

WAR OF WORDS

Language, Politics and 9/11

SANDRA SILBERSTEIN



London and New York

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For Doug and Maia

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Acknowledgments

I wish there had been no occasion for this book. When Routledge's Louisa Semlyen approached me in the summer of 2001 to write on George W. Bush, I told her nothing was happening. But I could have written a perfectly nice book on the political rhetoric of the early Bush administration. After the world changed on September 11, Louisa understood when I could think and write about nothing else. I am indebted and most grateful for Louisa's understanding and for the persistent and gentle prodding that assured the timely completion of this work.

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Introduction

This book is about language, about the ways language is deployed in times of national crisis. In the aftermath of the events of September 11, through public rhetoric, an act of terror became a war; the Bush presidency was ratified; New York became America's city, with Rudy Giuliani as "mayor of the world." Patriotism became consumerism, dissent was discouraged, and Americans became students, newly schooled in strategic geography and Islam. Perhaps most importantly, public language (re)created a national identity.

I am an applied linguist by training and inclination. I study language as it is used in the world. And this is naturally the perspective I bring to the events of September 11. As that day began, planes flew into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Thereafter, words helped many things happen. That event was first termed an act of "terror" and then became an act of "war." "Acts of war" are typically reciprocated with other "acts of war"—but war against whom? To ask such questions is to take a critical linguistic lens to 9/11, to ask how language can be employed to render national policy common sense.

For me, these have not always been easy questions to ask, particularly in the context of tragedy. New York is my city of origin. I came of age on its streets, in its schools, in its libraries and parks. New York is a hometown, inspiring all the affections and allegiances accorded any birthplace around the globe. For me, it is important to honor the horror and loss of 9/11. Yet, New York is also a financial and cultural mecca, presumably attacked for that identity on September 11, 2001. One can examine the

latter incarnation of the city without losing sight of the former; it is possible to mourn the losses of September 11 and still ask questions about it. This book explores the use of language in developing the public understanding of, and response to, the events that surrounded 9/11.

The linguistic trajectory from the World Trade Center and the Pentagon began with silence. No state announced responsibility for the events of September 11. But America was nonetheless assured that it had an “enemy,”—a “faceless enemy” that personified “evil.” And against that evil, America came to wage a “new kind of war.” The first step in that war, the first target, was Afghanistan. Because Afghanistan “harbored” the “faceless enemy,” bombing of Afghanistan began on October 7, 2001.

This is the short version of the story. But much had to happen in what became known as “the homeland” before the bombing could be sanctioned at home. Through emblems of patriotism, the media endorsed, and indeed helped produce, “America’s New War.” Through public rhetoric, a rookie president, America’s first appointed president, became popularly accepted as America’s military commander in chief and America’s chaplain. The nation was (re)created and united, with single purpose. The targets of the attacks were established—Western democracy, “our very way of life”—and one of the physical targets, New York, became America’s city. Finally, dissent was discouraged. All of this occurred before a single bomb was dropped on Afghanistan, and all of this happened through words. How this process developed is the focus of this book.

Of course, political rhetoric is designed to be deployed in the service of public policy. As the War on Terrorism was formulated, familiar images and themes contributed to the consolidation of support for the Bush administration and for its prosecution of a war in Afghanistan. This is not to say that Americans are simply dupes of governmental and media propaganda. But increasingly the media produce an immersion in carefully crafted rhetoric and imagery. It is worth the effort to explore the interaction of the complex cultural strains that ultimately aided in building a consensus around war.

All cultures have within them multiple (often conflicting) discourses. In America we find strains of deep tolerance and multiculturalism; we also find racism and xenophobia. Public rhetoric can access these various strains, using them as raw material to (re)create a national perspective around notions that—because of their cultural resonance—are widely

experienced as “common sense.” In the case of the War on Terrorism, xenophobia could be used to create an intolerant “other” who supported attacks on our secular democracy. Once an “enemy” is positioned as “evil,” fewer citizens are moved to inquire about “collateral damage,” the precise situation for civilians “on the ground.” To this day, amidst the enormous amount of discourse around the successes in Afghanistan, there is very little discussion about the human toll of the war.

