman concluded, placed significant responsibilities on the United States.[8]

The Cold War antagonism that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union peaked in the late 1950s to early 1960s. Both sides developed intercontinental ballistic missiles, and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 pushed the world dangerously close to nuclear war[9]. During this crisis, the Soviets surreptitiously installed missiles in Cuba targeted at the United States, sparking a tense standoff that was eventually settled by removing Soviet missiles from Cuba, in return for the dismantling of U.S. missiles

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around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow." https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/

[8] "At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms. I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. (…) The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. (…) The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms." https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/truman-doctrine#:~:text=I%20believe%20that%20we%20must,status%20quo%20is%20not%20sacred.

[9] *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations - Office of the Historian*. (n.d.). https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis#:~:text=The%20Cuban%20Missile%20Crisis%20of,came%20closest%20to%20nuclear%20conflict.

(Jupiter MRBMs)[10] in Turkey.

      Nonetheless, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Cold War landscape started to shift. The communist bloc started to show signs of weakness, with the Soviet Union and China experiencing a significant breakup in 1960[11]. Japan and Western Europe had tremendous economic expansion in the meanwhile, which lessened their need on the U.S. This change, together with the increasing independence of smaller countries, resulted in a world that was no longer cleanly split into two opposing blocs. The Cold War's last act occurred in the late 1980s, under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. He made changes intended at eliminating the totalitarian characteristics of the Soviet system and democratizing the government, resulting in the demise of communist governments across Eastern Europe. In late 1991, the USSR dissolved, giving rise to several new independent nations, including a democratic Russia[12]. With this, the Cold War finally drove to a close.

      This brief historical overview suggests that the United States has consistently held a position of significant influence on the global stage, particularly in terms of military and economic power. The conclusion of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union solidified the United States' status as the world's sole leading superpower. This outcome underscored the perceived advantages of a capitalist economic system, facilitated globalization and the spread of Western ideas, and bolstered American confidence during the economic expansion of the 1990s[13].

      While the geopolitical landscape had started to shift toward a more multipolar structure, the United States maintained its leading role in European affairs. This can be seen particularly with the NATO alliance, which even after losing its original purpose (protect Western Europe from the Soviet Union), still remained strong as Europe still

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[10] The connotation MRBMs stands for medium-range ballistic missiles that belonged to the US Air Force and refers to the ones that the US State Department was negotiating with some European countries to deploy them on their territory at the end of the 1950s. The two countries that agreed to host them during that period were Italy and Turkey. https://en.missilery.info/missile/jupiter

[11] Fu, T. (2023, November 28). *Sino-Soviet Relations in the Early 1950s - Late 1960s*. Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media. https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/25/20230689

[12] *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations - Office of the Historian*. (n.d.). https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/collapse-soviet-union

[13] Cox, M. (2002) September 11th and U.S. Hegemony—Or Will the 21st Century Be American Too?, *International Studies Perspectives*, Volume 3, Issue 1, February 2002, https://doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.00079

found itself in "a state of strategic dependence on the United States"[14] in regards to security matters. Hence, it was a common occurrence in the 1990s for parties involved in dispute to go to Washington for assistance in resolving their differences. Roads to negotiated agreements ultimately appear to have to pass via the White House, which is the single "911" number in the global system.[15]

This analysis of the United States' multifaceted international roles highlights its significant influence on the global order. Some argue that the contemporary international system is inextricably linked to U.S. actions. However, it is crucial to acknowledge and analyze this influence without resorting to value judgments or oversimplifications. Many scholars in international relations, particularly those advocating for a critical reevaluation of traditional paradigms, emphasize the importance of power dynamics in shaping world affairs. They argue that the actions and policies of influential states, like the United States, often contribute significantly to global stability[16]. However, it is equally important to acknowledge alternative perspectives and ongoing theoretical debates about the sources and dynamics of global stability.

The question then arises: could other powers potentially replace or supersede the U.S. position in the following future? China, Russia, and a revitalized Europe were often discussed as potential contenders. However, there are significant limitations to consider. While China possessed regional power and economic potential, it remained a considerable distance from rivaling the U.S. in comprehensive strength, a gap unlikely to close for decades[17]. Russia, burdened with a struggling economy and declining

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[14] Sloan, J. (2011, April 17). *US foreign policy in Europe between the end of the Cold War and 9/11*. E. https://www.e-ir.info/2011/04/17/us-foreign-policy-in-europe-beween-the-end-of-the-cold-war-and-911/#google_vignette

[15] Wheeler, N. (2000). *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*. Oxford University Press.

[16] Cox, M. (2002) "September 11th and U.S. Hegemony—Or Will the 21st Century Be American Too?", *International Studies Perspectives*, Volume 3, Issue 1, February 2002, https://doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.00079

[17] Cox, M. (1998b) "New China: New Cold War?" In Statecraft and Security: The Cold War and Beyond, edited by K. Booth, pp 224–246. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

military capabilities, presented itself as an even less likely hegemonic challenger[18]. While Europe boasted substantial resources, a lack of political cohesion and military capacity hindered its ability to directly challenge U.S. dominance[19]. Indeed, geopolitical landscapes can shift over time, and future trajectories are not predetermined. Yet, analyzing past trends offers valuable insights into potential future developments.

If the decline of the Soviet Union's global influence served as the catalyst for the resurgence of American confidence in the 1990s, then the long prosperity mentioned above, that started in 1993 and lasted almost uninterrupted until 2001, endowed it with tangible significance. The economic boom of the 1990s, fueled by technological innovation and expanding markets, showcased the apparent strengths of American capitalism[20]. Following a period of slower growth in the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. production experienced a significant upswing.

This period saw accelerating globalization, with increasing international trade and the integration of markets worldwide. During the Clinton administration a remarkable surge in the U.S. stock market and a solution to a longstanding economic concern – the budget deficit – was seen[21]. Clinton highlighted this achievement in 1998 by underscoring the potential benefits both for the U.S. economy and the global markets. The robust American economy of the 1990s fostered a sense of optimism, where progress seemed both achievable and sustainable. "The only way forward it seemed was up, and then up again".[22]

As previously stated, understanding the historical background and prior patterns is critical in order to develop a logical assertion and ultimately respond to the question presented at the beginning of this chapter. "On 11 September, 2001, the post-Cold War

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[18] Cox, M. (2000) "From the Cold War to Strategic Partnership? U.S.-Russian Relations Since the End of the USSR." In Russia After the Cold War, edited by M. Bowker and C. Ross, pp. 258–279. London: Longman.

[19] Cox, M. (2002) September 11th and U.S. Hegemony—Or Will the 21st Century Be American Too?, *International Studies Perspectives*, Volume 3, Issue 1, https://doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.00079

[20] Stiglitz, J. (2002, October). *The Roaring Nineties*. Retrieved from The Atlantic: https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2002/10/the-roaring-nineties/302604/

[21] Cox, M. (2002) "September 11th and U.S. Hegemony—Or Will the 21st Century Be American Too?", *International Studies Perspectives*, Volume 3, Issue 1, https://doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.00079

[22] Congressional Quarterly Weekly (5 February 2000) 58(6):228–233.

security burst."[23] The world before 9/11 and the current one are completely different altogether. Nowadays, it is reasonable to recognize a post-9/11 era, in the same way history delineates the post- WWI and WWII eras or the one after 1989 and 1991 – with the collapse of the Berlin wall and the downfall of USSR respectively[24].

Indeed, stating that the world has changed in its aftermath implies that the United States as a country, and its foreign policy have as well. As many people today seem to believe, the tragic events of 2001, helped to open eyes and shed light on the previously unchallenged American dominance narrative: even a planetary behemoth like the United States may be vulnerable, prone to attack and instability. Hence, it would not be incorrect to interpret 9/11 more as a breaking point, instead of a turning point. The system's ability to cope after the attacks started to crumble and the moment had come to realize that the American eagle's indestructible wings had finally been clipped.

In conclusion, inside an America that is "dizzy with success"[25], its sheer scope of accomplishments might easily plant the seeds of future issues: since triumphing in international conflicts is one thing; but establishing a lasting and mutually agreeable international order once the guns have been silenced, is quite another.

1.2 SEPTEMBER 11, 2001: "WE HAVE SOME PLANES"

In the early autumn morning of September 11, a group of 19 militants affiliated with al-Qaeda took over four commercial airplanes with a specific and structured plan: to turn these passenger planes into weapons – "large guided missiles loaded up to 11,400 gallons of jet fuel"[26] – by crashing them into significant targets. Each of the four flights was intended to fly trans-continentally, from the East Coast to Los Angeles. The

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[23] Carter, A. B. (2001). The Architecture of Government in the Face of Terrorism. *International Security*, *26*(3), 5–23. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3092086

[24] Cox, M. "American Power before and after 11 September: Dizzy with Success?" *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 78, no. 2 (2002): 261–76. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3095681.

[25] Cox, M. "American Power before and after 11 September: Dizzy with Success?" *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 78, no. 2 (2002): 261–76. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3095681.

[26] The 9/11 Commission Report (2004). In *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (.Gov)*. Retrieved March 8, 2024, from https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf

hijackers seized control of the aircrafts shortly after departure. However, only three out of four hijacked aircrafts actually reached their specific targets, while the remaining one ended up crashing in the countryside of the East Coast thanks to the heroic actions of the passengers on board, who attempted to counter-attack the militants.

American Airlines Flight 11 was the first jet to strike, slamming into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City at 8:46 a.m. The second one is United Airlines Flight 175[27] which targeted the South Tower of the World Trade Center and struck it at 9:03 AM. The third aircraft is known as American Airlines Flight 77[28], which plunged into the Pentagon in Washington D.C. at 9:37 AM. The last one is United Airlines 93, which fell apart into a field close to Shanksville, Pennsylvania at 10:03 AM. Its objectives were either the White House or the Capitol in Washington, D.C., however this was not confirmed.

These attacks exposed critical vulnerabilities in the existing protocols for defending U.S. airspace. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) worked together seamlessly to provide effective air defense. It is important to initially concentrate on each organization separately in order to comprehend how they function together.

The National Air Traffic Control System Command Center, situated in Herndon, Virginia, is in coordination with the 22 Route Traffic Control Centers that make up the FAA. The National Airspace System is managed by the Administration, and any type of event, including hijackings, is reported to its Operation Center[29]. Typically, the FAA controllers monitor data from a signal that each aircraft's transponder equipment[30] broadcasts in order to supervise airlines.

As a result, all four of the hijacked airplanes had to transmit a distinct

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[27] Which carried 5 hijackers: Shehhi, Fayez Banihammad, Mohand Al Shehri, Ahmed and Hamza Al Ghamdi (seats 6C, 2A, 2B, 9C, 9D respectively) https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf

[28] Boarded again by 5: Khalid Al Mihdar, Majed Moqed, Hani Hanjour, Nawaf and Salem Al Hamzi (seats 12B, 12A, 1B, 5E, 5F respectively) https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf

[29] *National Airspace System*. (n.d.). Federal Aviation Administration. https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/nas

[30] A transponder, also referred to as an XPDR, functions as a receiver/transmitter unit which, upon proper interrogation, generates a response signal; both inquiries and responses are transmitted via distinct frequencies. When prompted by military radar, friendly aircraft would emit a coded signal, a method initially employed by transponders for identification purposes to military entities. IFF denoted "Identification Friend or Foe." (https://skybrary.aero/articles/transponder#:~:text=Description,ICAO)

transponder signal while in flight. However, the hijackers circumvented this routine practice and turned off the transponders on three of the four aircrafts[31]. This does not imply, however, that the aircraft could not be monitored at all in the absence of that particular signal; rather, if the transponder is turned off, the primary radar[32] kicks in, but it does not display the plane's identity or altitude.

Additionally, the hijackers exploited another weakness in the existing system: its preparedness – meaning that the protocols assumed hijackings would follow a traditional pattern, with communication and time for intervention. The concept of a coordinated, suicidal attack using planes as weapons was not anticipated. – Prior to 9/11, it would have been an uncommon and concerning event if a commercial flight had veered off course or lost radio or transponder contact; this would often have been attributed to a technical malfunction or an aircraft accident. In these situations, the controller's task is to get in contact with the aircraft, its parent firm, and then nearby aircraft to get it back on track. It would take trying and failing at these attempts before any alarm sounds would go off.[33]

During the Cold War, the U.S. and Canada formed the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) as a binational organization to counter the Soviet threat in 1958.[34] However, by 9/11, NORAD's structure and protocols were ill-equipped for the emerging threat of terrorism. What were its limitations? First of all, NORAD's primary mission had not adapted to address this new kind of hijacking; secondly, with just seven alert locations across the United States, each containing

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[31] The 9/11 Commission Report (2004). In *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (.Gov)*. Retrieved March 8, 2024, from https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf

[32] The sole surveillance sensor used in civil aviation that can find aircraft without the need for on-board equipment is Primary Surveillance Radar (PSR). The radar antenna pulses radio waves as it spins, generally between 5 and 12 rpm. The wave is reflected and part of the energy is returned to the antenna when it reaches an airplane (or other object). (https://skybrary.aero/articles/primary-surveillance-radar-psr)

[33] The 9/11 Commission Report (n.d.). In *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (.Gov)*. Retrieved March 8, 2024, from https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf

[34] Tasked with overseeing aircraft control and warning for North America. By mutual assistance agreements with other commands, aerospace warning include the surveillance of man-made objects in space as well as the detection, validation, and warning of attacks on North America by planes, missiles, or space vehicles. Ensuring air sovereignty and air defense of US and Canadian airspace are included in aerospace control. *North American Aerospace Defense Command > About NORAD > NORAD History*. (n.d.). North American Aerospace Defense Command. https://www.norad.mil/About-NORAD/NORAD-History/

merely two fighter aircraft on high alert[35], the organization's capacity to respond quickly was constrained; thirdly, shooting down a hijacked commercial plane required approval from the highest authorities or the National Command Authority – which refers to the president and the secretary of defense; and finally, the possibility of a coordinated terrorist attack using hijacked planes as weapons was not part of NORAD's pre-existing threat assessments.

Hence, according to protocols that the FAA and NORAD had devised for cooperating with each other:

- The aircraft subjected to hijacking would be readily recognizable and would not attempt to disappear;

- Adequate time would transpire to handle the issue through the proper channels of command within the FAA and NORAD;

- The hijackings would occur in a conventional manner: they would not be suicide attacks intended to turn the plane into a weapon of destruction.

As aforementioned above, the details of that autumn morning perform a simple theme: both of the agencies were unprepared for those tragic occurrences and they evidently struggled to improvise some sort of homeland defense. On top of all this unpreparedness, it is worth to mention that when the first plane struck the North Tower no one in the White House was aware of what was going on, including president Bush, who was in Sarasota, Florida. Most of the authorities and federal agencies learned about the attacks from the news, particularly the CNN.

"The theater of destruction offered to the world on 9/11 was larger than Bin Laden had ever dreamed. Shock is of course one goal of terrorism; the greater the number of people in shock, the better. That is why the attacks are to date the most perfect act of terror in history. First you attract the media to a place like the World Trade Center with the crash of the first plane, then you deliver unforgettable images of terror 20 minutes later with a second plane."[36]

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[35] The 9/11 Commission Report (2004). In *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (.Gov)*. Retrieved March 8, 2024, from https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf

[36] Spiegel, D. (2007). Inside 9-11: What Really Happened. United States: St. Martin's Press.

In the immediate aftermath of September 11, the nation's leaders displayed a remarkable picture of unity. A joint session of Congress resonated with a patriotic song, 'America the Beautiful', highlighting a sense of national purpose rarely seen in recent times: *"to the oceans white with foam, God bless America, my home sweet home…"*[37]. This moment of bipartisan unity, prioritizing the country over party lines in the face of crisis, seems unimaginable in today's political climate. A powerful sense of patriotism and solidarity surged through the American people.

President Bush's visit to Ground Zero, the blazing ruins of the World Trade Center[38], embodied this spirit. Perched atop a damaged fire truck, he addressed the tireless rescue workers. His message, punctuated by a poignant exchange with a worker who could not hear him, resonated deeply: *"I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear from all of us soon."*[39] In accordance with a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, since September 11, patriotic demonstrations have been more frequent. 96% of respondents claimed they have seen at least a few instances of patriotism in their neighborhood, such as bumper stickers and flags. Approximately one in five respondents (17%) state that their neighborhood has erected a permanent memorial honoring the attack victims.[40]

These terrorist acts are noteworthy in American history, often being compared to two other substantial events: Pearl Harbor and the War of 1812. All three featured assaults on American soil, a rarity throughout the nation's history.

- British forces attacked and burned Washington D.C. in 1814: a symbolic blow to the young nation's capital.

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[37] *America After 9/11*. (2023, January 19). FRONTLINE. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/america-after-9-11/transcript/

[38] *September 11 attacks | History, Summary, Location, Timeline, Casualties, & Facts*. (2024, March 1). Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/event/September-11-attacks/The-attacks

[39] F. O. (2019, September 12). *George W. Bush's bullhorn speech still echoes, 'I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you.'* YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zi2SNFnfMjk

[40] Rosenberg, S. (2019, December 31). *I. Americans and 9/11: The Personal Toll | Pew Research Center*. Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2002/09/05/i-americans-and-911-the-personal-toll/

- The attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese in 1941: the one that caused the U.S. Pacific Fleet to be severely damaged and ultimately prompted America to enter World War II.

Immediately following 9/11, analogies were frequently made between it and Pearl Harbor. Surprisingly, several polls indicated that a majority of Americans saw 9/11 as the more devastating incident[41]. However, it is necessary to evaluate the context of these events, emphasizing that, while Pearl Harbor inflicted major military damage, 9/11's human cost was considerably larger[42].

Furthermore, the 9/11 attacks were a purposeful act of terrorism, which is fundamentally different from a wartime attack; additionally, while both incidents had their own distinct influence on the country, 9/11 started a worldwide war against terror and ushered in a new era of increased security measures. While making analogies might help us comprehend historical events, it is critical to acknowledge their differences. Each event shaped American history in profound ways, with 9/11 leaving an undeniable mark on the national psyche.

