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# President Bush's Enthymeme of Evil

## The Amalgamation of 9/11, Iraq, and Moral Values

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Ted Windt's description of presidential crisis rhetoric helps explain the successes and the difficulties of President Bush's war on terror. Immediately after the attacks, the president moved rhetorically to provide reassurance and to delegate policy direction. But President Bush's rhetorical transformation of a faceless coward's attack on our country into evil's attack on everything good and proper in the world prepared us to respond against enemies beyond "those responsible for these attacks" even as his top advisors warned against doing so. The devil-angel melodrama provided the dramatic proof Windt described, and when the president cast it in the form of a jeremiad, it reconciled contradictions and complicated counterargument and deliberation.

**Keywords:** 9/11; Bush; jeremiad; Kerry

As generally expected, the war in Iraq and our responses to terrorism in the wake of the attacks of 9/11 dominated the 2004 presidential campaign. On October 21, 2004, the Program on International Policy Attitudes and Knowledge Networks released a study titled *The Separate Realities of Bush and Kerry Supporters* (Kull, Ramsay, Subias, Weber, & Lewis, 2004). The study centers on the accuracy of supporters' perceptions of reality. For example,

despite the report of the 9/11 Commission saying there is no evidence Iraq was providing significant support to al Qaeda, 75% of Bush supporters believe Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda (30% of Kerry supporters), with 20% believing that Iraq was directly involved in 9/11. Sixty-three percent of Bush supporters even believe that clear evidence of this support has been found, while 85% of Kerry supporters believe the opposite. (Kull et al., 2004, p. 4)

Bush supporters were also more likely than Kerry supporters to believe that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) prior to the war and/or a major program to produce them and that the *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the Director of Central Intelligence on Iraq's WMD* (a.k.a. the Duelfer Report; Duelfer, 2004) con-

firmed as much, although the report concludes that Iraq had neither WMD nor a major program to construct them (the administration would officially abandon its search for WMD about a week before its inauguration).

But the key division has to do with the Iraq War itself. Asked whether the United States should have gone to war with Iraq if the country neither had been involved in the 9/11 attacks nor had been developing WMD, Kerry supporters answered no 92% to 6%, whereas 58% of Bush supporters said no and 37% supported the war anyway.

The Program on International Policy Attitudes and Knowledge Networks report (Kull et al., 2004) asks how and why Bush supporters would be so resistant to dissonant information. One possible explanation can be derived from Milton Rokeach's (1960) work on belief and disbelief systems. He posited core beliefs or values that establish an intermediate region of authority beliefs from which we derive any number of particular beliefs. Incoming factual propositions from trusted authorities or consistent with one's values can be easily incorporated; whereas discrepant propositions, those consistent with opposing values or "facts" coming from oppositional authorities, can be easily deflected. The keys for an incumbent candidate, then, would be to sharpen the disjuncture between belief and disbelief systems, to enhance the values undergirding his or her authority, and to minimize dispassionate rational discussion of the facts of the case.

This article reexamines President George W. Bush's rhetoric during the month following the 9/11 attacks to better understand how his rhetorical responses created an enthymeme of evil and presented it in the form of a presidential jeremiad. My analytical framework is Theodore Windt's (1973/1992) essay on presidential speeches of international crisis, based on his analyses of Kennedy's Cuban Missile Crisis address and Nixon's Cambodian incursion address. As the president and so many others have said, "9/11 changed everything"—this article explores how it did so through presidential rhetoric, closing belief systems in a way that enabled Bush's supporters to resist factual information that might otherwise have led them to consider Senator Kerry's arguments.

Campbell and Jamieson (1990) explained in *Deeds Done in Words* that presidential addresses seeking declarations of war evidence common generic characteristics. War messages are typically thoughtful rather than angry; they explain the origins of the immediate problem and the necessity for war, normally arguing that military force is being used as a last resort. But President Bush could pursue none of these topoi in mid-September 2001 because he and the nation were angry rather than thoughtful, the origins of the immediate problem and the enemy were unknown, and military force seemed a necessary first resort; also, the national trauma demanded retribution.