The insights revealed by exploration of this rhetorical landscape are not always troubling; they can also be uplifting. Initially I had a cynical view of the deployment of the term *heroism*, as it was applied to anyone who had suffered on 9/11. But, ultimately I came to a different view—that the strain in American discourse that allowed for the broad use of that term came from a hearteningly altruistic ideology. Heroes became those who lost their lives selflessly helping others. There is much in the language of 9/11 to scrutinize and critique. And in the most difficult national moments, this is exactly what must be done. But there are also rhetorical moments that justify hope.

War of Words focuses largely on events in America immediately following the attacks of September 11, 2001. More specifically, it scrutinizes a range of language (visual, oral, written) produced in the wake of 9/11. It does not address the military events in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Rather, it explores the War of Words that made those events possible. Each chapter examines a different aspect of the War of Words through a different analytic lens.

Chapter 1, “From Terror to War: The War on Terrorism”: In the weeks following 9/11, a terrorist attack comes to merit the full response of the U.S. military and the creation of an unprecedented coalition of allies. This chapter addresses the question: How did a response to terror become the War on Terrorism? The goal of this chapter is to detail how the particular road taken—the construction of a nation at war—is aided through the strategic deployment of language. This chapter examines presidential rhetoric.

Chapter 2, “Becoming President” explores another rhetorical turning point: the events of September 14, 2001. On that National Day of Prayer and Remembrance, the president addressed the nation at services in the National Cathedral, then visited “ground zero” in New York City. President Clinton’s chief of staff, Leon Panetta, once observed, “Part of being

president is being the nation's chaplain." This was the (rhetorical) role George W. Bush came to fulfill on that day.

Chapter 3, "From News to Entertainment: Eyewitness Accounts": In the wake of 9/11, the media was alive with survivors' tales—stories that captured horrifying events and the fortitude of those who survived them. Stories, by their nature, locate our very personal experiences within larger cultural norms and expectations. But for the televised narratives of September 11, their larger relevance was heavily constructed by reporters and the visual frames of the news media. Viewers were (re)made American through the televisual displays of the nation. This chapter examines the role of television in creating accounts of September 11 and in constructing post-9/11 identities. The chapter focuses on approaches to studying narrative as it moves from "real time" storytelling to the highly manufactured tales that appeared on news magazines and on a prime-time series. This discussion is the most linguistic in the book.

Chapter 4, "New York Becomes America(n)": Perhaps for the first time since 1790—when it ceased being the federal capital—New York became archetypically American on 9/11. On that day, New York became America. With the exception of scant coverage from the Pentagon (a military target), news coverage emanated from New York. The Twin Towers, a symbol of New York, became the symbol of "The Attack on America." The "innocent civilians" attacked as presumptive Americans were New Yorkers. This chapter explores the rhetorical construction of New York as an American city and Rudy Giuliani as America's mayor.

Chapter 5, "Selling America": Two kinds of campaigns "sold America" post-September 11. One was a manifestation of nation building as it sold America on itself. "I am an American," was probably one of the most successful public service announcements in the history of the republic. The second campaign sold America on consumerism. Both promotions turned on patriotism. One built loyalty to values of tolerance and diversity. The other conflated patriotism and consumerism in a dance of political/economic codependence, resisted (at least initially) by many. The trajectory of these promotional campaigns—from tolerance to spending—is the focus of this chapter.

Chapter 6, "The New McCarthyism": Along with increased patriotism, post-9/11 saw attacks on those who questioned U.S. policy. A provoking

volley was fired by the conservative American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), founded by Lynne Cheney, wife of the Vice President. In November, ACTA published a report listing more than 100 examples of what it claimed was a “blame America first” attitude on America’s campuses. While ACTA tarred campuses as a “weak link,” some on campus found the ACTA report truly sinister. “The New McCarthyism” examines the ACTA campaign and reactions to it. Part of the rhetorical analysis centers on logical fallacies.