The attacks, however horrific, can be seen as twisted expressions of dissent against a global order dominated by a single superpower, the United States, with the choice of targets that was not a random one. The World Trade Center symbolized American economic might, the Pentagon its military strength, and the potential White House or Capitol targets represented its political power. This conduct made the enormous power imbalance that exists between the United States and other countries

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[41] Rosenberg, S. (2019, December 31). *I. Americans and 9/11: The Personal Toll | Pew Research Center*. Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2002/09/05/i-americans-and-911-the-personal-toll/

[42] More than 2,600 individuals perished in the World Trade Center, 125 at the Pentagon, and 256 aboard the four aircraft. The casualties surpassed those of the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941. Nineteen young Arabs, who had resided in the country for over a year and assimilated into local communities, were responsible for this unimaginable tragedy. Among them, four had received pilot training, while the majority had limited formal education. Some had minimal proficiency in English. Armed only with box cutters, small knives, and cans of Mace or pepper spray, they commandeered the four planes, transforming them into deadly guided missiles. *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. (n.d.). https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report_Exec.htm#:~:text=More%20than%202%2C600%20people%20died,extremists%20headquartered%20in%20distant%20Afghanistan.

clear – a discrepancy that fuels animosity[43]. Moreover, the delusion of complete security was destroyed by the U.S.'s seeming unopposed supremacy following its triumph in the Cold War. The terrifying 9/11 photos called into question America's security and sense of control.

Crises frequently require a reassessment of presumptions. That is exactly what happened on 9/11. It exposed America's weaknesses and constraints in determining global policy and also changed the United States' world view:

"Before 9/11 the American people, if largely uncomprehending of the outside world, viewed it through benevolent eyes; after 9/11 they saw enemies everywhere. Before 9/11 American governments had, for fifty years, sought to keep the peace by leading a Western alliance of the like-minded; after 9/11 Washington committed itself to the defense of America first and foremost."[44]

There has long been debate surrounding the foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration. Some argue that it represents a revolutionary departure from past approaches, while others contend that it aligns with traditional U.S. foreign policies. It is important to consider multiple perspectives, but it is also evident that Bush's international strategies do show continuity with historical principles. The commitment to *"defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people"*[45] has indeed been a recurring theme in U.S. history, seen in Wilson's rhetoric of World War I with the Fourteen Points, and the Truman Doctrine.

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[43] Cox, M. "American Power before and after 11 September: Dizzy with Success?" *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 78, no. 2 (2002): 261–76. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3095681.

[44] Frentzos, C., & Thompson, A. (2013). The Routledge Handbook of American Military and Diplomatic History (1st ed.). Taylor & Francis. Retrieved 15 March 2024 from https://www.perlego.com/book/1595441/the-routledge-handbook-of-american-military-and-diplomatic-history-1865-to-the-present-pdf (Original work published 29 August 2013)

[45] The United States must expand the scope of progress by instituting democratic frameworks and fostering open societies. It should formulate joint initiatives for collaborative efforts with other influential global entities, uphold the pursuit of human dignity, strengthen alliances to counteract international terrorism, engage in partnerships to mitigate regional disputes, prevent adversaries from endangering the nation, its allies, or friendly nations with weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), ignite a fresh phase of worldwide economic advancement through open markets and free trade, and embrace aspirations for human dignity. These principles are delineated in the National Security Strategy of September 2002. *I. Overview of America's International Strategy*. (2006, July 26). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss1.html

However, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the significant changes that Bush's presidency brought about. While his doctrine cannot be labeled as revolutionary, it is essential to recognize the deviations from past practices. The traditional strategies of deterrence (dissuade enemies from attacking by threatening a strong response); alliance formation; multilateralism (working through international organizations like the UN to address threats); and containment (aimed to limit the influence of hostile states) were indeed supplanted by new approaches[46]:

- Pre-emptive actions: striking an enemy before they attack, even if the threat is not imminent. This is a controversial approach as it raises questions about justifying pre-emptive wars.

- Prevention: taking action to stop an enemy from developing capabilities that could pose a future threat.

- Unilateralism: taking action without necessarily seeking approval or cooperation from other countries.

- Hegemony: The U.S. acting as the dominant power shaping the international order.

These shifts reflect a departure from established norms and have sparked considerable debate both domestically and internationally. While Bush's foreign policy may not have been entirely unprecedented, it undeniably introduced significant changes that continue to shape global politics to this day.

1.3 A NEW TYPE OF ACTORS: AL QAEDA & OSAMA BIN LADEN

Al-Qaeda ('the base'), the infamous terrorist organization responsible for the attacks on American soil in 2001, emerged not in a vacuum, but from a complex interplay of historical events and ideologies. This sub-chapter explores the group's origins, tracing its roots back to the rise of Salafism and its entanglement with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan at the end of the 1970s.

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[46] Leffler, M. P. (2005, June 1). *9/11 and American Foreign Policy**. Diplomatic History. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2005.00491.x

Salafism, a reform movement within Sunni Islam, advocates a return to the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and his early followers[47]. While various interpretations of Salafism exist, some emphasize a literal reading of Islamic scripture and a rejection of what they perceive as later innovations within Islam. This strand of Salafism provided the ideological foundation for some who viewed existing Muslim governments as corrupt and in need of overthrow[48].

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 proved to be a pivotal moment. Osama bin Laden, a wealthy Saudi national, born in 1955 in the city of Jeddah, and deeply influenced by Salafism, saw the invasion as a war against Islam and a call to jihad[49]. He traveled to Afghanistan to support the *Mujahideen* ('those who engage in jihad[50]')[51], the Afghan resistance fighters. Thus, he prepared himself for a future as a charismatic leader with one specific goal: purging the world of sin and false religion. This heartfelt resentment was not only against the Communists but also against the decadent West, especially the U.S.

The United States, motivated by Cold War concerns, emerged as a key supporter of the *Mujahideen*, providing billions of dollars in aid and encouraging the recruitment of foreign fighters not only in Arabic countries, but also in Asia, Europe and the U.S. itself; which in bin Laden's eyes translated only as the fact that the first "multinational

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[47] After the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, Salafism gained widespread recognition in Western culture. Unlike other utopian ideologies, salafism looks not to the future but rather to an idealized and "authentic" Islamic past. term *salaf*, which refers to *al-salaf al-salihin*, or "the pious predecessors," is the root of the term *salafi*. These are commonly understood to be the two Muslim generations that succeeded the prophet Muhammad in addition to his current friends, or *sahaba*. Wehrey, F., & Boukhars, A. (2019, November 7). *Defining Salafism*. Oxford University Press eBooks. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190942403.003.0002

[48] Fitzpatrick. (2019, October). Al Qaeda Origins, Ideology, Goals and Future. *ResearchGate*. Retrieved March 12, 2024, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337025829_Al_Qaeda_Origins_Ideology_Goals_and_Future

[49] Spiegel (2007, April 1). *Inside 9-11: What Really Happened* [Ebook]. Macmillan Publishers. https://it.everand.com/book/182559565/Inside-9-11-What-Really-Happened

[50] The term in Arabic that translates to "struggle" or "effort" is "jihad". In the Quran, it encompasses two distinct concepts: the "little jihad", which denotes a holy war against non-believers, and the "great jihad", which pertains to the internal endeavor of a Muslim to achieve perfection across all aspects of life.

[51] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, February 23). mujahideen. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/topic/mujahideen-Afghani-rebels

Muslim army, the first jihad was financed with U.S. dollars"[52] or, to better understand, with infidels' money. Even when the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, the problem was far from being solved. Despite the shared goal, tensions arose between bin Laden and the West.

The presence of American troops on Saudi soil following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990[53], which triggered the international conflict known as the Persian Gulf War[54], further fueled bin Laden's resentment towards the United States, which he viewed as a corrupt and imperialist power[55]. This growing anti-Western sentiment marked a decisive moment, leading bin Laden towards the ideology of global jihad against the West. This period brought him into contact with a network of international jihadists, fostering the connections that would later become crucial for al-Qaeda[56].

Thus, to summarize, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan provided the stage for the formation of al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, fueled by Salafist ideology and a growing antipathy towards the West, capitalized on the opportunity to forge a network

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[52] Spiegel (2007, April 1). *Inside 9-11: What Really Happened* [Ebook]. Macmillan Publishers. https://it.everand.com/book/182559565/Inside-9-11-What-Really-Happened

[53] Christopher Henzel, "The Origins of al Qaeda's Ideology: Implications for US Strategy," Parameters 35, no. 1 (2005), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.2241.

[54] In pursuit of gaining authority over Kuwait's abundant oil resources, settling a substantial debt owed by Kuwait, and solidifying Iraqi hegemony in the region, Saddam Hussein, Iraq's leader, sanctioned the invasion and annexation of the country. This event marked the inaugural major international crisis of the post-Cold War era. Within a day, the initial deployment of American troops commenced in Saudi Arabia. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, March 3). Persian Gulf War. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/event/Persian-Gulf-War

[55] The American presence in Saudi's soil sparked a contrast between bin Laden and the Saudi regime since he found that American troops on the sacred terrain home to the cities of Mecca and Medina, was unacceptable. In 1992 he was banished and settled in Sudan. Spiegel (2007, April 1). *Inside 9-11: What Really Happened* [Ebook]. Macmillan Publishers. https://it.everand.com/book/182559565/Inside-9-11-What-Really-Happened

[56] He encounters Hasan al Turabi, a Muslim religious scholar and lawyer from Sudan who became a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and went on to found the National Islamic Front (NIF), Sudan's version of the Brotherhood. In addition, upon bin Laden's arrival in Jalalabad in 1996, he forged a friendship with the Taliban's Mullah Mohamed Omar. The U.S. and the Taliban had a cordial relationship at the time because to a particular oil and gas pipeline that was planned to run from Turkmenistan directly through Afghanistan and Pakistan, avoiding both Russia and Iran. Fuel may then be sent to customers in the West. Stability in and around Kabul as well as in the relationship between Afghanistan and the United States were necessary for this to be successful. However, bin Laden managed to bring together the Taliban and the Afghan fighters by forming the secrete brigade O55, sponsored and trained by Al Qaeda. Spiegel (2007, April 1). *Inside 9-11: What Really Happened* [Ebook]. Macmillan Publishers. https://it.everand.com/book/182559565/Inside-9-11-What-Really-Happened

of international jihadists. Understanding this historical context is crucial for analyzing the evolution of al-Qaeda's ideology and its eventual turn towards global terrorism. In 1998 the organization's slogan became: The World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders with the following edict issued by Osama himself:

"The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim."[57]

Terrorist attacks followed rapidly, including the same-year attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania which resulted in a total of 224 casualties and 5,000 hurt, as well as the 2000 attack on the U.S. warship Cole near the Yemenite port of Aden with 17 casualties and 39 wounded[58]. In 2001, the first homeland attack occurred, with the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as targets, causing the death of nearly 3,000 civilian lives:

"The morning will arrive. The victors will come. We swear we will conquer you. The earth will tremble beneath your feet."[59]

Al-Qaeda can be defined as an international armed group of Muslim militants whose *casus belli* is represented by the "near enemy" (*al adou al qareeb* i.e. the dictatorial regimes of the middle East) and the "far enemy" (*al adou al ba'eed* i.e. the west and its supporters)[60] with a campaign presented as a struggle against injustice.

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[57] *Who Is Bin Laden? - Edicts And Statements - Hunting for bin Laden*. (2015, November 18). FRONTLINE. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/edicts.html#:~:text=%22The%20ruling%20to%20kill%20the,move%20out%20of%20all%20the

[58] *The Seattle Times. Understanding the conflict. Terrorism.* (n.d.). https://special.seattletimes.com/o/news/nation-world/crisis/terrorism/binladen_18.html

[59] Spiegel (2007, April 1). *Inside 9-11: What Really Happened* [Ebook]. Macmillan Publishers. https://it.everand.com/book/182559565/Inside-9-11-What-Really-Happened

[60] Mohamedou, M.-M. O. (2011). *Understanding Al Qaeda* (2nd ed.). Pluto Press. Retrieved 14 March 2024 from https://www.perlego.com/book/665408/understanding-al-qaeda-changing-war-and-global-politics-pdf (Original work published 3 June 2011)

"The American imposes himself on everyone. Americans accuse our children in Palestine of being terrorists, those children, who have no weapons and have not even reached maturity. At the same time, Americans defend a country, the state of the Jews, that has a policy to destroy the future of these children. We are sure of our victory against the Americans and the Jews as promised by the Prophet: Judgment day shall not come until the Muslim fights the Jew, where the Jew will hide behind trees and stones, and the tree and the stone will speak and say, 'Muslim, behind me is a Jew. Come and kill him.'"[61]

The armed group began with a hierarchical structure with the master visionary in the person of bin Laden at the top; a consultation council right below, which dealt with the major undertakings including terrorist operations; and three committees: a military, a religious and finance one. Each of them reflected the three prime movers behind the creation of al-Qaeda. The military committee was assigned to the strategist Ahmen al Zawahiri; the religious committee to the spiritual guide Dr. Fadl; while the finance one was directly coordinated by the master visionary himself[62]. At the bottom of this pyramidal hierarchy cell organizations can be found. These cells represent small groups of militants around the world (the members of one cell do not necessarily know the members of another) which are usually divided into either the planning or the execution phases for terrorist actions[63].

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[61] *Who Is Bin Laden? - Greetings, America. My Name Is Osama Bin Laden - Hunting for bin Laden.* (2015, November 18). FRONTLINE. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/miller.html

[62] Fitzpatrick. (2019, October). Al Qaeda Origins, Ideology, Goals and Future. *ResearchGate*. Retrieved March 12, 2024, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337025829_Al_Qaeda_Origins_Ideology_Goals_and_Future

[63] *The Seattle Times. Understanding the conflict. Terrorism.* (n.d.). https://special.seattletimes.com/o/news/nation-world/crisis/terrorism/binladen_18.html

Figure 1 Al-Qaeda's cells (Source: Seattle Times)

Traditional thinking about international affairs and conflicts often resembles a game of chess. Each country has a well-defined territory (the chessboard) and a well-trained military (the chess pieces). Power comes from controlling territory and defeating your opponent's military head-on. However, al-Qaeda shattered this model[64]:

- It was stateless, not tied to any specific territory;

- It was globalized, meaning its operations and influence could occur anywhere;

- It was de-territorialized, not focused on controlling land;

- It was untraceable, making it difficult to locate and eliminate.

These characteristics rendered traditional military strategies ineffective. They did not fight conventional battles, but launched surprise attacks, creating an unpredictable and widespread threat. The traditional way of fighting wars, by attacking the heart of a nation and distinguishing between soldiers and civilians, became obsolete. The events of 9/11 served as a stark example in which al-Qaeda employed a new tactic: suicide

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[64] Mohamedou, M.-M. O. (2011). *Understanding Al Qaeda* (2nd ed.). Pluto Press. Retrieved 14 March 2024 from https://www.perlego.com/book/665408/understanding-al-qaeda-changing-war-and-global-politics-pdf (Original work published 3 June 2011)

attacks, whose orchestrators "need to be recognized as a category of soldiers"[65] fighting for a cause.

On October 12, 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom marked the beginning of the United States' first counter-attack against al-Qaeda[66]. This operation, conducted in conjunction with British forces and supported by anti-Taliban factions, involved airstrikes targeting the organization's sites in Afghanistan. The objective was not only to weaken it but also to eliminate its leader, who was added to the Most Wanted terrorist list just two days before. Two months later, Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, was tracked to Tora Bora, a cave complex southeast of Kabul[67]. Subsequently, a two-week battle ensued between U.S. and coalition forces and al-Qaeda militants, during which bin Laden managed to escape into Pakistan.

Thereafter, U.S. forces conducted extensive searches along the Afghan-Pakistani border, but bin Laden remained elusive for many years, staying out of the public eye. Less than a week before the 2004 U.S. presidential elections, he released a videotaped message directed at the American people, criticizing once again President George W. Bush's administration for perpetuating confusion and not addressing the true motives behind the events of 9/11:

"I wonder about you. Although we are ushering the fourth year after 9/11, Bush is still exercising confusion and misleading you and not telling you the true reason. Therefore, the motivations are still there for what happened to be repeated."[68]

The 2008 elections saw the entry of a new president: Nobel Prize winner and 'anti-war candidate' Barack Obama, who would be doomed to inherit this ongoing and long-lasting conflict. In a 2009 audio message, bin Laden linked Obama's administration to that of his predecessor, accusing the new administration of perpetuating the same

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[65] Dalal, M. (2006). [Review of *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, by M. Mamdani]. *The Arab Studies Journal*, *14*(2), 177–180. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27933990

[66] Laub, Z. (2017, May 1). *The U.S. War in Afghanistan*. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan

[67] *Osama bin Laden | Biography, al-Qaeda, Terrorist Attacks, Death, & Facts*. (2024, March 11). Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Osama-bin-Laden

[68] *CNN.com - Bin Laden: "Your security is in your own hands" - Oct 29, 2004*. (2004, October 30). https://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/10/29/bin.laden.transcript/

policies of darkness and deception: *"the new administration is still covering you in the shroud of darkness"*[69]. Eventually, after two years of drone-strikes in the Afghan territory aimed at locating bin Laden, U.S. intelligence finally pinpointed his whereabouts in a secure compound in Abbottabad, near Islamabad, Pakistan, on May 1, 2011[70]. A secret operation carried out by U.S. Navy SEALs ended with the death of bin Laden, bringing to a halt a decade-long manhunt for the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks.

The demise of Osama bin Laden was officially declared by former President Obama on national television, marking a significant event in the global War on Terror started by his predecessor.

> *"Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda, and a terrorist who is responsible for the murders of thousands of innocent men, women and children."*[71]

The seriousness of the situation was emphasized in former President Obama's speech to the country, which focused on bin Laden's involvement as a major planner of terrorist acts that claimed countless of innocent lives. This announcement prompted scenes of jubilation among the American population, serving as a symbolic closure to a chapter marred by tragedy and uncertainty. For al-Qaeda, however, bin Laden's demise represented a profound setback. His enduring evasion of capture had been a source of inspiration and resilience for the organization, bolstering its narrative of divine protection and resilience against perceived adversaries, particularly the United States. The loss of its charismatic leader not only dealt a blow to al-Qaeda's operational capabilities but also undermined its ideological appeal and recruitment efforts.