Instead, the Bush administration began engaging in rhetoric consistent with Windt's (1973/1992) description of crisis rhetoric. In such speeches, the president asserts the existence of a new situation concerning which the president alone has mastery, the president provides a narrative of the new situation as part of a larger global or historic struggle in which "ideological angels do mortal and moral combat with ideological devils" (Windt, 1973/1992, p. 95), and support for the president's announced response is a mark of honor and character for the American people.

## Mastery of the New Situation

Windt (1973/1992) wrote of the genre that these speeches “begin with an assertion of the President’s control over the facts of the situation and an acknowledgment that the New Facts which occasion the speech constitute a New Situation—a crisis for the United States” (p. 94). But through the first 9 days of rhetorical response culminating in the address to Congress, neither the president himself nor any officials recorded in the *Public Papers of the President* claimed such mastery of the facts, for reasons that are now becoming apparent.

Unlike Pearl Harbor, the Cuban missiles, or the Cambodian jungles, Americans were not dependent on their president for information about the attacks of September 11. While his staff regrettably left the president reading *Our Pet Goat* with Florida school children and Vice President Cheney and Counterterrorism Chief Richard Clark took charge in the White House, the nation watched television news coverage. All of us developed an information pool about the attacks that was, like those from the Kennedy and Reagan shootings, television-network dependent. Had the president boldly claimed personal mastery of new facts when he spoke to the nation at 8:30 p.m., he would have had to contest the prevailing narratives advanced by the networks—narratives that had by then taken hold of the American people. Although Entman (2003) and Jamieson and Waldman (2003) detailed the media’s uncritical acceptance of the president’s framing of the attacks, the president’s rhetorical options and public expectations had already been influenced by the networks’ extensive, dramatic, and repetitive coverage of the attacks.

President Bush faced two rhetorical situations on 9/11—one defined by the exigency of the attacks and the other by the exigency of confusion and anger of the American people—and his rhetoric would quickly reflect these dual concerns. Bush’s (2001a) remarks at 9:30 a.m. from Sarasota, Florida, announced the September 11 tragedy and efforts to help victims and promised efforts to find and punish “those responsible for the attacks” (p. 1098). Five hours later, Bush (2001b, pp. 1098-1099) elaborated his concern for the victims and the efforts being made to protect America. That evening, Bush (2001c) reminded us of the images we had witnessed on television and attributed meaning to them:

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. (p. 1099)

But of the attackers, President Bush (2001c) said only that

the search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I’ve directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them. (p. 1100)

Two days later, the president visited Ground Zero in his most memorable moment and spoke to rescue workers, continuing to articulate his mastery of public sentiment:

I want you all to know that America today—America today is on bended knee in prayer for the people whose lives were lost here, for the workers who work here, for the families who mourn. This Nation stands with the good people of New York City and New Jersey and Connecticut as we mourn the loss of thousands of our citizens. (Bush, 2001f, p. 1110)

When someone yelled, “I can’t hear you!” President Bush (2001f) responded with his famous words, “I can hear 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” (p. 1110). Still, the identity of “those people” and what they would hear remained unclear, but there was no doubting the president’s solidarity with the victims and the rescue workers.

While providing symbolic reassurance to Americans, the president readily acknowledged his delegation of tactical command to others. From Sarasota and Barksdale Air Force Base, he referred to the efforts of Vice President Cheney and federal agencies including the FBI. Bush (2001d) told Governor George Pataki and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani by phone that “I really appreciate the fact that you all are in charge” (p. 1104). In short, while providing memorable symbolic leadership, the president was rhetorically delegating all managerial and strategic aspects of the response. But in point of fact, it was the president who ran all of the meetings following his return to Washington (Woodward, 2002, p. 38).

Central to Windt’s (1973/1992) formulation is presidential omniscience. The president’s rhetorical authority in a crisis stems from his mastery of the facts. As Windt explained,

The President possesses “unmistakable evidence” or has been advised by high-ranking experts about the New Situation. He, therefore, understands the New Situation better than anyone else. At this point, political leadership is personalized; the course of national policy is rhetorically concentrated in one man. Each President emphasized that he was keeping his compact with the people . . . to study the situation carefully and to report to the people once a decision had been made. Under study mandated by the President’s compact with the people New Facts emerged and thus constituted a crisis demanding decisive action. (p. 94)

The key elements of the president’s mastery of the new situation, then, are the exclusivity of his expert information, his personal embodiment of that expertise, and his compact with the people. It is these three factors that generically privilege a president’s crisis narrative and insulate it from counterargument.