Chapter 7, “Schooling America: Lessons on Islam and Geography”: After the attack on America, made in the name of Islam, the media sought to inform an audience admittedly unacquainted with both the religion and a region that is home to more than a billion Muslims. This was not a benign travelogue of cultural and historical highpoints. Rather, instruction focused on the military, political, and economic self-interest of the United States. “Schooling America” focuses on these pedagogical moments.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

A word on transcription is in order. Linguists have their own arcane transcription conventions, which defy traditional punctuation. To make this text accessible to nonlinguists, I elected to use traditional punctuation when transcribing speech. I did, however, use a few linguistic conventions. If one speaker overlapped the talk of another, I used a square bracket “[” to indicate where that overlap began. I chose to maintain speakers’ actual false starts, often indicating these with a hyphen: “word- .” Also maintained are the fillers speakers used in natural conversation, so readers will find *ahs* and *ums* sprinkled throughout. Additionally worth noting is that, for clarity’s sake, some words in example texts are bolded to indicate the basis of claims and analyses. Finally, I took a decision to avoid the use of *sic* throughout the text. In the rush of the moment, many people misspeak, and it seemed uncalled for to indicate each time such an error occurred. I also found the punctuation on the White House and other Web sites somewhat idiosyncratic, but I judged it inappropriate to pepper transcripts of presidential speeches, for example, with *sic*. This book is about the way language is actually used, and I have tried to capture that sense of things in the texts that appear throughout.

1

From Terror to War The War on Terrorism

Presidential power is the power to persuade.

Political scientist Richard Neustadt¹

At 8:45 a.m. EDT on the morning of September 11, 2001, an American Airlines jet flew into the north tower of the World Trade Center. With the collision of a second plane, into the south tower, it became clear that the media was not covering an accident. This was confirmed within the hour as an American Airlines plane flew into the Pentagon and another hijacked flight crashed south of Pittsburgh. CNN banners screamed “Breaking News” above “America Under Attack.” And for several days thereafter, CNN announced the “Attack on America.” But the “attack” quickly became an act of war, this generation’s “Pearl Harbor.” It is not the intent of this chapter or this book to speak to the validity of this analysis. (My cousins, academic historians living in lower Manhattan, found it impossible not to feel themselves in a war—witnessing war crimes against innocent civilians.) Nonetheless, given that other rhetorical and political postures were available, the goal in this discussion is to detail how the particular road taken—the construction of a nation at war—is aided through the strategic deployment of language.

The perspective I will be taking is that language has consequences—that through the use of language, we create and recreate particular worlds of understanding. For this reason, I will sometimes be using the

convention of parentheses when I talk about (re)creating, for example, a unified nation.

Examining presidential rhetoric in the wake of September 11, we see a terrorist attack that comes to merit the full response of the U.S. military and the creation of an unprecedented coalition of allies. This chapter addresses the question, how did a response to terror become the War on Terrorism?

First, a few words on terrorism. Unfortunately for those of us living in this electronic age, terrorism is an act made for television. Terrorism specialist Walter Laqueur notes:

The success of a terrorist operation depends almost entirely on the amount of publicity it receives. This is one of the main reasons for the shift from rural guerrilla to urban terror in the 1960s; for in the cities the terrorist could always count on the presence of journalists and TV cameras and consequently a large audience.²

Terrorism feeds on the news media in a system of mutual survival. Former diplomat David Long notes: “The media’s mission to cover the news and the terrorist’s ability to ‘create’ news have led to a symbiotic relationship between the two, one in which the media not only convey the news, but help the terrorist create it.” Terrorist violence succeeds in the form of “carefully planned theatrical events.”³

Terrorist attacks are a particular challenge to a government that must create the impression that it is able to contain violence and protect its citizens. It must find a balance between appearing ineffectual and infringing on civil liberties.⁴ And it needs to ensure that terrorists don’t dominate the news. This creates a presidency dependent on media exposure for its own power to persuade.