Ayman al-Zawahiri's rise to the leadership of al-Qaeda, brought about notable logistical and ideological challenges. While Zawahiri had been intricately involved in the organization's decision-making processes, his assumption of leadership necessitated

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[69] *Osama bin Laden Message Surfaces in Wake of 9/11 Anniversary*. (2009, September 14). ABC News. https://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/osama-bin-laden-message-surfaces-wake-911-anniversary/story?id=8564631

[70] *Osama bin Laden | Biography, al-Qaeda, Terrorist Attacks, Death, & Facts*. (2024, March 11). Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Osama-bin-Laden

[71] N. F. (2023, May 2). *Archive: President Barack Obama Announces Killing of Osama bin Laden*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ReSbSiw0Bg

a reaffirmation of allegiance from al-Qaeda affiliates worldwide[72]. This process was complicated by the decentralized nature of the organization, with branches in Yemen, Iran, and the Islamic Maghreb exhibiting varying degrees of loyalty and autonomy. Hence, filling the shoes of the millionaire who gave everything up to fight the enemies of Islam, was not going to be an easy job.

The establishment of the General Command within al-Qaeda facilitated Zawahiri's ascension to leadership, albeit with limitations on his authority compared to bin Laden[73]. His leadership tenure was marked by attempts to consolidate the organization's global network and adapt its strategies in response to evolving geopolitical dynamics. However, Zawahiri's recent demise at the hands of CIA-operatives (July 31, 2022)[74] has once again put doubt over the future trajectory of the organization, highlighting the absence of a clear succession plan and the challenges of maintaining cohesion in the face of external pressures and internal divisions.

In drawing to a close and in light of the aforementioned information, presently, al-Qaeda manifests as a de-centralized network characterized by a departure from its erstwhile structure as a unified entity under the firm central leadership of Osama bin Laden. Instead, it operates as a diffuse network comprising loosely affiliated groups dispersed across diverse geographical locations. Extensive counter-terrorism measures have significantly degraded its operational capacity, rendering it less capable of orchestrating large-scale attacks akin to the magnitude of 9/11 independently. Nevertheless, its continued relevance lies in its ability to serve as an inspirational force, perpetuating its ideological *ethos* and radical methodologies.

1.4 THE WAR ON TERROR: AFGHANISTAN & IRAQ

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are commonly viewed as integral components of a broader campaign against global terrorism, serving as pivotal manifestations of

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[72] *Al-Qaeda since the Death of Bin Laden*. (n.d.). https://www.iemed.org/publication/al-qaeda-since-the-death-of-bin-laden/

[73] *Al-Qaeda since the Death of Bin Laden*. (n.d.). https://www.iemed.org/publication/al-qaeda-since-the-death-of-bin-laden/

[74] Harrington, J., & Thompson, J. (2022, December 21). *Zawahiri's Death and What's Next for al Qaeda*. https://www.csis.org/analysis/zawahiris-death-and-whats-next-al-qaeda

America's foreign policy response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. These conflicts are often characterized as some of the most protracted, intense, and lethal engagements in American history. However, a nuanced examination reveals that while the war in Afghanistan may indeed be considered the longest, assertions regarding the largest and bloodiest conflicts need contextualization.

For instance, the Civil War (1861-1865) stands out as the bloodiest conflict in American history, claiming 620,000 casualties in total between the Union and Confederate sides. In terms of scale, the United States' involvement in World War I saw over 16.1 million military personnel mobilized, making it the largest engagement in which the nation has participated[75]. Furthermore, the Vietnam War (1955-1975) endured for 13 years, representing the longest duration of sustained military involvement until the conflict in Afghanistan surpassed it.

Indeed, the Afghan and Iraq wars have taken a significant toll for natural resources expended and lives lost (over 7,000 U.S. military casualties in total between the two)[76], both stand out because they have prompted significant moral introspection and debate, reflecting the complex interplay of ethical considerations inherent in military interventions. This is not to argue that similar discussions have not happened before; rather, every military operation, both historical and contemporary, has its own set of moral difficulties and complexity that are shaped by factors like the geopolitical environment, strategic goals, and legitimacy perceptions.

As a result, claiming that they mark the end of America's moral trajectory would be excessively simple. However, they have been subjected to a more intensive moral criticism and serve as powerful reminders of the ongoing need for ethical thought and transparency in international affairs.

In a primary phase, the Global War on Terror (GWOT) championed by the United States in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, was welcomed with international

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[75] Tanielian, T., Jaycox, L. H., Adamson, D. M., Burnam, M. A., Burns, R. M., Caldarone, L. B., Cox, R. A., D'Amico, E. J., Diaz, C., Eibner, C., Fisher, G., Helmus, T. C., Karney, B. R., Kilmer, B., Marshall, G. N., Martin, L. T., Meredith, L. S., Metscher, K. N., Osilla, K. C., . . . Yochelson, M. R. (2008, March 26). *Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery*. RAND. https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG720.html

[76] *US & Allied Killed and Wounded | Costs of War*. (n.d.). The Costs of War. https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/military#:~:text=Over%207%2C000%20U.S.%20servi ce%20members,have%20been%20even%20more%20extensive.

support with NATO invoking Art. 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty[77] for the first time. Yet, as the conflicts carried on, the U.S. found themselves completely and utterly alone.

AFGHANISTAN

Modern Afghanistan is administratively divided into 34 provinces, each with its designated capital city. Governance is centralized, with the central government responsible for appointing governors to oversee the administration of these provinces[78]. Geopolitically, Afghanistan's borders are flanked by nations that have historical significance, including territories once part of the Russian Empire and the former Soviet Union to the north, Iran (formerly Persia) to the west, Pakistan and India (formerly under British colonial rule) to the southeast, and a small border with China to the northeast. Afghanistan's strategic location at the crossroads of the Middle East as well as South Central Asia, renders it a geopolitical hotspot.

Historically, Afghanistan's strategic importance has attracted the attention of major international powers. Endowed with overflowing natural resources, including minerals, natural gas, and opium, the country has been coveted for its economic potential. Moreover, its proximity to historic trade routes like the Silk Road has promoted the flow of products and ideas throughout Eurasia.[79] Afghanistan's internal geography, characterized by rugged terrain and mountainous landscapes, has historically served as a natural buffer zone, making it challenging for external forces to exert full control over its territory.

Ethnically and linguistically diverse, Afghanistan's population comprises numerous tribes speaking different languages and dialects. However, the two official

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[77] "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all (…)" (The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm)

[78] Carlisle, R. (2022). Afghanistan War, Third Edition. Infobase Publishing. https://www.perlego.com/book/3769259/afghanistan-war-third-edition-pdf

[79] Marshall, T. (2016) *Prisoners of Geography*. London, England: Elliott & Thompson.

languages are Dari (Afghan Persian) and Pashto[80]. This ethnic and tribal diversity, coupled with religious divisions between Sunni and Shia Islam, has contributed to the complexity of governance, posing challenges to the consolidation of a unified national identity and the establishment of effective governance structures.
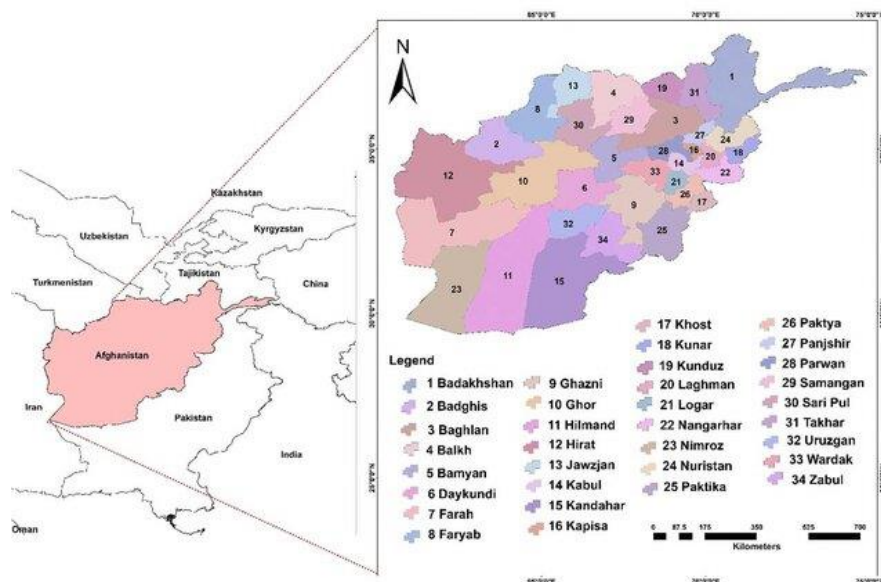

Fig. 2. Location map of Afghanistan and its provinces (Source: Research Gate)

To comprehensively understand the genesis of the conflict with the United States, it is imperative to delve into a concise historical overview, tracing back to the era of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent emergence of the Taliban. The Soviet invasion, spanning from 1979 to 1989, was conducted in support of the Communist regime led by Najibullah. Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces, Najibullah's regime managed to retain power amidst internal opposition[81]. However, Afghanistan remained embroiled in a tumultuous period characterized by competing political factions vying for control[82].

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[80] Carlisle, R. (2022). Afghanistan War, Third Edition. Infobase Publishing. https://www.perlego.com/book/3769259/afghanistan-war-third-edition-pdf

[81] Carlisle, R. (2022). Afghanistan War, Third Edition. Infobase Publishing. https://www.perlego.com/book/3769259/afghanistan-war-third-edition-pdf

[82] When Najibullah's administration collapsed in 1992, military leader Ahmad Shah Massaud seized control of Kabul. Massaud backed Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Tajik ethnic minority leader. Many members of the Pashtun ethnic majority were outraged by the prospect of Tajik rule in Afghanistan. Rabbani could barely keep authority over a few areas in northern Afghanistan. (https://www.perlego.com/book/3769259/afghanistan-war-third-edition-pdf)

Central to this narrative is the rise of a newly emerging Afghan generation, identified as '*talibs*', who fled to neighboring Pakistan during the Soviet invasion. In Pakistan, these individuals received training in Pakistani *madrassas*, educational institutions affiliated with the Deobandi branch of Islam[83]. The Deobandi ideology espouses a puritanical interpretation of Islam, advocating for the purification of religious practices by eschewing perceived Western influences.

In the ensuing years, these trained individuals, known as the Taliban, returned to Afghanistan during the 1990s and coalesced into militant militias[84]. In 1996, the Taliban seized power and established a new regime, known as the Taliban regime, with Mullah Mohammed Omar at its helm. Influenced by their education and training in Pakistani *madrassas*, the Taliban incorporated the teachings of their instructors into their religious beliefs, resulting in the implementation of a stringent and repressive regime unparalleled in the region's history.

The new regime, by providing a fostering environment for terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, and refusing to give up Osama bin Laden after September 11, 2001, the Taliban set the stage for the start of a long-lasting conflict (20 years) with the United States (the War on Terror) that began with the infamous Operation Enduring Freedom on October 12, 2001. Due to its duration and complexity, the conflict has been managed by four different U.S. political figures: former presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump, leading up to also the current president Joseph Biden.

This sub-chapter will examine how the four different U.S. presidencies managed the conflict in Afghanistan, starting with the Bush administration. Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 was initiated by a CIA-led strike force under the direction of Cofer

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[83] Several critics adopted sweeping terms like 'fundamentalist,' 'fanatic,' and 'medieval' to characterize the Taliban. The Taliban, on the other hand, claimed to be followers of a Sunni school of thought that originated during India's colonial era in the late nineteenth century. This school was named after Deoband, a small rural town northeast of Delhi, where the movement's first madrasa or seminary was established in 1867. Even though a large number of Taliban members had attended Deobandi schools, one of the movement's spokespeople in the last few months said, "Every Afghan is a Deobandi." Metcalf, B. D. (2021, September 9). “Traditionalist” *Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs*. Items. https://items.ssrc.org/after-september-11/traditionalist-islamic-activism-deoband-tablighis-and-talibs/

[84] Carlisle, R. (2022). Afghanistan War, Third Edition. Infobase Publishing. https://www.perlego.com/book/3769259/afghanistan-war-third-edition-pdf

Black, the CIA's director of counterterrorism. This operation aimed to target the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in collaboration with international forces and internal opposition groups, whose cooperation was often secured through financial incentives. Within weeks of the operation's commencement, the Taliban was driven from Kabul, although the primary target, Osama bin Laden, remained elusive and was believed to be hiding in Pakistan.

The Bush administration, like its successors, grappled with the complexities of America's role in a war-torn and inherently challenging country. Bin Laden exploited this uncertainty to taunt the Americans through videotaped messages, outlining a strategy he termed 'death by a thousand cuts.'[85] This strategy extended beyond the immediate impact of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It signified the initiation of a prolonged process aimed at undermining the United States by exploiting its own decisions and actions. Bin Laden envisioned a series of U.S. orchestrated events that would gradually weaken, rather than strengthen, the position of their country on the global stage.

Consistency with his vision can be found in the Bush administration's response, characterized as a 'dark side' approach, championed by Vice President Dick Cheney, which emphasized clandestine operations and circumvention of legal and moral constraints.

"We also have to work the dark side, we got to spend time in the shadows, in the intelligence world. A lot of what needs to be done here will have to be done quietly, without any discussion using sources and methods that are available to our intelligence agencies, if we are to be successful."[86]

One manifestation of this approach was the establishment of Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, commonly referred to as Gitmo, as a detention facility for suspected terrorists. The treatment of detainees at Guantanamo, including indefinite detention without trial, harsh interrogation techniques, and inhumane living conditions, drew widespread condemnation and became emblematic of the perceived erosion of American values and

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[85]   *America   After   9/11*.   (2023,   January   19).   FRONTLINE.
https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/america-after-9-11/

[86] N. N. (2022, November 5). *MTP75 Archives — Full Episode: Dick Cheney's Post-9/11 Interview*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yT6CNd25Jvc

moral standards in the pursuit of national security objectives. Additionally, the Bush administration approved the application of severe questioning methods such as waterboarding, beatings, and sleep deprivation, in secret detention facilities around the world[87]. These measures, while intended to extract intelligence from detainees, raised ethical and legal concerns and further strained America's international standing.

Furthermore, President Bush's decision to include Iraq in the conflict through his State of the Union address just four months after the attacks, further escalated tensions and widened the scope of U.S. military engagement in the area. The Bush administration's approach to the conflict in Afghanistan, characterized by aggressive military action, covert operations, and disregard for international legal norms, laid the groundwork for subsequent challenges and controversies faced by subsequent administrations in managing the protracted conflict.

Barack Obama, the first African American to hold the office of President of the United States, took on duty in 2009 with a pledge to bring about change, notably as an anti-war candidate. His early reception of the Nobel Peace Prize underscored global hopes for a departure from the aggressive foreign policies of his predecessor. However, Obama's pragmatic approach to national security quickly became apparent, as reflected in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Oslo, Norway:

> *"I cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince Al-Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms."[88]*

Despite his initial anti-war stance, Obama's administration faced the daunting task of managing ongoing conflicts inherited from the Bush era, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq. Obama strategically distinguished between the two, labeling Afghanistan as the 'right war' due to its direct ties to the 9/11 attacks, while dubbing the invasion of Iraq as the "dumb war".[89] To address the challenges in Afghanistan, Obama sought counsel

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[87] Ashkenas, J., Fairfield, H., Keller, J., & Volpe, P. (2014, December 9). *7 Key Points From the C.I.A. Torture Report*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/12/09/world/cia-torture-report-key-points.html

[88] N. P. (2009, December 17). *2009 Nobel Peace Prize Lecture by Barack Obama*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AORo-YEXxNQ

[89] *The 2008 Election: Campaign Themes, Strategies, and Developments*. (n.d.). https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/pages/instructors/setups2008/campaign-strategies.html

from General of Special Forces Stanley Mc Chrystal, who urged the deployment of more troops in order to combat the Taliban's comeback. This surge was exemplified by the Marjah operation[90], involving 15,000 troops tasked with uprooting Taliban strongholds. However, the operation encountered fierce resistance, with Mc Chrystal himself characterizing it as a 'bleeding ulcer'[91], highlighting the complexities of the conflict.

Amidst these challenges, Obama's administration significantly expanded the use of drone strikes as a counterinsurgency tool. Although initiated under the Bush administration, Obama's tenure witnessed a dramatic escalation in drone strikes, aimed at targeting Taliban insurgents. However, despite the increase in strikes, they failed to fully dismantle the Taliban's influence or diminish its ideological appeal, while also resulting in civilian casualties and exacerbating anti-American sentiment.

The pinnacle of Obama's efforts in Afghanistan came a decade into the conflict, with the successful operation to eliminate Osama bin Laden, the orchestrator of the 9/11 attacks. This milestone, while significant, underscored the enduring complexities and challenges facing U.S. efforts in the region, highlighting the inherent tensions between national security imperatives and moral obligations in the pursuit of peace and stability.

In the ensuing years and at the beginning of his second term, Obama adopted quite different perspectives regarding the nation, realizing that efforts to develop a democracy along Western lines was largely futile and that the United States' role was limited to eliminating terrorists and holding the Taliban in check. Hence, on December 31, 2014, Obama declared that significant combat operations would cease, and the U.S. would instead focus on helping and training Afghan security forces[92].