In the series of 9/11 remarks, President Bush appeared to lack exclusive information about the attacks, for he was away from his advisors and from the televisions to which all of us were glued. Nor did he invoke, as he might have, the exclusive high-ranking experts who did advise him, perhaps suspecting that their credibility might not be at its peak that day. President Bush was not omniscient about the attacks but about their impact and meaning for Americans. As he did so, the network commentators enhanced

rather than challenged his message, enhancing its position for future narration (Entman, 2003; Jamieson & Waldman, 2003). In this sense, President Bush fulfilled his compact with the people by becoming their voice even as he deferred public discussions of intelligence, evidence, and policy.

Meanwhile, back in the White House, Clark and Cheney handled the immediate policy response. By 3:30 p.m. on 9/11, the CIA was convinced of al Qaeda's responsibility for the attacks and so informed the president (Woodward, 2002, p. 27). But the president did not share this information with the public in his address to the nation that night. Indeed, 2 days later, when asked how confident he was that bin Laden was behind the attacks, Bush (2001d) answered, "We will not discuss intelligence matters, how we gather intelligence, and what we know—about anybody. When our Government acts, you'll be informed" (p. 1106). The president had exclusive information that would have provided mastery of the new situation, but he chose not to share it with the public.

The contrast eventually proved too much for Clark. When he appeared on *60 Minutes* in March 2004 to discuss his allegations that the president had mishandled 9/11, an incredulous Leslie Stahl objected, "But he sounded all the right notes" (Stahl, 2004). Their exchange suggests the presence of two rhetorical communities: one concerned with public reaction and led by the president and populated by Stahl, other reporters, and almost all Americans in September 2001; the other concerned with terrorism and national security and populated by Clark, Cheney, the National Security Council, but few in the public eye. With the passage of time, the latter community would become more visible and their arguments—especially regarding the lack of any evidence to suggest an Iraqi role in the 9/11 attacks—would become increasingly important and visible.

President Bush's mastery of the symbolic reassurance dimension of the new situation and his delegation of the military dimension helps to explain why he eventually lost some of his public support, as well as his ability to retain support for so long. First, President Bush is not a man of detail who comes across as well informed about detailed policy options, and his delegation of policy to others spared him that role. Second, shocked Americans in mid-September were ill prepared for a Gore/Kerry style seminar on counterterrorism, and Bush's rhetoric allowed him to be angry and decisive without going into specifics or distinctions. Third, President Bush's appeal during the 2000 campaign had been that he was well liked, and this strategy cast him as an appropriate voice of the people. Fourth, this strategy insulated the president and his high-ranking experts from the always-risky question: What did the president know and when did he know it? It would not have been constructive, for example, for frightened citizens to learn in mid-September that President Bush had received, on August 6, a presidential daily brief titled *Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US* that warned of "preparations for hijackings" and "recent surveillance of federal buildings in New York" (Kean et al. 2004, p. 262).

The lasting impact of these choices is clear when we reflect on the mileage the Bush reelection campaign got from the theme of the president's leadership after 9/11, with the overwhelming preponderance of those references being to his bullhorn exhortation at Ground Zero and his meetings with victims and their families. It is not unfair to

ask how the president could ascertain the intent of the attacks without knowing the identity of the attackers. Ordinarily, police interrogate suspects and dismiss some because they lack motives for committing the alleged crime. But in a public melodrama like 9/11, the presidential narrator can rhetorically ascribe a motive for the acts and use the resulting purpose-act ratio to charge any number of suspects—without further exploring the purpose-act ratio. Although it is certainly plausible that the attackers “intended to frighten our Nation into chaos and retreat” (Bush, 2001c), that attribution of purpose has not been uncontested. It is also plausible, for example, that they intended to cripple international commerce by attacking the World Trade Center, sought to provoke the United States into a problematic counterattack, sought to wreck the U.S. economy as they had the Soviet’s (as Osama bin Laden claimed in his election-eve tape), or attacked us here because we had sent troops onto their lands (Buchanan, 2004). But as Windt (1973/1992) wrote, the president’s mastery of this new situation made his interpretation dominant.