In effect, the media age has transformed the very office of the U.S. presidency. Roderick Hart⁵ characterizes its modern role: “the president is first and foremost a talker.” Prior to the twentieth century, he reports, “presidents rarely spoke at all.” But all that was to change. Between 1945 and 1975, public speeches by U.S. presidents increased almost 500%. And that figure has continued to increase.⁶ Hart again: “presidential speech and action increasingly reflect the opinion that speaking *is* governing.” The power of the presidency rests in its ability to persuade.

And that power and persuasion rests in access to the media and the ability to shape reporting. Even though terrorists create televised events, communications specialist Steven Livingston argues that the ability to shape reporting remains the province of the government:

The power to shape perceptions of violent events and their principal actors (both perpetrators and victims) usually rests not with the terrorists but with government officials. Who the terrorists are in the first place is a question largely determined by these officials. Those who have routine access to the mass media, those to whom reporters turn when the dust settles and the shooting stops, have the ability to shape coverage and perceptions.⁷

Such was the office and the task on 9/11 when George W. Bush addressed the nation. Presidential speeches draw news coverage, and Bush would speak to the nation three times that first day, including a prime-time address. These speeches can be found in the Appendix to this chapter. In addition, there would be four press briefings by the White House and a statement by the press secretary. And, of course, statements by current and former government officials would fill the airwaves.

Bush's first remarks came a scant forty-five minutes after the first plane hit; he spoke for only a minute from Emma Booker Elementary School in Sarasota, Florida.⁸ In a brief statement, Bush described the events with noteworthy precision: "Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center." He also characterized the situation: "a difficult moment for America," "an apparent terrorist attack," and "a national tragedy." America was not yet at war.

In examining the next two sentences, we'll take a close look at the language used, particularly the grammatical choices. These remarks also participate in the rhetorical (re)construction of the presidential Bush. He is in control—grammatically marked as an active agent. In the following quote, note the use of the personal pronoun, *I*, and the use of the active voice as Bush marshals the full resources of the state:

I have spoken to the Vice President, to the Governor of New York, to the Director of the FBI, and have ordered that the full resources of the federal government go to help the victims and their families,

and to conduct a full-scale investigation to hunt down and to find those folks who committed this act.

This phrasing stands in sharp contrast to comments made by Attorney General John Ashcroft later in the day.⁹ His statements are grammatically “passive”: “Crime scenes **have been** established by the federal authorities.” And some statements have no agent: “The full resources of the Department of Justice . . . **are being deployed** to investigate these crimes and to assist survivors and victim families.” In the president’s remarks, he personally had done everything possible to help and protect the citizens.

The president is firm, “Terrorism against our nation will not stand.” In pledging to find “**those folks** who committed this act” he has been both presidential and folksy. As one scholar has observed, “The presidency is still a damned informal monarchy.”¹⁰

Grammatically, the president creates a united nation, under God. “**We’ve** had a **national** tragedy,” he reports. In examining the use of pronouns here, we have what linguist John Wilson calls a “pronominal window into the thinking and attitudes”¹¹ of a political leader. Oftentimes the referent for the pronouns *we* and *you* is ambiguous (as “we’ll” recall from the exhortations of “our” high school teachers to avoid their use!). There is certainly ambiguity in the phrasing by Health and Human Services Secretary Thompson later in the day: “It is now **our** mission to begin the healing from this tragedy.” In contrast, Bush’s “we” is the nation (re)created and united through his remarks: “Terrorism against **our nation** will not stand.” Having constructed the listeners as a nation, Bush ends with a nation under God: “And now if you would join me in a moment of silence. May God bless the victims, their families, and America. Thank you very much.”

With the attack on the Pentagon and the downing of Flight 93—which may have been heading for the White House—those charged with presidential security faced a dilemma. On the one hand, the president had to be kept in secure locations. On the other hand, he needed to be rhetorically visible. The president spoke again at 1:04 p.m. from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana.¹² His first task is reassurance; he begins: “I want to reassure the American people that the full resources of the federal government are working to assist local authorities to save lives and to help the victims

of these attacks.” Once again, notwithstanding the president’s absence from the capital, he is able to confirm that he has marshaled the full resources of the state. He is also able to reassure those for whom talking is governing: “I’ve been in regular contact with the Vice President, the Secretary of Defense, the national security team and my Cabinet.” And that talk has worked in the service of the people’s government: “we have taken the necessary security precautions to continue the functions of **your** government” and in the service of their safety: “We have taken all appropriate security precautions to protect the American people.”