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[90] Marjah, which is situated in the center of the southern Afghanistan opium growing region, has long been ruled by the Taliban and was crucial to their ability to control the opium trade and use the proceeds to finance their activities. NATO officials saw the battle for Marjah as the pilot project for their new approach of reinstating security in strategic population centers and fostering trust in the capacity of the Afghan government to deliver public services. *Marine General: The Fight for Marjah is "Essentially Over."* (2010, December 8). ABC News. https://abcnews.go.com/International/Afghanistan/general-marjah-fight-essentially/story?id=12338362

[91] *America After 9/11.* (2023, January 19). FRONTLINE. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/america-after-9-11/

[92] Liptak K. (2021, August 24). *Bush, Obama, Trump, Biden: How four presidents created today's Afghanistan mess.* CNN. Retrieved March 21, 2024, from https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/23/politics/how-four-presidents-created-afghanistan-mess/index.html

The Trump administration (2017-2021) and the Biden administration (2021-present day) both adopted strategies meant to bring the United States' long-running battle in Afghanistan to an end. Under the banner of 'America First', President Trump fundamentally shifted the strategic approach towards the conflict. Central to this shift was the initiation of negotiations with the Taliban, spearheaded by U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, and the signing of an agreement between the United States and the Taliban, witnessed by Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo[93]. This agreement, while significant, notably excluded direct participation from the Afghan government. Its provisions encompassed the phased withdrawal of U.S. and allied troops, prisoner exchanges, and the lifting of sanctions against the Taliban. However, the absence of Afghan government involvement in these negotiations instilled apprehension among the Afghan populace, who feared a resurgence of Taliban rule rather than the envisaged attainment of lasting peace.

President Trump's administration heralded plans for a gradual reduction of U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan, yet the complete withdrawal remained unrealized by the conclusion of his presidential term. Subsequently, with the election of President Biden, a definitive announcement regarding the cessation of American military engagement in Afghanistan was made, culminating in the establishment of a deadline for the full withdrawal of troops by the end of August 2021[94]. This milestone heralded the closure of America's longest-running military campaign, albeit amidst considerable critique and scrutiny regarding the execution and consequences of the withdrawal process.

THE 2003 INVASION OF IRAQ

The 2003 invasion of Iraq orchestrated by the United States under the Bush administration stands as a pivotal moment in contemporary history. While it is commonly understood that the invasion was propelled by motivations fabricated by the Bush administration in 2002, a comprehensive analysis necessitates a deeper

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[93] *Afghan conflict: Trump hails deal with Taliban to end 18-year war.* (2020, February 29). https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51692546

[94] Liptak K. (2021, August 24). *Bush, Obama, Trump, Biden: How four presidents created today's Afghanistan mess.* CNN. Retrieved March 21, 2024, from https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/23/politics/how-four-presidents-created-afghanistan-mess/index.html

examination of the intricate geopolitical relationships that had been evolving for decades. This sub-chapter is going to dwell on the war on Iraq but it also endeavors to provide an exploration of the historical context surrounding the invasion, tracing back to the late 1970s and early 1980s when Saddam Hussein rose to power amidst shifting alliances and regional dynamics.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the United States' engagement in the Middle East was predominantly driven by strategic interests in oil resources and geopolitical hegemony. Under the Nixon administration, the U.S. forged partnerships with key regional players such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, wherein oil access was exchanged for assurances of protection and support for the respective monarchies[95]. This period marked a significant influx of Western influence in the region, prompting reactions from emerging leaders like Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

The ascension of Saddam Hussein to power in Iraq in 1979 introduced a new dimension to the regional landscape. Amidst the backdrop of the Cold War, wherein Iran and Iraq were aligned with the Soviet Union, Hussein's Iraq embarked on a tumultuous journey, notably marked by the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. Despite initial ideological differences, the conflict against Iran unexpectedly drew Iraq closer to the United States, with the latter providing military assistance to contain the Iranian revolution[96].

Saddam Hussein's legacy is one of stark contradictions, characterized by perceptions of brutality juxtaposed with admiration in certain quarters of the Arab world. While widely condemned internationally, particularly for his authoritarian rule and human rights violations, Hussein garnered respect regionally for his perceived defiance against Western influence. His staunch support for the Palestinian cause and confrontational stance towards Israel[97] further solidified his image as a "strongman"

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[95] Chaudhary, & Aparna. (2018). 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Study of the Pre-emptive Use of Force and Just War. Scholars World. https://www.perlego.com/book/3067436/2003-invasion-of-iraq-a-study-of-the-preemptive-use-of-force-and-just-war-pdf

[96] Chaudhary, & Aparna. (2018). 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Study of the Pre-emptive Use of Force and Just War. Scholars World. https://www.perlego.com/book/3067436/2003-invasion-of-iraq-a-study-of-the-preemptive-use-of-force-and-just-war-pdf

[97] He was a member of the Iraqi Baathi party for many years prior to rising to prominence. Through this group, he helped form the Arab Liberation Front, a minor Palestinian political organization that he eventually led and joined the Palestinian Liberation Organization in its fight against Israel. He welcomed

standing up to Western hegemony[98].

However, Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait in the 1990s marked a definitive shift in U.S.-Iraq relations, leading to strained diplomatic ties and eventual military intervention by the United States and its allies in 1991[99]. This episode set the stage for subsequent confrontations, culminating in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, driven by a complex interplay of geopolitical, ideological, and strategic factors.

President Bush made headlines in 2002 when he referred to North Korea, Iran, and Iraq as part of the "axis of evil", implying that their pursuit of WMDs constituted a serious danger to international peace.

"...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..."[100]

Iraq, in particular, was singled out as a potential target in the Global War on Terror (GWOT), marking the inception of a new National Security Strategy (NSS) that sanctioned pre-emptive military action. The decision to include Iraq in this broader framework was underpinned by two key assumptions fabricated by the U.S. administration at the time:

1) Alleged Connections to 9/11 – assertions were made regarding Iraq's potential involvement in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, citing evidence such as the presence of terrorist training camps within Iraqi territory and alleged meetings between Iraqi intelligence agents and one of the 9/11 hijackers, Mohammed Atta, between 2000 and 2001[101];

Palestinians into his nation and continued to help them by giving them employment, protection, and education as soon as he came into office.

[98] Ibrahim, A. (2023, March 22). *The US-led war in Iraq and Saddam's Arab legacy*. Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/22/hldthe-us-led-invasion-of-iraq-and-saddams-arab-legacy

[99] Ibrahim, A. (2023, March 22). *The US-led war in Iraq and Saddam's Arab legacy*. Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/22/hldthe-us-led-invasion-of-iraq-and-saddams-arab-legacy

[100] *"Axis of Evil."* (2023, January 19). C-SPAN.org. https://www.c-span.org/video/?525425-13/axis-evil

[101] Chaudhary, & Aparna. (2018). 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Study of the Pre-emptive Use of Force and Just War ([edizione non disponibile]). Scholars World. https://www.perlego.com/book/3067436/2003-invasion-of-iraq-a-study-of-the-preemptive-use-of-force-and-just-war-pdf

2) Development of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) – concerns were raised over Iraq's purported efforts to acquire and develop WMDs, heightening fears of their potential use or transfer to terrorist groups.

The ensuing 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States sparked considerable debate over its compliance with international legal norms. The issue remains contentious, with ongoing struggles to reconcile differing perspectives. From a legal standpoint, the analysis hinges on the concept of self-defense under customary international law and under the UN Charter framework.

According to customary international law, self-defense upholds a state's right to defend itself against violent force.[102] However, clarity is required regarding terms such as anticipatory, preventive, or pre-emptive self-defense, which are often used interchangeably. In compliance with legal interpretations, all three entail the permissible use of force in response to an imminent threat, prior to an armed attack[103], as established in the Caroline case of 1837[104]. Nevertheless, customary self-defense must adhere to two fundamental criteria[105]:

- Necessity – meaning that the state has to be left with no other choice but war for survival;

- Proportionality – referring to the amount of deployment of force to counter the threat, which does not have to exceed the magnitude of the threat itself.

[102] Hosang, H., Raluca , Ducheine, P., Géry, A., Gisele , L., Missiroli, A., & Kerttunen, M. (2022). *A LANGUAGE OF POWER? Cyber defence in the European Union* [PDF]. the EU Institute for Security Studies. https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_176.pdf

[103] Haynes. (2002, October 16). General Counsel of the Department of Defense Info memo. In *The Rumsfeld Archive*. Retrieved March 25, 2024, from https://library.rumsfeld.com/doclib/sp/2564/2002-10-16%20from%20William%20Haynes%20re%20Legal%20Distinction%20Between%20Preemption,%20Preventive%20and%20Anticipatory%20Self-Defense.pdf

[104] This case establishes the definition of the right to self-defense under customary international law. The dispute arose between the U.S. Secretary of State and the British Government following the destruction of an American vessel in an American port by British citizens. The U.S. government asserted that the attack on the vessel constituted an act of aggression against U.S. territory. In response, the British government asserted its right to self-defense. (https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/the-use-force-international-law/content-section-1.3)

[105] Haque, A. A. (2018). Necessity and Proportionality in International Law. In L. May (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of the Just War* (pp. 255–272). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Despite these principles, states are also bound by written norms, such as those enshrined in the UN Charter. Article 51 of the UN Charter states that one may only use self-defense in retaliation for an armed attack:

> *"Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence <u>if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations</u>, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security."*[106]

In examining the 2003 invasion of Iraq through the lens of customary international law, notable discrepancies emerge with regard to the two aforementioned criteria. The doctrine of necessity dictates that Military operations must be the ultimate resort, pursued only when all other options for ensuring the state's survival have been exhausted. In the context of Iraq, the perceived immediacy and severity of the threat posed by the regime were contested. Critics argued that the evidence presented by the Bush administration failed to convincingly demonstrate an imminent danger to the security of the United States or its allies, thus undermining the rationale for preemptive military intervention.

While the principle of proportionality demands that when responding to a danger, the use of force must be proportionate to the seriousness of the threat.[107] In the case of Iraq, assertions regarding the regime's possession and development of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) served as a primary justification for the invasion. However, subsequent investigations revealed significant discrepancies between the intelligence assessments and the actual presence of WMDs in Iraq. This discrepancy cast severe question on how proportionate the military reaction was, suggesting that the scale of the invasion may have exceeded the perceived threat posed by the Iraqi regime. Consequently, it can be argued that the NSS under the Bush administration failed to comply with both treaty-based and customary norms.

The United States and its coalition allies began a torrent of airstrikes on March 20, 2003, to mark the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, resulting in the swift collapse of

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[106] *UN Charter, Art. 51-54 - Comitato Atlantico Italiano*. (2013, February 12). Comitato Atlantico Italiano. https://www.comitatoatlantico.it/documenti/un-charter-art-51-53/

[107] Zeng, L. (2020, October 31). *Legality Issues of the Third Iraq War and the Dilemma of International Law*. Modern China and International Economic Law. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-8657-6_9

Iraqi defenses and the eventual entry of U.S. troops onto Iraqi soil, culminating in the fall of Baghdad[108]. However, the subsequent search for weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), which had been cited as a primary justification for the invasion, proved inconclusive, leading to international scandal and eroding trust, particularly within the United States.

Three weeks following the invasion, an iconic event took place in Baghdad's Firdos Square when Iraqi citizens and American soldiers demolished a monument of Saddam Hussein.[109] However, the jubilation soon gave way to the harsh realities of post-regime Iraq, characterized by widespread chaos and the absence of effective governance. In response, President Bush appointed U.S. diplomat Paul Bremer III as the presidential envoy[110] and head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, effectively placing him in a *de facto* leadership role to oversee the reconstruction efforts.

At this point, the mission underwent a significant shift as efforts pivoted towards establishing democracy in Iraq, reflecting the post-World War II reconstruction endeavors in Germany and Japan. This involved instituting new foundations by purging Saddam's Baathist Party from the government and disbanding the Iraqi army[111], which left many former soldiers unemployed and disenfranchised. The resultant protests escalated into a violent insurgency, further exacerbating the instability in the region. The escalation of violence between insurgents and U.S. forces culminated in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal (just like Gitmo for Afghanistan and the CIA enhanced interrogation techniques), where allegations of torture and mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. troops surfaced, accompanied by damning photographic evidence. These revelations not only tarnished the moral standing of the United States but also fueled anti-American sentiment, escalating the conflict.

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[108] *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. (n.d.). https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/middle-east/operation-iraqi-freedom.html#:~:text=On%2020%20March%202003%2C%20Operation,palace%20and%20selected%20military%20targets.

[109] *A timeline of the Iraq War*. (2023, March 8). PBS NewsHour. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/a-timeline-of-the-iraq-war

[110] *America After 9/11*. (2023, January 19). FRONTLINE. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/america-after-9-11/

[111] Herbert, D. (2014, June 20). *The Interview - Paul Bremer, Former US administrator in Iraq*. France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/20140619-interview-paul-bremer-former-us-administrator-envoy-iraq-us-military-george-w-bush-2003-invasion-isis

The situation worsened with the emergence of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates in Iraq, led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who capitalized on the chaos to foment sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shia factions, exacerbating violence and instability. This volatility was starkly illustrated by the brutal killings of four U.S. contractors in Fallujah in 2004[112], leading to retaliatory actions against Al-Qaeda operatives two years later. Additionally, in 2006, the execution of former dictator Saddam Hussein failed to quell the insurgency, prompting the deployment of additional U.S. troops (20,000 soldiers) and the implementation of a new strategy under General David H. Petraeus. The "Awakening" initiative[113] sought to enlist Sunni tribal members to combat al-Qaeda's insurgency, marking a pivotal turning point in the conflict.

A significant change in U.S. policy toward Iraq did not come about until the inauguration of President Barack Obama in 2008. In response to growing public opinion and worries about the war's financial and human costs, the Obama administration promised to remove American forces from Iraq by 2011. With the formalization of this promise in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)[114] between the United States and Iraq, the nine-year conflict came to a conclusion on December 18, 2011, when all U.S. combat forces were completely withdrawn.

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[112] Laub, Z. (2017, May 1). *The Iraq War*. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/timeline/iraq-war

[113] *A timeline of the Iraq War*. (2023, March 8). PBS NewsHour. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/a-timeline-of-the-iraq-war

[114]A settlement reached amicably between non-bellicose nations is referred to as a SOFA. The signing of a SOFA sometimes denotes the transition from occupation to peacekeeping. On November 26, 2008, the US announced a "Declaration of Principles for a Long-Term Relationship of Cooperation and Friendship Between the Republic of Iraq and the United States of America." This project aimed to provide a new foundation for bilateral relations beginning in 2009. The decree addressed issues related to economic, political, and military cooperation.
Status of Forces Agreement between the Republic of Iraq and the United States of America. (2009). In *DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance*. Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces. Retrieved March 26, 2024, from https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/US-Iraqi_SOFA-en.pdf

Conclusion

In conclusion, through the examination of key events, trends, and tensions leading up to September 11, 2001, valuable insights emerge into the myriad factors that contributed to the vulnerability of the United States and the global community to such an unprecedented act of terrorism. At the heart of this historical narrative lies a confluence of domestic and international factors, including America's foreign policy engagements, ideological conflicts, and security vulnerabilities. The rise of extremist ideologies, simmering tensions in the Middle East, and America's position as a global superpower all played integral roles in setting the stage for the events of 9/11.

As the historical context of the 9/11 attacks is reflected upon, it becomes evident that this seminal moment not only reshaped American society and politics but also had far-reaching implications for international relations and global security. The response to 9/11, both domestically and internationally, ushered in a new era defined by heightened security measures, military interventions, and debates over civil liberties and human rights. Furthermore, the enduring legacy of 9/11 serves as a sobering reminder of the fragility of peace and the constant threat posed by terrorism in the modern world.

2. THE POWER OF RHETORIC IN SHAPING PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Introduction

The foundational question guiding this chapter and, indeed, the broader thesis is the following: to what extent did the rhetoric utilized by the Bush administration serve to legitimize and justify the initiation of the War on Terror, with particular emphasis on the 2003 invasion of Iraq? Through an in-depth examination of rhetorical strategies employed by the administration, this chapter seeks to elucidate the intricate interplay between language, power, and political action in the realm of international relations.

Importantly, the overarching aim of this chapter and the thesis as a whole is to underscore the profound significance of rhetoric within the domain of international relations and politics. By delving into the rhetorical landscape surrounding the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Iraq, this analysis endeavors to elucidate the far-reaching implications of linguistic constructs on the global stage. Moreover, it seeks to underscore how a rigorous rhetorical analysis can furnish valuable insights into the accountability and crisis management practices of an administration, providing a critical perspective to evaluate its choices and actions.

Fundamental to this inquiry is the understanding of the crucial role played by the United States, under the direction of former President George W. Bush, played in handling of the most consequential crises in contemporary history. The events surrounding 9/11, the War on Terror and the invasion of Iraq have left an indelible mark on the geopolitical landscape, reshaping global dynamics and leaving enduring legacies that reverberate to this day. By focusing on the rhetoric of the Bush administration, this chapter aims to illuminate the broader political climate within the United States during this tumultuous period and recognize its profound implications for the contemporary world order.

This analysis seeks to integrate two contentious concepts that have long been subjects of discourse among contemporary philosophers and political theorists: politics and the Political. While these terms may initially appear synonymous, they entail nuanced distinctions. Drawing from the insights of German political theorist Carl Schmitt, politics denotes the practical activities involved in governance, characterized

by a defined and tangible subject matter[115]. In contrast, the Political encompasses a broader and more expansive domain, encapsulating fundamental aspects of power, conflict, and decision-making within society, as well as the overarching forces that shape collective existence[116].

Applying this conceptual framework to the case study at hand, the manifestation of both politics and the Political are discerned within the context of the Bush administration's response to the events of 9/11 and the subsequent initiation of the War on Terror. Within the realm of politics, concrete actions and policy measures undertaken by the administration may be placed, such as the Department of Homeland Security's founding, the administration's military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the formulation of a new National Security Strategy. These tangible endeavors reflect the administration's practical response to perceived threats and security challenges.

Conversely, the realm of the Political is exemplified by the rhetoric employed by President Bush to articulate broader narratives and ideological frameworks underlying the War on Terror. This rhetoric transcends mere policy prescriptions, encompassing themes of freedom v. terror, good v. evil, and us v. them. Such discourse serves to delineate a larger existential struggle beyond the immediate events of 9/11, appealing to deeper societal dynamics and values. Moreover, calls to national unity and patriotism within this discourse serve to mobilize support and legitimize the administration's actions within the domestic sphere.