The point is that the president’s speech settled on a single reason for the attack and a path of response to it before deciding who the attackers were. The significance of this point is that President Bush emphasized the act-purpose ratio, inferring that the acts of 9/11 were motivated by evil. With the suicide bombers dead, the particular agents who perpetrated the acts of 9/11 could not be punished for the acts and, thus, other agents of evil would have to be punished and thwarted. This move would undergird the administration’s master enthymeme of evil—a set of premises that would insulate his Iraq policies from Democrats’ critiques and enable his supporters to amalgamate 9/11, Saddam Hussein, abortion, stem cell research, 1980s defense cuts, and Senator Kerry’s “nuanced” positions into a concern for “moral values.”

### A Melodramatic Episode

In his convention keynote address, Rudolph Giuliani recalled thinking, “Thank God George Bush is our President,” but few people ever said “Thank God Dick Cheney and Richard Clark were in the White House Situation Room” because—at least at that moment—the symbolic reassurance was more important to them than was the military response. Indeed, it was the president’s very symbolic reassurances that would enable him to provide the rhetorical transformation that would justify the multi-stage military responses.

At the time, reporters and most Americans presumed the delay in addressing the second rhetorical situation—identifying the attackers and the appropriate response—awaited intelligence assessments. But subsequent disclosures have revealed instead conflicts among White House personnel. Although the evidence clearly indicated that the attack had come from al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden aided by the Taliban government of Afghanistan, key members of the administration sought to link the attacks to Iraq and Saddam Hussein (Clark, 2004; Woodward, 2002). Three lines of argument emerged: (a) retaliate against al Qaeda in Afghanistan, (b) retaliate against Iraq, and (c) respond first against Afghanistan and later against Iraq and others in the axis of

evil. While the policy makers debated their options, the rhetorical situation demanded a speech.

Windt (1973/1992) wrote that the international crisis genre hinges on a melodrama of good versus evil. Windt argued that

to intensify the either-or/devil-angel nature of the New Situation created by the enemy, each President reminded the public that this incident was only one in the continual battle between the Free World and the Communist World. . . . Each President elevated his particular policy to a struggle between the Free World and the Communist World, one in which ideological angels do mortal and moral combat with ideological devils. Melodrama. Each drew upon the language and assumptions permeating the anti-communist ideology of the public. (p. 95)

Had these attacks occurred during the cold war, they could have been characterized as part of that epic struggle. But if the specific devil of communism was gone, the rhetorical power of evil as our enemy remained. President Bush's speechwriters moved swiftly to place the attacks in an ongoing melodrama of evil versus American virtue.

Transcendence of the attacks evolved quickly. At 9:30 a.m., Bush (2001a) announced that "our country" had been attacked; at 2:30 p.m., that "freedom itself" had been attacked (Bush, 2001b); and by 9:30 p.m., it was "our way of life, our very freedom" (Bush, 2001c) that had been attacked. In a similar manner, the attacks attributed at 2:30 p.m. to "a faceless coward" (Bush, 2001b) had by 9:30 p.m. been perpetrated by "evil" (Bush, 2001c). On the night of the September 11, our response would be to "go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world" (Bush, 2001c, p. 1100); but at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Service held on September 13, we would "rid the world of evil" (Bush, 2001e, p. 1108). The rhetorical transformation from a coward's attack on our country to a mission to rid the world of evil had taken barely 48 hours.

Clark's (2004) account suggests why the attacks, enemy, and response were so rapidly transformed from September 11 to September 13:

On the 12th and 13th the discussions wandered: what was our objective, who was the enemy, was our reaction to be a war on terrorism in general or al Qaeda in specific? If it was all terrorism we would fight, did we have to attack the anti-government forces in Colombia's jungles too? Gradually, the obvious prevailed: we would go to war with al Qaeda and the Taliban. The compromise consensus, however, was that the struggle against al Qaeda and the Taliban would be the first stage in a broader war on terrorism. *It was clear that there would be a second stage* [italics added]. (p. 31)

Like Clark, Secretary of State Colin Powell and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Hugh Shelton were inclined to respond only against those with clear links to the 9/11 attacks. But if the presidential team was itself divided, public rhetoric could not wait.