For those listening carefully for clues to planned military actions, there are several key phrases. The first does not seem to put the United States on a war footing: “Make no mistake: The United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts.” Hunting down and punishing could indicate covert actions, leading to, for example, assassination or bringing perpetrators to justice under U.S. or international law. It could also mean formal military action. The next clue comes quickly: “We have been in touch with the leaders of Congress and with world leaders to assure them that we will do whatever is necessary to protect America and Americans.” This phrasing is more ominous. When the president speaks, he governs. And the courtesies of warning allies in advance of attacks may begin to be in place.

The president is firm. Twice he says, “make no mistake.” The second time can also be read in a military context, as he addresses the rhetorically unified nation: “The resolve of **our** great nation is being tested. But make no mistake: We will show the world that we will pass this test.”

The Barksdale statement is similar to the first: It places the president in charge, bringing to the service of the people the resources of the state. But it expands on the single statement made earlier, “Terrorism against our nation will not stand.” In the second brief statement, assurances of resolve are accompanied by assurances of action: “we will do whatever is necessary.”

The president closes as he had previously, on a religious note. Just before indicating that the nation would pass the test, he thanks “the folks” who were mounting the rescue efforts, and offers a prayer for victims and families. Bush ends with “God bless.”

By the evening, we had “the war on terrorism,” announced in the course of a five-minute, prime-time address to the nation.¹³ The president begins by characterizing the attacks. They are no longer “two airplanes [crashing] into the World Trade Center.” Nor are they simply “traged[ies].” Rather, they are attacks on “our way of life.”

Good evening. Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices; secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.

Within a few short lines, much has been accomplished rhetorically. A “fellow citizenry” has been invoked—united within its symbolic territory of a “way of life” and its “freedoms.” To invoke those symbols is to invoke precepts for which, I daresay, most Americans would give their/our lives. To understand how these concepts can be deployed rhetorically, it’s necessary to say a few words about both nation and symbols.

Anthropologist Benedict Anderson¹⁴ defines the nation as “an imagined political community.” It is imagined, he tells us, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Moreover, national boundaries tend to be recent, elastic, and accidental. As a philosophical entity, he argues, nation-states are rather impoverished. Nonetheless, today, all individuals on the planet are born into nations.

Literary scholar Lauren Berlant¹⁵ (1991) explores American nation building. She argues that Americans are “inextricably bound together by America. . . . because we inhabit the political space of the nation.” This space is not merely legal, geographical, genetic, linguistic, or experiential, but “some tangled cluster of all of these.” She calls this political space the “national symbolic”—a place that brings together all the symbols that evoke America. Following Berlant, the rhetorical terrain of September 11 can be thought of as a national symbolic site. Berlant argues that through our linguistic practices we continually (re)create the nation. And one of the goals of the national symbolic is to produce a fantasy of national inte-

gration. In fact, this integration is the utopian promise of the nation. Through national identity, the individual is liberated from solely local affiliations and promised an almost limitless collective identity. But Berlant notes, “people are not naturally ‘the people’ in their local affiliations.”¹⁶ Nations must be (re)made. Media coverage of the Olympics, for example, promises my young daughter collective identity and renews the nation, even (or especially?) when our athletes are “under attack.”

In President Bush’s prime-time speech, those eligible, are (re)made Americans—under attack, in airplanes and offices; moms and dads. America’s symbolic terrain is the site from which this speech is delivered:

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. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.

America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.

Today our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature. 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.

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.