By interrogating the interplay between politics and the Political within the context of the War on Terror, this analysis attempts to enlighten the multifaceted dimensions of power, ideology, and governance that shape contemporary political landscapes. Moreover, it highlights the importance of conceptual clarity in navigating complex political phenomena and understanding their broader implications for society.

The chapter will be divided in five subsections: 2.1 will provide a general overview of rhetoric, defining the concept and explaining some key elements that are crucial for understanding the overall thesis; 2.2 will delve into the actual rhetorical analysis, focusing on specifically selected speeches and addresses delivered by former

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[115] Frye, C. E. (1966). Carl Schmitt's Concept of the Political. *The Journal of Politics*, *28*(4), 818–830. https://doi.org/10.2307/2127676

[116] Frye, C. E. (1966). Carl Schmitt's Concept of the Political. *The Journal of Politics*, *28*(4), 818–830. https://doi.org/10.2307/2127676

President George W. Bush in the post-September 11 period. In particular, the examination will explore the religious and historical symbols used by Bush for his persuasive strategy. The speeches which will be analyzed will be both to the nation and the international community, all retrieved from the online White House archives; 2.3 will continue the analysis of the same speeches, but will shift the focus to how Bush utilized some significant rhetorical/semantic devices such as anaphora, metaphors, antithesis, antimetabole and hyperbole to, again, shape public opinion during this crisis.; 2.4 will focus exclusively on the rhetoric surrounding the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It will explore the rationale and persuasive methods utilized by the Bush administration to validate the war. Additionally, section 2.5, will endeavor to examine the involvement of the U.S. news media in this particular context.

2.1 A GENERAL OVERVIEW ON RHETORIC

The word 'rhetoric' originates from ancient Greek (*rhetorike*) and denotes the ability to skillfully using language to persuade or influence others[117], often employed by a speaker or orator (*rhetor*). Initially, rhetoric was integral to civic life in ancient Greece and Rome. However, in modern times, its significance in contemporary politics seems to wane due to the prominence of technology and scientific studies, which prioritize measurement over interpretation[118]. Nevertheless, in today's world, where images and texts are consumed more than ever, the relevance of speech and persuasion persists, albeit in transformed ways.

Within political communication, rhetoric serves as a crucial tool for understanding the persuasive power of language. In this sub-chapter it is argued that it delves beyond mere analysis of arguments, exploring how they are crafted to influence specific audiences within particular contexts. By examining the timing and location of arguments, rhetoric uncovers how they are tailored to map connections and risks, shaping judgments and influencing choices. Rhetoric extends beyond spoken or written words, encompassing gestures, visuals, and sounds, creating a more profound impact

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[117] *Oxford English Dictionary*. (n.d.). https://www.oed.com/?tl=true

[118] Martin, J. (2013). Politics and Rhetoric (1st ed.). Taylor and Francis. https://www.perlego.com/book/1323886/politics-and-rhetoric-a-critical-introduction-pdf

than language alone. It operates where language struggles to capture the complexities of reality, bridging gaps in understanding during moments of crisis or uncertainty.

Furthermore, it is essential to differentiate rhetoric from related concepts such as ideology and discourse. Ideologies (such as socialism or liberalism) represent established systems of interconnected ideas and values guiding political actors, while discourse reflects evolving meanings shaping social practices[119]. Rhetoric draws on and contributes to these systems but is not confined by them, reshaping ideologies and engaging with evolving discourses.

Aristotle delineated three genres of rhetoric prevalent in ancient Greece: deliberative, forensic/judicial, and epideictic. All three in line with different occasions of public address – respectively, political assemblies, law courts and ceremonial occasions[120].

- Deliberative rhetoric – its purpose is to persuade an audience to take a specific course of action by presenting arguments for and against a particular proposal, considering potential benefits and drawbacks;

- Forensic/judicial rhetoric – with the goal to prove guilt or innocence in a legal setting;

- Epideictic rhetoric – concerned with praising or blaming something focusing on the good or bad qualities of a person, event, or object. It evokes emotions in the audience and strengthens their existing beliefs by emphasizing positive or negative aspects of a subject.

An excellent resource for developing effective speeches or writing understandable explanations are the five canons of rhetoric – *inventio* (invention/discovery), *dispositio*

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[119] For example, the way we talk about gender roles now is very different from how we did in the past, which is indicative of a larger change in the social discourse. Discourse, like rhetoric, emphasizes the "at-work" aspect of meaning-making in particular contexts. Discourse, however, frequently takes a broader approach, covering a wider range of social issues. On the other hand, rhetorical analysis usually concentrates on particular texts, events, or interactions where a certain discourse is used or contested. Martin, J. (2013). Politics and Rhetoric (1st ed.). Taylor and Francis. https://www.perlego.com/book/1323886/politics-and-rhetoric-a-critical-introduction-pdf

[120] Ilie, C. (2006, December). *Rhetoric, Classical*. ResearchGate. Retrieved April 10, 2024, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304042264_Rhetoric_Classical

(arrangement), *elocutio* (style), *pronuntiato* (delivery), and *memoria* (memory)[121] – since the goal of rhetoric is to employ arguments effectively and properly. This can persuade a crowd of a particular viewpoint. This subsection will focus only on the first three canons, as they lay the groundwork for further analysis in the next sub-chapters.

Inventio involves selecting arguments that effectively convey the desired viewpoint, employing Aristotle's appeals of *logos* (reason), *ethos* (credibility), and *pathos* (emotion)[122]. *Dispositio* encompasses the speech's structure, typically including elements like introduction (*exordium*), narration (*narratio*), argumentation (*confirmatio*), refutation (*refutio*), and conclusion (*peroratio*)[123]. While speeches may not rigidly adhere to this structure, the arrangement remains crucial as it involves strategic choices in every instance.
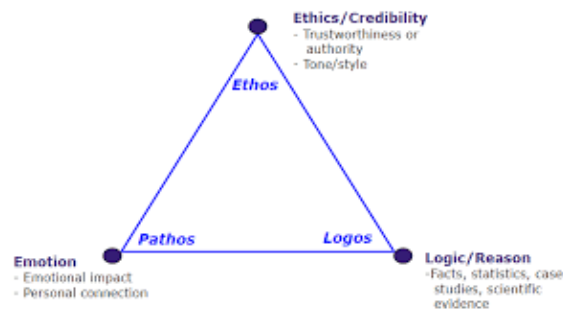
Fig. 3 The rhetorical triangle (Source: Kwantlen Polytechnic University)

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[121] Mulder, P. (2023, November 20). *Five Canons of Rhetoric (Aristotle)*. Toolshero. https://www.toolshero.com/communication-methods/five-canons-of-rhetoric/

[122] As seen in figure 1, *logos* means reason. As a result, it refers to an argument based on logical process in which the speaker uses evidence to persuade the audience that a conclusion is true. Contrarily, *ethos* relates to authority or credibility and entails highlighting the speaker's suitability to speak in the first place. As a result, the emphasis is on the speaker and their standing and reliability, which is something that is frequently observed in the political arena. Last but not least, *pathos* is emotion and as such, it entails evoking the audience's feelings rather than their thinking; for example, the goal may be to elicit laughter, joy, terror, or rage, and as such, it has a more persuasive impact. Whaley, N. (n.d.). *Aristotle's Rhetorical Appeals: Ethos, Logos, and Pathos*. Pressbooks. https://pressbooks.pub/openrhetoric/chapter/aristotles-rhetorical-appeals/

[123] Martin, J. (2013). Politics and Rhetoric (1st ed.). Taylor and Francis. https://www.perlego.com/book/1323886/politics-and-rhetoric-a-critical-introduction-pdf

The *elocutio*, or style, canon of rhetoric is pivotal in shaping the language, diction, and tone of discourse, thereby influencing both the *ethos* and *pathos* of the speaker[124]. Why is it important to find the right kind of style when it comes to language? The significance of selecting an appropriate style is underscored by the recognition of language as an instrumental medium, wherein words transcend mere information transmission to become conveyors of varied meanings, capable of evoking diverse responses depending on their arrangement. Consequently, on a simpler note, words can be perceived as vehicles for blending meanings to evoke different sensations.

Central to understanding linguistic expression is the distinction between denotation and connotation[125]. Denotative words directly signify the object they name, representing literal meanings devoid of emotional associations (i.e. the word 'book' as simply the collection of pages bound together), whereas connotative words imbue associations with objects and ideas, adding layers of meaning beyond the literal (i.e. instead of book, it becomes 'tome' which suggests a large book filled with complex information, in which the connotation can be positive by implying importance, but also negative by implying complexity). For instance, Abraham Lincoln's characterization of democracy as "government of the people, by the people and for the people"[126] carries connotations of unity and popular sovereignty, underscoring its emotive impact amidst civil discord.

Enhancing both denotative and connotative aspects of language involves the employment of figures of speech, categorized into schemes and tropes[127]. Schemes, designed to captivate attention, include prominent devices such as anaphora (the

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[124]   Martin,   J.   (2013).   Politics   and   Rhetoric   (1st   ed.).   Taylor   and   Francis. https://www.perlego.com/book/1323886/politics-and-rhetoric-a-critical-introduction-pdf

[125] *Connotation vs. Denotation: Literally, what do you mean?* (2023, May 16). https://www.merriam-webster.com/grammar/connotation-vs-denotation-literally-what-do-you-mean

[126]   *The   Gettysburg   Address   by   Abraham   Lincoln*.   (n.d.). https://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm

[127]   Martin,   J.   (2013).   Politics   and   Rhetoric   (1st   ed.).   Taylor   and   Francis. https://www.perlego.com/book/1323886/politics-and-rhetoric-a-critical-introduction-pdf

repetition of initial words)[128], antithesis (the juxtaposition of contrasting terms)[129] and antimetabole (the repeating of words in subsequent phrases in reversed order)[130]. A detailed examination of these schemes will be provided in subsection 2.3 for contextual clarity.

Tropes, on the other hand, utilize specific words to connote particular meanings. Notably, the metaphor – a substitution of terms to invoke comparison[131] – and the hyperbole – an exaggeration to amplify significance[132] – are pivotal tropic figures warranting discussion in subsequent sections (2.3–2.4). In-depth analyses of these figures will elucidate their applications within the framework of this study.

2.2 RELIGIOUS AND HISTORICAL SYMBOLS AS FOUNDATIONS OF BUSH'S RHETORIC

The realm of international relations has historically relied on the strategic deployment of persuasive discourse. While considerations such as military capabilities and resource allocation remain paramount, the influence of rhetoric in shaping decisions pertaining to peace and conflict has been somewhat overlooked within academic inquiry[133].

As aforementioned above, rhetorical theory teaches that the profound impact of language in not only conveying ideas but also shaping perceptions and attitudes. State

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[128] *anaphora.* (n.d.). Merriam-Webster Dictionary. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anaphora

[129] *antithesis.* (2024, April 2). Merriam-Webster Dictionary. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antithesis

[130] *antimetabole, n. meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary.* (n.d.). https://www.oed.com/dictionary/antimetabole_n

[131] *metaphor.* (2024, April 10). https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/metaphor

[132] *hyperbole.* (2024, April 10). https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/hyperbole

[133] Deibert, R. (1998, September 1). *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations. Edited by Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996. 429p. $35.95 cloth, $24.95 paper.* ˜the œAmerican Political Science Review. https://doi.org/10.2307/2585554

actors wield words deliberately, employing various rhetorical devices to not only communicate with their domestic constituencies but also to project their state's values and priorities onto the international stage. The manner in which situations and outcomes are framed through discourse significantly influences subsequent policy choices, highlighting the intricate interplay between rationality and emotion in political decision-making processes.

Within the context of the United States' political system, the institutional framework, particularly the system of checks and balances, accords considerable significance to presidential leadership[134]. The presidency assumes a pivotal role as the locus of national rhetoric, with the incumbent president often serving as the primary agent of persuasive communication.

"Presidents respond to moments with words that tell us what the moment means and then, with words, recommend to the nation and Congress courses of action."[135]

The ascendancy of George W. Bush to the presidency in 2001 marked a departure from the conventional archetype of his predecessors, characterized by a distinctive 'cowboy persona'[136] that belied expectations of rhetorical sophistication. Despite early perceptions of his oratory acumen being tainted by unconventional linguistic expressions and grammatical lapses, Bush confronted a defining test of his rhetorical prowess in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist strikes.

The cataclysmic events of 9/11 precipitated a wave of panic and uncertainty among the American populace, exacerbated by initial ambiguities surrounding the identity of the assailants. Bush's immediate rhetorical objectives were centered on fostering a sense of calm and national unity while articulating a coherent strategy to assuage public anxieties and restore confidence in the government's ability to address

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[134] Kuś, R. (2020). "Our Grief and Anger": George W. Bush's Rhetoric in the Aftermath of 9/11 as Presidential Crisis Communication. Res Rhetorica. 7. 10.29107/rr2020.1.3.

[135] King, A. (1991). [Review of *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance; Democratic Eloquence: The Fight over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America; Presidential Debates: The Challenge of Creating an Informed Electorate*, by K. K. Campbell, K. H. Jamieson, K. Cmiel, & D. S. Birdsell]. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *21*(2), 52–55. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3885520

[136] Kuś, R. (2020). "Our Grief and Anger": George W. Bush's Rhetoric in the Aftermath of 9/11 as Presidential Crisis Communication. Res Rhetorica. 7. 10.29107/rr2020.1.3.

the crisis. Despite initial skepticism regarding his rhetorical efficacy, Bush's response to the exigencies of the moment revealed a nuanced and adept deployment of persuasive rhetoric.

Speech 1: Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation (September 11, 2001)

On the evening of September 11th, televised from the White House, President Bush addressed the nation, initially acknowledging the tragedy with a poignant recounting of the events, focusing on the human toll[137]. However, he proceeded to commend the nation's resilience, asserting that while the attacks inflicted destruction and loss of life, they could not undermine America's foundation – Already hinting historical symbols. He adeptly contextualized the events within America's historical narrative of resilience, resolve, and ability to surmount adversity. By referencing past national challenges, such as previous conflicts and threats, he underscored the continuity of American values and its capacity to endure trying times.

> *"A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America."[138]*

President Bush depicted America as *"the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world"*, portraying it as a symbol of hope and liberty. This imagery resonates with historical narratives portraying America as a haven for those seeking freedom, reinforcing the concept of American exceptionalism. The notion of America as a chosen nation with a divine mission dates back to the arrival of the first settlers[139] – Christian Protestants, particularly Puritans, who viewed themselves as ordained to accomplish great deeds. The belief that Americans are the chosen people of God, and that God generated their civilization, is evident in both internal American culture, such as the National Anthem[140] and the Pledge of Allegiance[141], and external American culture,

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[137] Andersson, I. (2005). American political rhetoric: a study of selected speeches by George W. Bush.

[138] *Statement by the President in Address to the Nation*. (2001, September 11). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html

[139] Andersson, I. (2005). American political rhetoric: a study of selected speeches by George W. Bush.

[140] *"…**Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto - "In God is our trust,"***

such as the development of a heroic reputation throughout history (see Chapter 1, subsection 1.1).

"This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day. Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.

Thank you. Good night, and God bless America."[142]

Hence, in speech 1 the historical symbols are used to spread comfort and the promise of a strong nation seeking to 'right the wrongs', however, it is crucial also to take into consideration the fact that approximately 3 out of 4 Americans claim to practice a particular religion. The highest percentage of individuals, 68%, identify as Christians. As seen in figure 3 below, among them, 33% identify as Protestant, 22% as Catholic, and 13% as 'Christians' or with another Christian religion. Furthermore, 60% of Americans said that religion is "very important" in their lives between 1990 and 2005.[143]

And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave." The U.S. national anthem | USAGov. (n.d.).
https://www.usa.gov/national-anthem

[141] August 1892 saw the writing of the Pledge of Allegiance by socialist pastor Francis Bellamy (1855–1931). In its first version it said: "I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." "The Flag of the United States of America" was added in 1923. Amid the Communist threat of 1954, President Eisenhower urged Congress to include the phrase "under God", resulting in the current pledge: "**I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.**" *The Pledge of Allegiance*. (n.d.). https://www.ushistory.org/documents/pledge.htm

[142] *Statement by the President in Address to the Nation*. (2001, September 11). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html

[143] G. (2024, April 4). *How Religious Are Americans?* Gallup.com. https://news.gallup.com/poll/358364/religious-americans.aspx
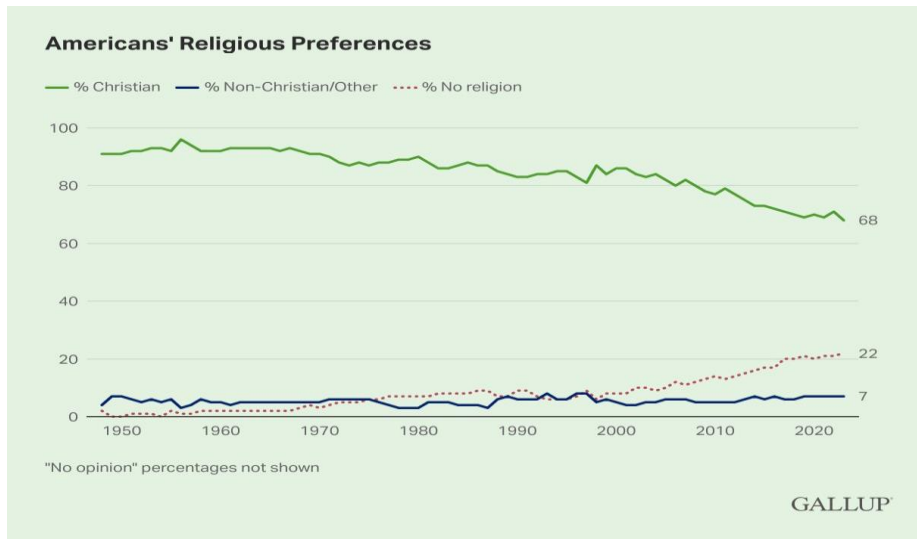
Fig. 4 How religious are Americans? (Source: GALLUP)

Keeping this fact in mind, it can be said that Bush's reference to Psalm 23 in speech 1 might have played a role in catching the attention of the religious audience and consequently helped to transmit the message in a more effective way:

> *"...Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me..."[144]*

President Bush frames the response to the attacks as a moral and historical imperative, casting the struggle against terrorism as a continuation of America's ongoing commitment to justice and peace. By invoking the language of war, he positions the conflict as a battle between good and evil (*"The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts"[145]*), drawing upon religious and historical themes of righteousness and moral clarity.