Rhetorically, the most effective path toward justification of a two-stage offensive against unspecified enemies who may or may not have had anything to do with the attacks of 9/11 was a rapid transformation of our response from *an attack on our coun-*



try to ridding the world of evil. From the outset, President Bush had characterized the acts as *evil*. By early October, he was talking about *evildoers* rather than the attackers. At his October 11 press conference, Bush (2001h) said, "After all, on our TV screens the other day, we saw the evil one threatening—calling for more destruction and death in America" (p. 1225). By *the evil one*, did the president mean bin Laden or was he invoking memories of the 9/11 photograph that purported to show Satan's face in the smoke and fire above the Twin Towers? Or perhaps he meant Saddam Hussein, of whom Bush had said earlier in the same press conference,

There's no question that the leader of Iraq is an evil man. After all, he gassed his own people. We know he's been developing weapons of mass destruction. And I think it's in his advantage to allow inspectors back in his country. . . . We're watching him carefully. (p. 1222)

On November 2, Bush (2001i) reiterated that "our war that we now fight is against terror and evil. It's not against Muslims. . . . Our struggle is going to be long and difficult, but we will prevail. We will win. Good will overcome evil" (p. 1337). Bush went on to say that "we are fighting evil, and we will continue to fight evil, and we will not stop until we defeat evil" (p. 1339).<sup>1</sup>

Yet the search for specific enemies must continue, for if we are to eliminate evil, which evildoers must we attack? The key rhetorical move by President Bush in all of this was the generic depiction of the 9/11 attackers as he applied the agents of evil principle. Although Bush (2001a) initially spoke of "those responsible," Bush (2001c) told the nation on 9/11 that "we will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them" (p. 1100), and few distinctions would be drawn in the days to come. When Bush (2001g) addressed the joint session of Congress and the nation on September 20, the attackers and those who harbor them had become more generally *our enemies*: "Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done" (p. 1140).

The notion of *bringing our enemies to justice* implies capture, possible extradition, and trial, whereas *bringing justice to our enemies* implies bombing and military attacks; the former is legal, the latter military. This important sentence merges the two disparate policy alternatives. But while merging the policy options, the president clearly did not say *whether we bring justice to our enemies or bring our enemies to justice, justice will be done*. Of the two constructions, the language he used seems to steer us toward the military course by coupling it with *justice will be done* while coupling capture with *whether* to form the weaker portion of the sentence.

Subsequent accusations by Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, Clark (2004), Bob Woodward (2002), and Pat Buchanan (2004), as well as the *9/11 Commission Report* by Kean et al. (2004), all indicate the administration's continuing concern with the axis of evil: Iran, North Korea, and Iraq—especially Iraq. In light of those accounts of White House discussions, it is worth examining the *Public Papers of the President* for 2001 to see which of "our enemies" and what foreign policy topics were on the president's rhetorical agenda. Keyword searches of the *Papers* reveal that those now known

**Table 1**  
**Presidential Mentions of Enemies Pre- and Post-9/11**  
**(percentages in parentheses)**

	January 20 to September 10, 2004	September 11 to December 31, 2004	Total
al Qaeda and bin Laden	6 (3.31)	59 (32.59)	65 (35.9)
Taliban and Afghanistan	2 (1.1)	74 (40.88)	76 (41.98)
Iraq and Saddam Hussein	29 (16.0)	11 (6.0)	40 (22.1)
Total	37	144	181

to be responsible for the attacks of 9/11 made it into the White House's rhetorical agenda (i.e., into published presidential documents) only 8 times in about 8 months, as compared to 29 times for Iraq and Saddam Hussein. If al Qaeda, bin Laden, the Taliban, and Afghanistan concerned the administration, that concern was not manifest in either public discourse or documents. But that situation changed following the attacks, when they constituted 73% of such remarks for the year. Yet, although the administration was privately looking for ways to prove Iraq's complicity in the attacks and planning, in any event, to attack Iraq in the second phase of the war on terror, Iraq and Saddam Hussein slipped from earshot—rating only 11 mentions in 3 months (see Table 1).