One aspect of this nation-building rhetoric is “convergence by divergence.”¹⁷ Americans are brought together through their contrast with a shared enemy. Evil and the worst in human nature are met by the best in America—daring and caring. “Despicable acts” and “mass murder” are contrasted with “the brightest beacon of freedom,” justice, and peace. These contrasts will be maintained throughout the rhetorical war. And they will be used by allied heads of state who need to rally their citizens. Britain’s Prime Minister Tony Blair states on September 11, “The

people who perpetrate this have no regard whatever for the sanctity or value of human life, and we the democracies of the world, must come together. ...”¹⁸ He echoes these remarks on September 12:

[T]he world now knows the full evil and capability of international terrorism which menaces the whole of the democratic world. The terrorists responsible have no sense of humanity, of mercy, or of justice.

To commit acts of this nature requires a fanaticism and wickedness that is beyond our normal contemplation.¹⁹

Presidential rhetoric has been said to have two styles.²⁰ The first is *motivational*, which is high on optimism, low on specific programs. The second is termed *pedagogical*, which is high on realism and certainty, and symbolism framed in human terms. In some sense, presidents must communicate both tendencies. “The president ... is the nation’s first chauvinist as well as its most dependable teacher.”²¹ But individual presidents tend toward one style or the other. Ironically, George W. Bush, long the butt of jokes for his unschooled demeanor, displays a highly pedagogical style—one that becomes increasingly pedagogical in the days to come. In this 9/11 address, the symbols of America invoked in Bush’s speech are framed very much within human terms, and within descriptions of unflinching realism and certainty. We see this clearly when Bush describes realistically the context, then adds with certainty that the nation will prevail:

The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong.

The president speaks with certainty throughout the speech when he asserts:

Our military is powerful, and it’s prepared.

The functions of our government continue without interruption.

Our financial institutions remain strong.

America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time.

With confident realism Bush continues the presidential countenance built throughout the day. He announces steps he has taken as the nation's chief executive:

Immediately following the first attack, I implemented our government's emergency response plans.

I've directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice.

And there are new ways in which Bush signals presidential prerogatives. Notice the following two statements:

I appreciate so very much the members of Congress who have joined me in strongly condemning these attacks.

And on behalf of the American people, I thank the many world leaders who have called to offer their condolences and assistance.

In the first statement, condemnations are construed not as independent statements, but as declarations that join the president. In the second, Bush speaks "on behalf of the American people." In both cases, the language foregrounds presidential prerogatives—the ability to set the agenda and to speak for the nation. Not foregrounded, but rather announced as already given information, is the confirmation of building support: both the Congress and many world leaders are on board.

Announcing the building coalition allows the first reference to war:

America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the **war against terrorism.**

In support of that war, the president asks once again that “God bless America.”

In his first formal speech of the day, President Bush has set into motion the themes that will accompany U.S. policy and actions for the foreseeable future: Evil, Terror, and the War on Terrorism.

Rhetorically, the president is very much in step with the public. As we will see in Chapter 3, “From News to Entertainment: Eyewitness Accounts,” the public was quick to label September 11 an act of terrorism. Immediately after the attacks, person-on-the-street Colleen refers to the hijackers as “zealot terrorist pigs.” And she goes further, installing Bush as the commander in chief, who will take whatever actions are necessary: “Whatever we have to do to eradicate the country or the world of this- of this vermin, I just hope Bush will do whatever is necessary to get rid of them.”

Colleen’s remarks reflect the realities of modern U.S. military action. Rhetoricians Campbell and Jamieson explain:

The rhetorical model in the Constitution is that of a president going to Congress to request authorization for acting as commander in chief; the model that has developed through time is that of a president assuming that role and asking for congressional ratification.²²

This situation is recognized by the 1973 War Powers Act, which allows the president to enter United States Armed Forces into combat in the absence of a formal declaration of war. Its insistence that troops be recalled within a specified period of time has never been tested.