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[144] *Psalm 23 (NIV).* (n.d.). Bible Gateway. https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%2023&version=NIV

[145] *Statement by the President in Address to the Nation.* (2001, September 11). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html

Speech 2: Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People (September 20, 2001)

From reassurance words and national unity, the analysis moves on to speech 2 where the historical and religious symbols are now focused on conveying the gravity of the situation following the attacks and to rally support for the U.S. response. Once again he invokes unity and resilience but, this time not referring to the country, but more specifically to the American people in the face of tragedy, by opening the oration this way:

> *"In the normal course of events, Presidents come to this chamber to report on the state of the Union. Tonight, no such report is needed. It has already been delivered by the American people."*[146]

The President continues on paying tribute to the courage and sacrifice of individuals such as Todd Beamer and the endurance of rescuers, portraying them as symbols of American heroism and unity. Here, a more in-depth contextualization is needed – Todd Beamer was among the passengers on board on Flight 93, the fourth aircraft where passengers resisted the hijackers, thwarting another potential catastrophic attack and adverting further loss of life.

Alongside this tribute to the heroes of Flight 93, he addressed the rescuers and workers whose goal was to search for survivors at Ground Zero (former World Trade Center) in New York City and spent countless of days and hours in order to save those who could still be saved. Worth mentioning in this case is what happened on September 14, 2001. Prior to this Joint Session Presidential Address, Bush decided to pay a visit to Ground Zero surrounded by debris, destruction and pain. In that circumstance one of the proudest moments of his presidency took place just with his appearance at the spot and also with his oration, now known as 'the Bullhorn Speech' which converted into a personal dialogue with one of the workers who was unable to hear what the President's words. His remarks were immediately followed by the President's response: *"I can hear*

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[146] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

you! I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you! And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!"[147]

Fig. 5 President George W. Bush and firefighter Ben Beckwith standing on the debris of the WTC in NYC (Source: U.S. News & World Report)

In this instance, Bush's ability to use rhetoric was further enhanced by his presence on the wreckage of the World Trade Center. This occurred at a time when the country was still reeling from the events that had occurred just three days prior, obsessively watching the news channels in a state of unsettling disbelief, and desperately clinging to any idea of hope and rationality as well as a leader to rally around. As seen in Figure 2, Bush was not dressed in the elegant suits associated with the federal government organizations; rather, he was wearing dark blue jeans and a grey bomber jacket portraying the picture of the people's champion. Coming back to speech 2, another important element to mention is a multi-faith solidarity, meaning that he emphasized the diversity of religious expression in America, automatically underscoring the idea of national unity and solidarity across religious and cultural divides:

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[147] Team, F. T. D. (2021, September 9). *'I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you': George W. Bush's bullhorn speech*. FOX 29 News Philadelphia. https://www.fox29.com/news/i-can-hear-you-the-rest-of-the-world-hears-you-george-w-bushs-bullhorn-speech

"I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends."[148]

This sympathetic façade would soon be disproved by the initiation of the War on Terror in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the Muslim population experienced years of constant mistreatment and unjust imprisonment on behalf of the U.S. troops, even without proof of collaboration with al-Qaeda or any other terrorist organization (see Chapter 1, section 1.4). Not to mention the unspeakable wave of hate towards American Muslims that exploded inside the country during that time – probably fueled by another statement present in the same Joint Session speech referring to terrorists and extremists, but, at the end of the day, still part of the Muslim population:

"We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. (...) they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies."[149]

Moreover, an appeal to international-solidarity was made by acknowledging the support of allies and nations around the world, emphasizing the global nature of the struggle against terrorism and the need for international unity: *"And on behalf of the American people, I thank the world for its outpouring of support."[150]*

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[148] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

[149] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

[150] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

Speech 3: Address to the United Nations General Assembly (September 23, 2008)

Concerning this international solidarity and unity among nations, a great example is represented by this very speech. Cooperation was called upon to stress the importance of multilateral organizations (such as the UN) in addressing global challenges, calling for closer collaboration to prevent terrorist attacks and confront extremism effectively. Bush highlights the serious challenge posed by violent extremists who defy the principles of international order and threaten peace and security worldwide; and asserts that advancing the vision of freedom is essential in the fight against extremism, emphasizing the importance of respecting human rights and supporting young democracies around the world.

The examples of historical and religious symbols to underline his points are seen:

- At the beginning of the speech when he evoked the historical context of the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945, following the devastation of World War II;

- In his reference to the Charter of the UN and the historic pledge made by representatives from around the world to express their belief in fundamental human rights and unite their power to uphold international peace and security: "*And together, we can build a world that is freer, safer, and better for the generations who follow.*"[151]

- In his reference to historical leaders such as President Harry Truman, who visited the delegates negotiating the UN Charter in San Francisco, Bush invokes Truman's message of *"unshakable unity of determination"*[152] to emphasize the importance of global cooperation in confronting contemporary challenges;

- In his mentions of the Bible, the Koran, and the Torah to emphasize that extremists reject of the principles of morality and conscience upheld by these

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[151] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

[152] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

religious texts. This underscores the universal condemnation of terrorism across different faith traditions: "*By deliberately murdering the innocent to advance their aims, these extremists defy the fundamental principles of international order.*"[153]

Speech 4: Address to the Nation (March 19, 2003)

For speech 4 the analysis gest straight to the heart of the historical and religious symbols used to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which will also serve for the fourth section of this chapter. President George W. Bush strategically employs historical and religious symbols to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq and maintain strong public support for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Bush positions the conflict within a broader historical narrative of defending freedom and peace, aiming to keep the American people informed and engaged in the legitimization of the invasion.

Throughout the speech, Bush emphasizes the concept of 'freedom' as a central theme, tapping into its deep historical and ideological significance in American rhetoric. By framing the conflict as a struggle for freedom, Bush invokes core American values such as liberty, democracy, and human rights, portraying military action as a necessary means to promote these values globally. For instance, he declares,

"...My fellow citizens, the dangers to our country and the world will be overcome. We will pass through this time of peril and carry on the work of peace. We will defend our freedom. We will bring freedom to others and we will prevail."[154]

Thereby, supporting the notion of freedom as an objective and a rationale for action. Furthermore, Bush deftly incorporates historical allusions to place the current crisis in the larger perspective of U.S. leadership and global responsibility. The president aims to assure the public that the mission is not an isolated event but rather a continuum of U.S. efforts to keep world peace and security, drawing parallels with previous conflicts.

In addition to historical appeals, Bush incorporates religious language to morally

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[153] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

[154] *President Bush Addresses the Nation.* (2003, March 19). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/iraq/news/20030319-17.html

legitimize the invasion. He invokes values of justice, compassion, and divine blessing, stating, *"May God bless our country and all who defend her"*[155], positioning the mission as a righteous cause sanctioned by divine providence. By appealing to the American public's strongly held ideas and ideals, particularly among religious communities, Bush depicts military action as both a moral responsibility and a holy commitment. This religious framework reinforces the goal's moral clarity and boosts popular support for the invasion, since the choice to include Iraq in the War on Terror fight had many people questioning and doubting the purpose, both internationally and domestically.

2.3 THE PRESIDENT'S PERSUASIVENESS THROUGH SEMANTICAL LENSES

It is now time to examine these four chosen speeches with reference to paragraph 2.1 from a different perspective, one that is more analytical and particular than the one used previously. It was not in vain that a comprehensive review of rhetoric and a few of its semantical tools were mentioned in the preceding section (2.1). The elements that will be used in this interpretation will be respectively:

- The category of rhetoric to which the speeches pertain to;

- Three (out of the five) canons of rhetoric: *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio*;

- Aristotle's appeals to *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*;

- The figures of speech such as anaphors, antithesis, antimetabole, metaphors and hyperbole.

Let's get technical with **speech 1**: given immediately following the terrorist attacks, President Bush's speech was a defining moment throughout American history. Mostly using epideictic rhetoric (see section 2.1), the speaker aimed to comfort and unify the country in the midst of sorrow by praising and emphasizing the positive aspects of America as a nation.

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[155] *President Bush Addresses the Nation*. (2003, March 19). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/iraq/news/20030319-17.html

Regarding the three canons:

1. *Inventio* – the speaker's decision to express the intended message – the address was centered around expressing sympathy, solidarity, and resolve while highlighting the common ideals and resiliency of the American people. He created a story on the resilience and unity of the country in the face of hardship;

2. *Dispositio*, or the speech's arrangement – the oration had a predetermined framework, starting with a sorrowful acknowledgement of the assaults and expressing grief for those killed and their families before progressively moving into a call for national unity and a determination to combat terrorism;

3. *Elocutio* – the style and the tone – the seriousness of the crisis and the necessity of unity were emphasized by the sad and poignant words. Bush's moving statements of loss and resolve struck a chord with the American people and emphasized how urgent the situation was.

While the speech primarily appealed to *pathos* by evoking strong emotions of grief, shock, and determination, Bush also subtly appealed to *ethos* by presenting himself as a compassionate and resolute leader guiding the nation through crisis.

To facilitate the process of enhancing arguments and stimulating the audience, a variety of rhetorical devices may be needed, particularly the proficiency in *inventio* and *elocutio*. The former allows the speaker to modify the facts as they see fit, whilst the latter stirs up feelings[156]. The educator Quintilian suggested using *ornatus*, or embellishment, in addition to this mastery of rhetorical description.[157]. It contains a variety of rhetorical techniques, including the figures of speech (anaphors, metaphors, hyperboles, antimetaboles, and antithesis) that will be examined in this section.

Anaphora – originates from the fusion of the Greek terms *'ana'*, meaning 'repeat', and *'pherein'*, which means 'to carry'[158]. The origin implies that when we

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[156] Skinner, Q. (1996). THE TECHNIQUES OF REDESCRIPTION. In *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (pp. 138–180). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[157] Damm, A. (2003). Ornatus: An Application of Rhetoric to the Synoptic Problem. Novum Testamentum, 45(4), 338–364. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1561103

[158] Malewitz. (2020, May 13). *What is Anaphora? Definitions & Examples* [Video]. Oregon State University. Retrieved April 17, 2024, from https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-anaphora

encounter anaphors, certain words' sounds and meanings are repeatedly conveyed back to the listeners until they also internalize and carry them forward. In the case study at hand:

a) "Today, *our* fellow citizens, *our* way of life, *our* very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts."[159]

b) "…and we responded *with* the best of America, *with* the daring of our rescue workers, *with* the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could."[160]

In these two passages of the speech, for instance, the anaphors serve several purposes – the repetition of the term 'our' and the preposition 'with' at the beginning of each phrase helps the speaker to emphasize the importance of what is being threatened or protected. In point a, it highlights the shared experience and values under attack (way of life, freedom); on the other end, in point b, the collective response (the best of America, daring of rescue workers…). The repetition fosters a sense of cohesion and common goal. Everyone participates in the reaction, and everyone is impacted by the assault ("our fellow citizens"). It unites the audience in rage, optimism, and patriotism all at once.

Metaphor – the etymology of the word comes from the ancient Greek term *'meta-pherein'*, meaning to transfer[161]. As a result, it is a figure of speech that changes the meaning of one idea to another. Alternatively, the conventional definition, according to Aristotle, is "the application of a noun which properly applies to something else."[162]

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[159] *Statement by the President in Address to the Nation*. (2001, September 11). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html

[160] *Statement by the President in Address to the Nation*. (2001, September 11). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html

[161] *metaphor, n. meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary*. (n.d.). https://www.oed.com/dictionary/metaphor_n?tab=meaning_and_use#37059120

[162] Filonik, J. (2022). Metaphors in rhetoric: From ancient Greek to 21st-century politics. In M. Edwards, A. Serafim, & S. Papaioannou (Eds.), Brill's companion to the reception of ancient rhetoric (pp. 454-485). Brill. [doi: 10.1163/9789004470057_021]

a) "Terrorist attacks can shake the *foundations of our biggest buildings*, but they cannot touch *the foundation of America.*"[163]

b) "These acts *shattered steel*, but they cannot *dent the steel of American resolve.*"[164] –

c) "…we're the *brightest beacon* for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that *light from shining.*"[165]

In the first two instances, the metaphors convey the idea that while physical structures like buildings may be damaged or destroyed by terrorist attacks, the core values, resilience and strength of America as a nation remain untouched. It implies that despite facing adversity, such as terrorism, the essence of America (its values, principles, and unity) remains steadfast and enduring. The third instance, which presents the image of the country as a 'beacon' that shines so brightly that the whole world is able to see it, serves the same purpose and as a remainder not to drown in fear and not to lose trust in the motherland.

Furthermore, the president's assertion that the country had been attacked due to its nature as the world's beacon, can be also put into the category of *hyperbole* (*hyper* 'beyond' – *bol* 'throw'). The etymology has to be intended as the exaggeration of something to convey an amplified personal response[166] to whatever the context may be. Thus, for the issue at hand, the exaggeration served to heighten the sense of American exceptionalism and underscored the nation's perceived threat to those who oppose its values.

Moving on to **speech 2**, the president's address on September 20, 2001, aimed to unite the nation and outline a comprehensive response to terrorism. This speech

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[163] *Statement by the President in Address to the Nation*. (2001, September 11). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html

[164] *Statement by the President in Address to the Nation*. (2001, September 11). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html

[165] *Statement by the President in Address to the Nation*. (2001, September 11). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html

[166] Passarello. (2019, May 20). *What is Hyperbole? || Oregon State Guide to Literary Terms* [Video]. Oregon State University . Retrieved April 17, 2024, from https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-hyperbole

primarily utilized deliberative rhetoric (persuade an audience to take a specific course of action), seeking support from the audience for the administration's proposed response.

1. *Inventio*: Bush presented a clear argument for the necessity of a unified response to terrorism, emphasizing the principles of freedom, justice, and national security. He outlined the administration's plan for a comprehensive response, including diplomatic, military, and economic measures;

2. *Dispositio*: the speech followed a logical structure, beginning with a summary of the attacks and praising American resilience (like in speech 1), then outlining the plan, and finally concluding with a call to action and a pledge of resolve;

3. *Elocutio*: the language here was assertive and authoritative, reflecting Bush's determination to take decisive action against terrorism. His rhetoric was characterized by patriotic fervor and a sense of moral clarity in confronting 'evil'.

Contrarily to speech 1, where no appeal to *logos* can be found, speech 2 presents logical arguments to justify military action against terrorists and their supporters, framing it as a necessary measure to protect American values and security. In order to amplify this presentation of the war as necessary, he appealed to *ethos* by emphasizing his role as a leader capable of guiding the nation through crisis and enhancing credibility. Alongside these two appeals, also the one to *pathos* was made through emotional stories of heroism and sacrifice, aiming to inspire a sense of national pride.   Regarding the figures of speech in this case, anaphors, metaphors and antithesis are present. The anaphors can be seen in several cases:

a) "*...I will not* yield; *I will not* rest; *I will not* relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people."[167]

b) "*...We will not* tire, *we will not* falter, and *we will not* fail."[168]

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[167] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

[168] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

c) "*We will come together* to improve air safety (…) *We will come together* to promote stability and keep our airlines flying (…) *We will come together* to give law enforcement the additional tools it needs to track down terror here at home. *We will come together* to strengthen our intelligence capabilities to know the plans of terrorists before they act, and find them before they strike."[169]

Point A and B express a strong and unwavering determination to persevere in the face of challenges. It conveys a resolute commitment to continue the fight for freedom and security, suggesting that despite difficulties or setbacks, the collective effort will persist until success is achieved; in line also with the third point where the repetition of the expression 'we will come together' signals the need for collective efforts instead of internal division, reminding everyone who the real enemy is.

On the subject of enemy, speech 2 is also full of references of a juxtaposition between the 'evil doers' and the 'heroes', the innocence of the victims and the malevolence of the attackers, the concept of hate (on behalf of the terrorists to American values) and the ideals of American society, and the desired goal to overcome the 'age of terror' and enter into a brighter and more secure future. This opposition is typical of one figure of speech in particular, *antithesis* (*anti* 'against' – *thenai* 'to place')[170]. Placing contrasting ideas side-by-side, makes the difference between them stand out much clearer and it automatically sticks with the audience.

Concerning the *metaphors* in this specific case, crucial to point out are the themes of freedom v. terror, alongside the association of Western societies as the civilized ones in contrast with the Middle Eastern extremists, usually referred to as barbarians who only know violence and who need to be eliminated (basically the famous "us" v. "them" dichotomy[171] – which will be analyzed more in-depth in the successive section):

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[169] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

[170] *antithesis | Etymology of antithesis by etymonline*. (n.d.). Etymonline. https://www.etymonline.com/word/antithesis

[171] One of the most common themes to be found surrounding the 9/11 events that has had the ability to instill fear, hatred, discrimination and dehumanization, particularly on behalf of Western countries, towards the Middle East and its values/beliefs. N. (2015, February 12). *The "Us" vs. "Them" Dichotomy*

a) "This is *civilization's fight*."[172]

b) "A world where *freedom itself* is under attack."[173]

c) "*Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war* and we know that God is not neutral between them."[174]

The category of deliberative rhetoric applies also to **speech 3**, in which, the central theme was to rally support from international leaders (of UN member-states) for the War on Terror and convince them to join the U.S. in combating terror. Presenting a case for underlining the importance of international cooperation in confronting challenges, represents the *inventio* in this instance; the structure of the president's address comprised not only appeals to collaboration, support, and intervention, but also outlining specific measures to be taken, alongside suggesting some modifications to be made within the multinational organization that is the UN. That is what constitutes the *dispositio* of the oration. In line with the central theme of international cooperation, was the *elocutio*: the language used was diplomatic and inclusive, designed to appeal to a diverse audience of world leaders.

Consequently, this speech presents mostly two appeals: one to *ethos* by positioning himself as a statesman advocating for global security and democracy, leveraging his authority as the president of a superpower; the other to *logos* by presenting a logical argument for the necessity of international cooperation in addressing terrorism, highlighting the interconnected nature of security threats.

The *anaphora* in this instance can be found in the need to emphasize the collective responsibility of the international community in combating terrorism and promoting democracy. The repetition of the phrase "we must" reinforced the urgency of the message and underscored the need for unified action:

That Leads to Dehumanization | Nina Huynh. https://blogs.ubc.ca/ninatnhuynh/2015/02/12/the-us-vs-them-dichotomy-that-leads-to-dehumanization/

[172] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

[173] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

[174] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

a) "*We must* actively challenge the conditions of tyranny and despair that allow terror and extremism to thrive (…) *we must* stand united in our support of other young democracies (…) *we must* commit our resources and efforts to advancing education and health and prosperity (…) *we must* adopt a model of partnership, not paternalism."

Speech 3 presents also a new figure of speech that has not been seen before in this analysis: the *antimetabole* (*anti* 'opposite' – *metabolē* 'turning about')[175]. Like anaphora, it is based on a repetition, but in reversed order to change the meaning and create rhetorical impact. Let's have a look at the example to understand better:

b) "The terrorists envision *a world in which religious freedom is denied, women are oppressed, and all dissent is crushed.* The nations of this chamber must present a more hopeful alternative – *a vision where people can speak freely, and worship as they choose, and pursue their dreams in liberty*." – In this passage, the last phrase is repeated in reverse order as "religious freedom is denied, women are oppressed, and all dissent is crushed", creating a parallel structure that contrasts the oppressive vision of terrorists with the ideals of freedom and liberty upheld by the nations in the chamber.

In addition, Bush's use of the metaphor of 'tyranny' to describe oppressive regimes of the Middle East area was particularly evocative. By framing the struggle for democracy as a battle against tyranny, he sought to evoke a sense of moral clarity and justify the promotion of freedom and human rights on the global stage.

Finally, the analysis moves on to the last speech that will be analyzed in this subsection, **speech 4**. March 19, 2003 marked the beginning of the Iraq war as the United States launched a military invasion to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein. Thus, this address primarily utilized deliberative rhetoric, seeking to justify the intervention and rally public support for the war effort, in light of numerous domestic and international doubts surrounding the decision to include Iraq in the War on Terror.

The speech was strategically structured to build a case for war, beginning with a summary of Iraq's alleged weapons programs, followed by a rationale for military

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[175] *antimetabole / Etymology of antimetabole by etymonline*. (n.d.). Etymonline. https://www.etymonline.com/word/antimetabole

action, and concluding with a call for international support. Bush emphasized the gravity of the situation and the need for decisive action (*dispositio*). By presenting a case for military intervention in Iraq, citing the need to remove Saddam Hussein from power (*inventio*), he appealed to *logos*. However, as the language needed to be forceful and persuasive (*elocutio*) with the aim of legitimizing the administration's decision to go to war, the primary appeal of the oration was actually to *pathos*, since usually the emotional appeals resonate more with the audience and, in this way, might produce the outcome desired more effectively.

The predominant semantical devices regarding this oration are anaphors and metaphors. The anaphora can be found in the repetition of the name Saddam Hussein, usually always associated with negative descriptions, highlighting the focus of the address and reinforcing the case against the Iraqi regime. The most important metaphor noteworthy of mentioning revolved around the accusations on behalf of the presidential administration of development of WMDs in Iraq and Hussein's intention to not disarm, alongside the alleged associations of his regime to al-Qaeda, depicted in the speech as "the shadow of a threat"[176]. By framing the situation in terms of looming danger, he sought to evoke a sense of imminent threat instead, and justify the new National Security Strategy of preemptive action against Iraq.

2.4 THE RHETORIC SURROUNDING THE 2003 INVASION OF IRAQ

The last part of the previous section provided a glimpse into the crucial issue surrounding the Iraq war. This U.S. invasion is noteworthy of a whole differentiated section since not only different types of rhetoric were employed in order to gather support, but also an actual act of deception towards the American people and the international community. What is important to remember is that while effective rhetoric cannot be underestimated in its power to persuade, it is not always a bad thing. However, if accompanied by non-proved accusations/assumptions it may become destructive and cause a whole different set of problems.

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[176] *President Bush Addresses the Nation*. (2003, March 19). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/iraq/news/20030319-17.html

The predominant rhetoric employed concerned the aforementioned 'us' v. 'them' dichotomy, meaning a positive 'us' (the Western civilization) and a negative 'them' (the Islamic world). It automatically escalates into a 'good' v. 'evil' narrative, as can be seen clearly in the president's address to the State of the Union back in 2002 – the "axis of evil" speech, the one that anticipated Bush's intention to broaden the scope of the War on Terror – Any action carried out in the name of good, regardless of how damaging, is justified on the grounds that it is combating evil, according to this dualistic logic that portrays "us" as the forces of good and the other as the wicked one. This discussion becomes nearly apocalyptic since, in order for good to rule, evil must be completely vanquished and removed from the planet, not only battled piece by piece or incrementally.[177]

In order to understand better this dichotomy, it is crucial to mention the notion of retrospective responsibility in International Relations. Retrospective responsibility naturally leads to assigning blame and pointing fingers[178], which is a perfect fit with the topic of this section. To put it another way, state actors deliberately create the concept of responsibility in contentious international affairs in order to justify their positions and actions toward or against other parties.

Theoretically, an ideological structure can be used to uncover the discursive development of the dichotomy of the positive 'us' and the negative 'them'[179]:

- Express/emphasize the positive about Us;

- Express/emphasize the negative about Them;

- Suppress/de-emphasize the positive about Them;

- Suppress/de-emphasize the negative about Us.

[177] Kellner, D. (2004). 9/11, spectacles of terror, and media manipulation: A critique of Jihadist and Bush media politics. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *1*(1), 41–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405900410001674515

[178] Zhao, X. (2021, May 25). *Understanding the 'Us Vs Them' Division Through the Notion of Responsibility*. E-International Relations. https://www.e-ir.info/2021/05/25/understanding-the-us-vs-them-division-through-the-notion-of-responsibility/

[179] Zhao, X. (2021, May 25). *Understanding the 'Us Vs Them' Division Through the Notion of Responsibility*. E-International Relations. https://www.e-ir.info/2021/05/25/understanding-the-us-vs-them-division-through-the-notion-of-responsibility/

The dominant aspects of the structure in the case study of this section are the first two, however, the other two simply come as their direct consequence. In the realm of expressing positive information about 'us', the Bush administration revealed itself as a professional. As can be seen in all the speeches analyzed in the previous paragraphs, American exceptionalism, heroism, values and ideals are always praised and reminded, almost like a habit. This constant message serves also in the realm of the fourth aspect of the ideological structure aforementioned (i.e. suppressing negative information about 'us'), due to the fact that a constant reminder of only the good, will usually make it easier to forget the bad and vice versa.

The same impetus used to emphasize the positive aspects (of the 'us') was employed with regard to expressing the negative information about 'them'. In this case, a more in-depth contextualization is needed. The whole narrative of the dichotomy in question comes from an inevitable clash between the two civilizations mentioned above, due to their differences on every level. For instance, this construct of "Muslim as a threat" can be traced back to the time of the Holy Crusades, the war campaigns of European Christians to win back the city of Jerusalem from the Muslim population[180] – hence, it is not a coincidence that a depiction used by president Bush for the War on Terror was actually 'crusade'.

Furthermore, the Palestinian-American literary theorist Edward Said, in his book "Orientalism" (1978), critically examines the Western academic and cultural representations of the East, which he argues are often biased, and serve the interests of Western colonial powers. His central thesis is that there is a distinction between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'[181] (from which the dichotomy aforementioned potentially came into existence), and that Western scholars have constructed a distorted image of the 'Orient' as primitive, and inferior to the West. He explores the historical origins of Orientalist discourse, linking it to the European colonial expansion of the 18th and 19th centuries, during which Western powers asserted control over Eastern societies and cultures. Said contends that Orientalism extends beyond academia, functioning as a type

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[180] *How anti-Muslim rhetoric drives the imperialist "Global War on Terror" - Bridge Initiative*. (2019, January 2). Bridge Initiative. https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/how-anti-muslim-rhetoric-drives-the-imperialist-global-war-on-terror/

[181] Said, E. (1979, October). *Orientalism* [PDF]. Vintage Books Random House New York.

of cultural imperialism that perpetuates stereotypes and sustains power imbalances between the West and the East.

Nevertheless, when did this type of thinking reach the U.S.? When the waning of the two most powerful colonial countries – Britain and France – occurred[182] and the rise of the United States as a superpower took form, more specifically, after 1945; and with the never ending issue of the establishment of the Jewish population in the Palestinian territory. Yet, what is crucial to understand is that while the concept of Orientalism mentioned above referred to the East in general, after 9/11 a "Neo-Orientalism"[183] or the 20th century Orientalism came into being, according to which the Arab world (or the Middle East) becomes the central focus.

An era's political and cultural output highlights the ways in which historical settings may affect how meanings are created – neo-Orientalism is therefore associated with the response that followed the terrorist attacks back in 2001. What is central in this thesis is that the Middle East and the traditional Orientalist discourse, with its previously noted binary divide of 'us' and 'them', were brought about by 9/11 and the War on Terror.

American Neo-Orientalist assumptions presume that Islam is a threat to their way of life and, as the former U.S. Secretary of State, Lawrence Eagleburger, put it: *"there is only one way to begin to deal with people like this, and that is you have to kill some of them even if they are not immediately directly involved in this thing."*[184] Predictably, these words basically seem custom-made for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As already explained in detail in Chapter 1, what led the American people to support Iraq's entanglement in the War on Terror (at least at first) were two specific accusations made by the Bush administration towards Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Both claims revealed to be ill-founded, but only after the initiation of the war:

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[182] Little, D. (2009). American Orientalism (3rd ed.). The University of North Carolina Press. https://www.perlego.com/book/538201/american-orientalism-the-united-states-and-the-middle-east-since-1945-pdf

[183] Mubarak Altwaiji. (2014). Neo-Orientalism and the Neo-Imperialism Thesis: Post-9/11 US and Arab World Relationship. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, *36*(4), 313–323. https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.36.4.0313

[184] *CNN.com* - *Transcripts*. (2001, February 7). http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0109/11/bn.59.html

1) Saddam Hussein in possession of WMDs;

2) Iraq's involvement in the September 11 attacks with al-Qaeda.

While on a domestic level this strategy of emphasizing the good of 'us' and the bad of 'them' may have sufficed to garner support (always at first), on an international one a tad more effort was needed, as seen in the skepticism of international leaders around the world. In this instance Bush's move was to persuade the UN Security Council in 2003 on the case he had built with regard to the potential threat that could have been Iraq if no one had taken the matter in their own hands.

To do so, he appealed to the prestigious status and formidable reputation of his Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and confided in the fact that, if the same depiction of Hussein's Iraq and the case for war were made from his renowned persona, the whole narrative would have come out as more convincing. However, as Powell himself admitted many years later on a PBS documentary titled "America After 9/11" that aired in 2021: *"...he selected me, and I think he thought I had credibility to deliver a speech and it would be believable (...) I was a salesman that day to present a product."*[185]

President Bush's campaign for war against Iraq gained momentum in the late 2002, strategically avoiding an earlier launch, as White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card succinctly put it: *"From a market point of view, you do not introduce new products in August."*[186] This delay allowed for the consolidation of rhetoric and justification. The Bush administration contended that U.S. action was sanctioned by international law due to Iraq's alleged violations of UN Security Council resolutions aimed at dismantling its WMD program[187]. Thus, alongside the previously mentioned cultural arguments, a new narrative of fear was crafted to galvanize support for war.

He underscored the urgency of intervention by invoking Iraq's previous pledges to disarm after the Gulf War and warning of the consequences of unchecked

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[185]   *America   After   9/11*.   (2023,   January   19).   FRONTLINE. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/america-after-9-11/transcript/

[186] Now, D. (n.d.). *Card: "From a marketing point of view, you don't introduce new products in August."* Democracy   Now! https://www.democracynow.org/2002/9/9/headlines/card_from_a_marketing_point_of_view_you_dont_introduce_new_products_in_august

[187]   DiMaggio,   A.   (2015).   *Selling   War,   Selling   Hope*.   SUNY   Press. https://www.perlego.com/book/2674465

proliferation: *"In 1991, the Iraqi regime agreed to destroy and cease developing all weapons of mass destruction... Iraq has broken every aspect of this fundamental pledge."[188]* Additionally, in his Cincinnati address in October 2002, Bush asserted, *"If we know Saddam Hussein has dangerous weapons today – and we do – does it make any sense for the world to wait and confront him as he grows even stronger and develops more dangerous weapons?"[189]*

Critical to the president's case was the argument that the absence of evidence should itself be considered evidence of an imminent threat[190]. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice encapsulated this sentiment with her infamous phrase: *"There will always be some uncertainty... but we do not want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."[191]* This assertion set a troubling precedent, allowing leaders to justify war based on speculative threats rather than concrete evidence, eroding the standard of transparency in political discourse.

The post-9/11 Western portrayal and interpretation of the Islamic world can be found in the terrorist stigma which usually labels extremists, but sometimes gives the floor to a generalization of Muslims; in the concept of foreignness (or un-Americanism) which does not refer to issue of citizenship but connotes anything that might threaten the American lifestyle[192]; and also in a specific description of Arab mentality: *"The Arabs so far have demonstrated an incapacity for disciplined and abiding unity (...) They show lack of coordination and harmony in organization and function, nor have they revealed an ability for cooperation. Any collective action for common benefit or mutual profit is alien to them."[193]* – All three become the basis for mobilization against

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[188] *Saddam Hussein's regime is a grave and gathering danger*. (2021, June 29). Policy Options. https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/disarming-iraq/saddam-husseins-regime-is-a-grave-and-gathering-danger/

[189] *President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat*. (2002, October 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html

[190] DiMaggio, A. (2015). *Selling War, Selling Hope*. SUNY Press. https://www.perlego.com/book/2674465

[191] Cnn, B. W. B. (2003, January 10). *CNN.com - Search for the "smoking gun" - Jan. 10, 2003*. https://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/01/10/wbr.smoking.gun/

[192] Gross, O., & Aolain, F. (2014). The rhetoric of war: words, conflict, and categorization post-9/11. Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy, 24(2), 241-290.

[193] Said, E. (1979, October). *Orientalism* [PDF]. Vintage Books Random House New York.

a common and identified "enemy".

As already clear in the previous paragraphs, the strategic deployment of language in political discourse is a potent tool for shaping public perception and rallying support for particular agendas. Terms such as 'crisis', 'emergency', or 'war' are not neutral descriptors but deliberate choices full of political significance. When a situation is characterized as a 'crisis' or 'emergency', rather than merely a 'problem', it not only signals a sense of urgency but also implies a need for decisive action[194]. Similarly, labeling a situation as a 'war' invokes notions of conflict, threat, and national security, effectively heralding instability and heightening public anxieties.

This deliberate framing of issues as crises or wars serves to mobilize public opinion and garner support for whatever actions are deemed necessary by those in power. Leaders, cognizant of people's yearning for security and protection, often exploit these perceptions of threat to consolidate their authority. By amplifying or exaggerating perceived dangers (just like in the Iraq case), leaders construct narratives that justify extraordinary measures and erode democratic norms, all in the name of safeguarding national security.

The term 'war' holds particular rhetorical power, evoking visceral emotions such as fear or hysteria. These emotions, when stoked by political leaders and amplified through media coverage, profoundly influence public perceptions of risk and security. Fear, in particular, is highly contagious, spreading rapidly through emotional contagion and intensifying individuals' reactions to perceived threats.

Moreover, individuals are inclined to conform their opinions to align with the dominant views within their social circles, especially when confronted with uncertainty or ambiguity. In times of crisis or war, the need for clarity and certainty becomes paramount, leading individuals to rely on the judgments of perceived experts or authority figures. This dynamic further reinforces the influence of informational cascades[195], wherein individuals defer to the perceived wisdom of others, often to the detriment of independent critical thinking. Political leaders adeptly manipulate these

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[194] Gross, O., & Aolain, F. (2014). The rhetoric of war: words, conflict, and categorization post-9/11. Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy, 24(2), 241-290.

[195] Gross, O., & Aolain, F. (2014). The rhetoric of war: words, conflict, and categorization post-9/11. Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy, 24(2), 241-290.

cascades to control public discourse and advance their policy agendas. By framing issues in terms of war or crisis, leaders not only shape public perceptions of risk but also mold the broader narrative surrounding national security and governance.

In conclusion, what have been the consequences of the act of deception carried out by the Bush administration combined with the strategic rhetoric of fear and the 'us-them' binary distinction?

- Loss of credibility – the failure to uncover weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq and the debunking of alleged ties between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda undermined the credibility of the Bush administration both domestically and internationally. This revelation called into question the accuracy and integrity of the intelligence used to justify the invasion, leading to widespread skepticism about the government's motives and actions;

- Erosion of public trust – the deceit surrounding the justification for the Iraq war eroded public trust in government institutions and political leaders. Citizens felt betrayed by their leaders who had promoted false narratives to justify military intervention. This erosion of trust extended beyond the immediate issue of Iraq and contributed to a broader sense of disillusionment with the political establishment;

- Global disillusionment – the controversy surrounding the 2003 invasion strained diplomatic relations between the United States and its allies, as well as with other nations opposed to the invasion. The revelation of faulty intelligence and deception by the U.S. government undermined confidence in American leadership and raised concerns about the reliability of intelligence sharing and international cooperation;

- Instability inside the region – the destabilizing effects of the conflict reverberated beyond the borders of Iraq, contributing to regional instability and exacerbating existing conflicts in the Middle East. The power vacuum created by the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime gave rise to violence, insurgency, and the emergence of extremist groups like ISIS, further destabilizing the region and posing long-term security challenges;

- Internal instability – the prolonged conflict fueled social and political tensions within the United States, and resulted in significant human and financial costs. Thousands of lives were lost, both among coalition forces and Iraqi civilians, and many more were injured or displaced.