Rhetorically, Campbell and Jamieson note that, over time, the constitutional rhetoric of cooperation between the president and Congress has been replaced by one of justification. They argue that presidential war rhetoric throughout U.S. history displays five characteristics:

- (1) every element in it proclaims that the momentous decision to resort to force is deliberate, the product of thoughtful consideration;
- (2) forceful intervention is justified through a chronicle or narrative from which argumentative claims are drawn;
- (3) the audience is exhorted to unanimity of purpose and total commitment;
- (4) the rhetoric not only justifies the use of force but also

seeks to legitimate presidential assumption of the extraordinary powers of the commander in chief; and as a function of these other characteristics; (5) strategic misrepresentations play an unusually significant role in its appeals.²³

Many of these features will be familiar from our discussion thus far. War rhetoric, after all, dominated White House communication after September 11. Maintaining some of the conventions of war, the president addressed a joint session of Congress and the American people on September 20.²⁴ (This speech can be found in the Appendix to this chapter.) His persuasive task was made easier in the context of a joint congressional resolution on September 12, which had already committed money to the War on Terrorism and supported the president, “in close consultation with the Congress, to bring to justice and punish the perpetrators of these attacks as well as their sponsors.”

The president’s September 20 address was highly pedagogical. He addresses Campbell and Jamieson’s first imperative—to demonstrate thoughtful deliberation—through the use of a series of questions, which are answered carefully and at length. We’ll look only at the questions here:

Americans have many questions tonight. Americans are asking:
Who attacked our country?

Americans are asking, why do they hate us?

Americans are asking: How will we fight and win this war?

Americans are asking: What is expected of us?

Again, in keeping with Campbell and Jamieson, the War on Terrorism is justified by a chronicle:

On September 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars—but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known the casualties of war—but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning. Americans have known surprise attacks—but never before on thousands of civil-

ians. All of this, was brought upon us in a single day—and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.

The audience is exhorted to unity of purpose and commitment. The litany that asks for commitment begins with a presidential “I ask you”:

I ask you to uphold the values of America, and remember why so many have come here.

I ask you to continue to support the victims of this tragedy with your contributions.

I ask for your patience, with the delays and inconveniences that may accompany tighter security; and for your patience in what will be a long struggle.

I ask for your continued participation and confidence in the American economy.

And finally, please continue praying.

Americans are not being asked to give their lives here, but this is suggested at another point, as we’ll see below. The litany that seeks unanimity of purpose begins with “we will come together”:

We will come together to improve air safety.

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 take active steps that strengthen America’s economy, and to put our people back to work.

The unity that is sought, however, is also global:

This is not, however, just America’s fight. And what is at stake is not just America’s freedom. This is the world’s fight. This is civilization’s fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.

We ask every nation to join us. ...

The civilized world is rallying to America's side. ...

Bush is on strong rhetorical ground here. Earlier in the day, Tony Blair had announced, "This is not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism, but between the free and democratic world and terrorism. We, therefore, here in Britain stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends." On September 12, he confirms this unity after conversations with "several world leaders":

We all agreed that this attack is an attack not only on America but on the world, which demands our complete and united condemnation, our determination to bring those responsible to justice and our support for the American people at this time of trial.

Having sought unity and commitment, Bush's speech also acknowledges his role as commander in chief:

We will direct every resource at our command—every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war—to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network.

In keeping with a pedagogical style, the speech is filled with realism and certainty. Realistically, it describes a new kind of war, a war that can lead to loss of life:

This war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with a decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion. It will not look like the air war above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat.

Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success.

Certainty rests in the result of the war, not in its trajectory: While "the course of this conflict is not known ... its outcome is certain."

As in previous speeches, strong contrasting lines are drawn:

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.

Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.

In many ways this address, announcing a new kind of war, asking commitment of the public, is very much like the standard war rhetoric documented since the beginning of the republic. Hindsight will tell us the extent to which the speech conforms to Campbell and Jamieson's fifth characteristic: strategic misrepresentation, a feature that would likely be more prominent in the absence of a clear attack. Their use of the term *misrepresentation* is an attempt to capture the special context of war rhetoric. In assuming the role of a wartime commander in chief, a president is exercising extraordinary powers, powers that are comfortably granted in a democracy only in the context of a very strong consensus. Speeches designed to minimize dissent and build unity will necessarily report selectively and slant at least through emphasis. The potential for this selectivity is created by the fact that only the president has access to the information that will determine whether military action will be taken.

Campbell and Jamieson stress that misrepresentation comes often in the form of omissions. In this address, the sole grievance acknowledged for Al Qaeda, the sole response given to the question "why do they hate us?" is that "they hate our freedoms." Arguably the resentments that fuel Al Qaeda recruitment go beyond that, and more thoughtful commentary in the weeks to come would explore the making of terrorists. But that was not the rhetorical task at hand. (And we will see in Chapter 6, "The New McCarthyism," that some who questioned these strategic misrepresentations were excoriated in print.)

Along with the description of Al Qaeda's grievances, the characterization of Al Qaeda itself is questionable: "its goal is . . . imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere." This is, at best, a simplification.

Finally, it's important to note that the imminent bombing of Afghanistan could only be justified by conflating the Taliban with Al Qaeda ("In Afghanistan, we see Al Qaeda's vision for the world"), arguably a misrepresentation, even if in the minds of many it would not be consid-

ered a very great one. Had there been more civilian casualties in the U.S. air strikes, this conflation would have loomed larger in the days and weeks that followed. But initially, few civilian casualties were reported, and few Americans would have grieved over the Taliban as “collateral damage.”

There are other potential omissions. President Bush’s rhetoric does not detail why war becomes the inevitable response to terrorism. Nor is there a discussion of the other consequences resulting from war, for example, the expansion of American military power and presence worldwide.

The final rhetorical moment in the construction of the War on Terrorism came on October 7, when the president addressed the nation from the White House Treaty Room to announce the bombing of Afghanistan.²⁵ He began, “On my orders, the United States military has begun strikes against Al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.” For the first time in more than half a century, the U.S. was responding to an attack on its territory. Comparing President Bush’s speeches with Roosevelt’s famous “Day of Infamy” address²⁶ and his fireside chat²⁷ the next day (both in the Appendix to this chapter), it becomes clear that nations are not brought rhetorically to war in a single speech. Rather, the persuasive efforts of American presidents are ongoing, suggesting that studies of a single Declaration of War are at best incomplete. What is also clear is that while the War on Terrorism may be an untraveled road, its rhetorical route is well-trodden.

We’ll end this chapter by comparing the presidential rhetoric of Pearl Harbor with that of September 11. Through rhetorical conventions, presidents assume extraordinary powers as the commander in chief, dissent is minimized, enemies are vilified, and lives are lost in the defense of a nation once again united under God. So ritualized has been the invocation of prayer and divinity, this feature could well be added as a sixth characteristic of the American rhetoric of war. The role of prayer will be examined in Chapter 2, “Becoming President.”

12/8/41: Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date that will live in infamy, the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked.

9/11/01: Today, our fellow citizens, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts.

12/9/41: Many American soldiers and sailors have been killed by enemy action. American ships have been sunk; American airplanes have been destroyed.

9/11/01: The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices; secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dad, friends and neighbors.

12/9/41: Powerful and resourceful gangsters have banded together to make war upon the whole human race.

9/20/01: Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world—and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.

9/9/41: There is no such thing as security for any nation—or any individual—in a world ruled by the principles of gangsterism.

10/7/01: There can be no peace in a world of sudden terror.

9/9/41: We are now in the midst of a war, not for conquest, not for vengeance, but for a world in which this nation, and all that this nation represents, will be safe for our children.

9/20/01: The advance of human freedom—the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time—now depends on us. Our nation—this generation—will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future.

12/7/41: As Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense.

9/20/01: We will direct every resource at our command—every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war—to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network.

From Terror to War

12/8/41: It will not be a long war, it will be a hard war.

9/20/01: Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen.

12/9/41: We will know that the vast majority of the members of the human race are on our side. Many of them are fighting with us.

9/20/01: The civilized world is rallying to America's side.

12/8/41: With confidence in our armed forces with the unbounded determination of our people we will gain the inevitable triumph so help us God.

10/7/01: We will not waver; we will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail. Peace and freedom will prevail. May God continue to bless America.

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