2.5 THE MEDIA & NEWSPAPERS: THE SOUNDING BOARD OF THE RHETORIC SURROUNDING 9/11 ISSUES

In the age of non-stop news cycles, information inundates us from all directions, accessible 24/7 through a multitude of print, television, and online platforms. However, amidst this constant barrage, a growing chorus of voices laments the gradual erosion of traditional journalistic values in favor of an entertainment-driven approach.

Many argue that the media landscape, once anchored by principles of investigative rigor, educational depth, and objective reporting, has succumbed to the allure of entertainment.[196] In this paradigm, captivating headlines and sensational stories often take precedence over the pursuit of truth and the dissemination of unbiased information. As a consequence, concerns arise about the integrity of news reporting and its role in shaping public discourse.

The framework delineated in this section revolves around two key aspects:

1. News as the primary medium for information and public discourse on 9/11 issues;

2. News as a social construct and public drama.

News served as the primary conduit for information dissemination and the focal point for the discourse surrounding the events of 9/11. Editors, producers, reporters, and writers wield significant influence in determining which events or topics merit coverage, how they are framed, and the allocation of resources. While news is ostensibly a compilation of facts, images, and commentary, the critical emphasis lies in how these elements are presented[197]. They become 'newsworthy' by virtue of their

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[196] Monahan, B. (2010). *The Shock of the News*. NYU Press. https://www.perlego.com/book/719521

[197] Monahan, B. (2010). *The Shock of the News*. NYU Press. https://www.perlego.com/book/719521

selection and presentation.

The news is not merely a reflection of objective reality but is, in fact, a social construct. Journalists construct narratives and employ symbols not only to shape public perceptions of reality but also to actively create that reality. For instance, in the United States, the news media typically adhere to a consensus-driven portrayal of American society, culture, and the nation's role in the global geopolitical landscape; and regarding matters of national security, the U.S. press often aligns with the government's agenda, with the president assuming a central role. This symbiotic relationship between the media and government officials, known as indexing[198], means that executive officials, particularly those in close proximity to the president, wield significant influence during times of crisis or breaking news. As a result, the president may both benefit from and be scrutinized by the relentless media coverage.

9/11 stands as a quintessential example of public drama, a genre characterized by its dramatic elements that evoke strong emotions. Like a well-crafted movie, public drama weaves together appealing characters, a captivating plot, striking settings, and moral assessments. Notably, this genre finds its primary expression in television production and possesses a rare quality: durability[199]. Public dramas tend to linger in the public consciousness far longer than other forms of news, often becoming entrenched in popular discourse and culture, transcending their initial media context.

The aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks vividly illustrates the enduring power of public drama. The coverage of 9/11 transformed the tragic events into a narrative filled with crucial characters – the victims and the perpetrators – profound tragedy, exemplified by the loss of life, acts of heroism displayed by firefighters and first responders, and gripping images such as the haunting sight of the World Trade Center towers engulfed in flames and their subsequent collapse. At the time, it seemed inconceivable that any event could command more media attention than 9/11.

"Certainly I can tell you that when we were standing just about ... six, seven, eight blocks north of the World Trade Center this morning when that tower went down and the smoke literally

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[198] Brown, K. A. (2019, March 21). *9/11 and the American Press*. Oxford University Press eBooks. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190879402.003.0002

[199] Monahan, B. (2010). *The Shock of the News*. NYU Press. https://www.perlego.com/book/719521

billowed the dust up the avenue. It was precisely like the movies that we have seen. Much of this is like the movies. It is very, very hard. As a reporter, you know that the first thing to do is reach for something to make a comparison to and, frankly, through much of this it is almost impossible to find things that are a satisfactory comparison.”[200](NBC coverage, September 11)

On that dreadful autumn morning, the entire nation was jolted out of its routine as all eyes turned to the unfolding tragedy. Reporters based in Washington DC and New York found themselves thrust into the role of both war correspondents and counselors to a nation grappling with profound shock. Within a day of the attacks, the front pages of 190 U.S. newspapers prominently featured the devastation and its aftermath, while television emerged as a crucial lifeline to real-time updates[201].

Fig. 1 Newspapers front page headlines on September 11, 2001[202]

According to the Pew Research Center, a staggering two-thirds of the American public were glued to news coverage in the wake of the attacks. The overwhelming majority

[200] Monahan, B. (2010). *The Shock of the News*. NYU Press. https://www.perlego.com/book/719521

[201] Brown, K. A. (2019, March 21). *9/11 and the American Press*. Oxford University Press eBooks. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190879402.003.0002

[202] Images retrieved from: https://www.businessinsider.com/september-11-911-newspaper-headlines-2018-9; https://ca.finance.yahoo.com/news/americas-darkest-day-see-newspaper-131900273.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAKfgvRp0xA86E-IfwqOaVwtdvow_Y9ozJMo9FcqZiuplq8PLXZbOyfnFhEqiVoj-QusOK1N6I2xeKdq_-WKsoaTIRRS3I1W-NWu6O7ZwgsBrR3I2129uSuDdoZPkMcJZMPcwUPb1GnfzZMrGeTvMqR08y-LHhcTq3MgabyIlC7ve; https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2021/20-front-pages-that-ran-after-9-11/.

(75%) were deeply shaken by the information they encountered through various media channels. In a display of collective vigilance, 81% of Americans kept their televisions or radios on for continuous updates, while 46% intensified their scrutiny of newspapers for more detailed insights into the unfolding events[203].

> *"It is inescapable to note that the very first place nearly every member of the public turned was to the news media."[204]*

In this climate of confusion, fear and hysteria, the only stability and sense of security could only come from the idea of a great, powerful and fearless leader (the president) able to guide the people out of the darkness. In this specific context, the U.S. media played the role of the sounding board of the presidential administration's point of view on the matter and, as a result, different types of propaganda and disinformation started to dominate the picture. This dominance was indeed facilitated by the 21st century technology, but it is important to outline the fact that neither propaganda, nor disinformation are new occurrences in the political landscape, they have been used many times before in the past – it is enough to think about Nazi Germany, fascist Italy or the Soviet Union in the first half of the 20th century.

Nevertheless, what is the difference between them? Propaganda can be thought of as a strategic tool used by certain individuals or groups, often with political motives, to influence people's beliefs and opinions – a deliberate attempt to convince others to adopt a particular perspective while disregarding alternative viewpoints. This persuasion is often achieved through the skillful use of images, catchy slogans, and symbolic messages that appeal to emotions and preconceived notions[205]. In simpler terms, it is like a planned campaign to make people think a certain way, using tactics that play on their feelings and biases, ultimately aiming to make them embrace a particular

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[203] Brown, K. A. (2019, March 21). *9/11 and the American Press*. Oxford University Press eBooks. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190879402.003.0002

[204] *Running Toward Danger: How the News Media Performed on 9-11 and Beyond*. (2012, April 29). Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/events/running-toward-danger-how-the-news-media-performed-on-9-11-and-beyond/

[205] Waśko-Owsiejczuk, E. (2020). Disinformation and Fear Propaganda as Justification for the War on Terror During George W. Bush's Presidency. In G. Terzis, D. Kloza, E. Kużelewska, & D. Trottier (Eds.), *Disinformation and Digital Media as a Challenge for Democracy* (pp. 201–216). Chapter, Intersentia.

viewpoint as their own.

Applying this to the case study at hand, it can be stated that the Bush administration, taking advantage of the situation, appealed to a propaganda of fear and paranoia – using the news media as a tool – in order to expand the power of the executive, make some changes in the domestic security department (which led to limiting many civil liberties in the name of security) and to achieve public support for initiating the infamous War on Terror. Not to mention a kind of continuous propaganda of freedom, "good v. evil" and "us v. them" which contributed to mold the American public's mind.

"In the weeks following 9/11 I covered the heroic efforts on Ground Zero and saw the workers standing on the pile (...) I also remember the country coming together. Firefighters and police officers traveled together to lend a hand (...) Brave soldiers went to Afghanistan to hunt down the terrorists who attacked our country. We were united (...) For a while there were not two realities or two Americas (...) We knew what needed to be done (...) Our lives had changed. There were small sacrifices for most of us. We had to accept additional security..." (journalist Jim Acosta on 9/11, CNN coverage)[206]

On the other hand, disinformation is like a sophisticated strategy aimed at making someone believe something untrue, leading them to act in a specific way that benefits the person spreading the disinformation. It is not just about telling a simple lie, but about deliberately deceiving someone by mixing true information with one crucial false piece[207]. This false information is strategically chosen to trigger the desired response. One need only think of it as a well-planned campaign with professional preparation and organization, often involving the use of mass media. The goal is to change the beliefs of a large audience, both consciously and subconsciously. This involves carefully crafting a narrative, selecting which truths to mix with lies, and employing tactics like denying facts, twisting the truth, or altering details. In this case, the strategy was applied to the legitimization of the war with Iraq and the subsequent overthrown of Saddam Hussein's

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[206] C. (2021, September 11). *Jim Acosta chokes up reflecting on 9/11*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEKSA7UrVA0

[207] Waśko-Owsiejczuk, E. (2020). Disinformation and Fear Propaganda as Justification for the War on Terror During George W. Bush's Presidency. In G. Terzis, D. Kloza, E. Kużelewska, & D. Trottier (Eds.), *Disinformation and Digital Media as a Challenge for Democracy* (pp. 201–216). Chapter, Intersentia.

regime in the region.

The false pieces of information lied in the two assumptions made about his regime and intentions towards the Western world, which were designed not to leave much choice to the American population and the international community.

"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."[208]

In essence, the role of media, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, cannot be overstated. It served as both a primary source of information and a platform for shaping public discourse. Through the lens of propaganda and disinformation, this section has examined how the media can be manipulated to influence public opinion and policy decisions, often at the expense of truth and objectivity.

The events following 9/11 underscore the profound impact of media framing and narrative construction on societal perceptions and governmental actions. By understanding the mechanisms through which propaganda and disinformation operate, insight into the complexities of modern media landscapes and the challenges they pose to democratic governance and public accountability can be gained. Coming to the conclusion that it is imperative for media consumers to critically evaluate the information presented to them and for journalists to uphold ethical standards of reporting. Only through a commitment to truth, transparency, and integrity can the media fulfill its vital role as a guardian of democracy and an advocate for informed public discourse.

Conclusion

Rhetoric, an ancient Greek derivative, is the use of words in a convincing manner to make people do something or believe in something that may be important for their personal objectives. Although it might appear less important presently due to

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[208] *President Declares "Freedom at War with Fear."* (2001, September 20). https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

technology and increase in scientific studies, rhetoric still plays a key role in political communication because it presents a reflection of how language persuades different audiences within various contexts. Modern rhetoric is a dynamic tool still used today, despite being adapted to fit new technology and changed social practices; it also shapes ideologies and participates in evolving discourses. This will help one navigate through complex communication environments effectively and making their point of view known to others.

Upon analyzing George W. Bush's rhetoric after September 11th 2001, it reveals that he deliberately and strategically used historical and religious symbols. A close analysis of some speeches indicates a consistent pattern of invoking historical narratives of America on resilience, unity, and exceptionalism. Besides, his use of religious symbols was aimed at moralizing terrorism response by framing it as a righteous struggle against evil.

Conversely, if one examines the speeches through semantic lenses, employing canons such as *inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio*; one would notice how arguments were constructed and arranged to capture listeners' emotions, values and logic. President Bush intentionally used various figures of speech like anaphora, metaphors, antithesis, antimetabole and hyperbole to restate main points and make them more persuasive. Each speech was tailored to its specific context and audience, whether it was aimed at comforting and uniting the American people, rallying international support for the War on Terror, or justifying military intervention in Iraq. Moreover, through the skillful use of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*, Bush sought to establish his credibility as a leader, present logical arguments for his policies, and evoke strong emotional responses from the audience.

The conclusion of the discourse surrounding the 2003 invasion of Iraq in section 2.4, highlights a multitude of consequences stemming from the strategic rhetoric employed by the Bush administration, coupled with acts of deception and the framing of a binary "us v. them" narrative. The loss of credibility and erosion of public trust with the failure to uncover weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and the debunking of alleged ties between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda. Citizens felt betrayed by their leaders who had promoted false narratives to justify military intervention. This erosion of trust extended beyond the immediate issue of Iraq and contributed to a broader sense

of global disillusionment with the political establishment. The destabilizing effects of the conflict contributed to regional instability and exacerbating existing conflicts in the Middle East, together with the fueling of social and political tensions on a domestic level.

Finally, the media's portrayal of the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath reveals the intricate relationship between information dissemination, public perception, and governmental agendas. Through the lenses of propaganda and disinformation, it is evident how the media can be both a conduit for truth and a tool for manipulation. The coverage of 9/11 transformed the tragedy into a narrative filled with heroes, villains, and dramatic tension, captivating audiences and shaping collective memory. However, amidst the chaos and confusion, the media also became a battleground of competing narratives, where truth often became obscured by political agendas and sensationalism.

CONCLUSION

In terms of technique, this work has combined qualitative approaches through the analysis of media interactions and speeches. The patterns, strategies, and effects of rhetoric in the field of international relations were found by this thesis because studying the persuasive power of language offers important insights into power dynamics, conflict resolution, identity development, and trust-building. It makes it possible to navigate the complexities of international policy, gain a deeper understanding of domestic and international affairs, and evaluate the sincerity and dependability of political leaders' commitments, declarations, and promises – all of which are essential for productive collaboration and diplomacy.

While Chapter 1 has provided, as much as possible, a general briefing of the history of the United States as a country until the 20th century, and then delved into a reconstruction of the events of 2001, explained who the perpetrators were and dealt with the U.S. retaliation in the Middle Eastern region; the second chapter is the one that really demonstrates what has been written above. To answer the foundational question of this thesis, the protraction of this binary narratives of good v. evil, freedom v. terror, us v. them, rhetoric of fear and American exceptionalism ended up masquerading other factors, perhaps the real ones, that influenced the initiation of the GWOT: strategic considerations, geopolitical interests, and pre-existing policy agendas. Moreover, it did not come without consequences:

- Erosion of public trust in the government itself;

- International and domestic instability;

- Global disillusionment towards the United States as a leading country on an international scale.

It explored in detail how political and media discourses evoked images of threat and fear, delineating an often indistinct but ever-present enemy ready to justify extraordinary measures and military interventions. The investigation showed how, through the use of war metaphors, euphemisms and specific narrative frames, it was possible to create a climate of urgency and necessity that made actions otherwise difficult to justify acceptable, if not inevitable. The post-9/11 rhetoric also had the

power to define identities: those of "friends" and "enemies," "patriots" and "traitors." This polarization facilitated the mobilization of public support, but it also had profound and lasting repercussions for social cohesion and perceptions of individual security and freedom.

The era stands as a stark reminder of the transformative power of rhetoric in shaping the trajectory of global politics and security policies. In the wake of the terrorist attacks, the world witnessed a proliferation of discourses that sought to frame the response to terrorism in starkly moralistic terms, portraying it as a battle between good and evil, civilization and barbarism. Through the strategic deployment of language, political leaders, policymakers, and media outlets sought to galvanize public support for military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, presenting them as necessary and fair responses to the threat of terrorism.

The creation of narratives that presented military action as both a pragmatic need and a moral duty in the quest of security and justice was crucial to this legitimization process. These interventions were given a sense of moral clarity and noble purpose by the use of emotive vocabulary, and their rivals were portrayed as existential dangers that needed to be defeated at all costs. In this sense, language was weaponized to legitimize acts of aggression and violence on a worldwide scale in addition to influencing public opinion.

Nonetheless, as this thesis has attempted to show, rhetorical power is not unqualified nor impervious to criticism. There had been a proliferation of discourses, but also a rise to contentious discussions and dissident voices that questioned the dominant narratives of intervention and conflict. A wide range of voices that questioned the strategic and moral grounds for military operations and drew attention to their unintended repercussions and human costs developed, from critical media analysis to anti-war rallies.

Furthermore, the way that public opinion changes in reaction to changing geopolitical circumstances highlights how flexible and unpredictable rhetorical persuasion is by nature. In light of new information and evolving conditions, what were formerly thought to be self-evident facts may need to be reinterpreted and reevaluated. Therefore, while rhetoric has the power to influence public opinion and alter perceptions in the short term, its long-term effects depend on a wide range of variables,

such as changing discursive formations, historical context, and socio-political dynamics.

However, the study was not limited to a simple critique. It also sought to comprehend the dynamics through which this rhetoric has evolved and how it can be understood and deconstructed. In this sense, the research aspires to provide analytical tools useful not only for understanding the past, but also for addressing the challenges of the present and future.

Nowadays, the sophisticated use of rhetoric can be seen through traditional media and social networks, where words can travel at unprecedented speeds and reach a global audience in a matter of moments. Rhetoric continues to be used to manipulate public opinion, polarize societies, and influence political decisions on an international scale. The most important lesson to be learned from history is the need to develop a critical awareness regarding the use of words. It is crucial to recognize when rhetoric is used to manipulate, divide or deceive. The need to be vigilant and able to distinguish between truth and propaganda, between informed discourse and emotional manipulation must be recognized.

With a view to build a more resilient and informed society, it is important to educate the younger generation to understand and analyze rhetoric in all its forms. Only through increased media literacy and informed criticism there might be hope to mitigate the negative effects of manipulative rhetoric and promote public dialogue based on solid facts and reasoning.

To sum up, this case study provides a moving example of the continued importance of words as weapons in the context of global politics and security. Language has been used as a powerful tool of persuasion and justification in places of power as well as on the streets of cities all over the world, influencing the direction of military interventions and the destiny of whole nations. When considering the historical legacies, it is pivotal to be aware of the ways in which language may be employed to legitimize injustice and violence while also appreciating the ability of dissent and critical discourse to subvert established narratives and imagine different possibilities.

Political rhetoric, with its ability to influence hearts and minds, represents a titanic force in international relations. Ultimately, the power of political rhetoric in international relations also determines the fate of the people, demonstrating that words, if well-orchestrated, can be far more powerful weapons than any army.

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