President Bush campaigned on the position that Iraq is a crucial piece of the larger war on terror, whereas Senator Kerry argued that Iraq was a distraction from the "real" war on the terrorists responsible for the attacks of 9/11; but both candidates were committed to winning abroad to keep the United States safe at home. A third position was articulated by Buchanan (2004) in *Where the Right Went Wrong*. Buchanan took bin Laden's claims seriously and argued that the terrorists came here because we went over there and that we were attacked not because we are a freedom loving people but because of our foreign policy in the Middle East. He agreed with Kerry that the American presence in Iraq has both helped terrorist recruiting and undermined our historic European alliances.

Whereas most of President Bush's critics argued that the war in Iraq was a distraction from the response to the 9/11 attacks, it may be more accurate to say that 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan briefly distracted the Bush administration from its rhetorical war against Iraq. This is consistent with the advice of Paul Wolfowitz that 9/11 provided the opportunity to strike Iraq, with Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's recommendation inclination to forego Afghanistan in favor of the better military targets in Iraq (Woodward, 2002), as well as with Clark's frustration with the administration's inattention to al Qaeda prior to the attacks. But ultimately, the mid-September 2001 consensus to pursue an "Afghanistan first, Iraq second" war (Clark, 2004, p. 31) was consistent with the president's pledge to bring justice (first) to those most responsible for the attacks and to the rest of our enemies "at a time of our choosing."

The point is that there were two wars to wage—a policy war and a rhetorical war—and the rhetorical war required the president to define *the enemy* and *those responsible* as broadly as possible. This he did with constructions such as *bring justice to our enemies*. Doing so provided the framing necessary for associating Iraq, Saddam Hussein, and WMD with al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and the airliners of 9/11 at the abstract level of evildoers. Detailed and specific evidence of complicity is not necessary when the associations alleged are abstract, nor could an absence of specific and verifiable evidence prove that Iraq is not among our enemies.

### Test of Character

The importance of redefining an individual crisis as an episode in a melodrama, said Windt (1973/1992), is that it makes our policy a test of national character. “Even as each President announced his policy,” Windt wrote of Kennedy and Nixon, “he also attempted to shift the issue from its obvious military and political context to an ethical context; that is, from the consequences of war to a question of American character” (p. 96). President Bush (2001b) first voiced this theme on September 11 at Barksdale Air Force Base at 2:30 p.m., saying that “the resolve of our great Nation is being tested. But make no mistake: We will show the world that we will pass this test” (p. 1099). That night, Bush (2001c) reassured the nation that “these acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve” (p. 1099) and proclaimed that “this is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace” (p. 1100).

In writing about the genre of international crises, Windt (1973/1992) noted that those employing it use various rhetorical devices to insulate their rhetoric from counterargument and to rationalize contradictions. Windt’s important point, I believe, is that this kind of crisis rhetoric enables such protections because citizens “want to prove dramatically that they have character and courage in the wake of the latest threat” (p. 97). His focus on newsmaking is but one available strategy, neither the most advisable nor the most effective, for doing so.

Indeed, if dramatic proof is the object, then citizens can accomplish this in either of two ways. One would be to focus on purpose versus purpose, exhibiting resolve in the face of evil. Alternatively, they could adopt an agent versus agent focus, identifying themselves with the president in their effort to vanquish the agents “responsible for the attacks” as Bush initially pledged. Presidential rhetoric since 9/11 has consistently made President Bush the agent acting with resolve in defense of freedom against the intertwined purposes of evil and terror.

As Windt (1973/1992) wrote, “In essence, when a President employs ‘Crisis Rhetoric’ the question before the public is not whether the policy is a reasonable one or not, but rather whether one supports the President” (p. 98). But missing from Windt’s analysis is the point that support for a president under these circumstances can become a matter of faith rather than proof. Thus, one’s resolve in the face of evil means, in part, faith in the president and the president’s purpose even when evidence and testimony

tempt one to disbelieve. This is my caution regarding the Program on International Policy Attitudes and Knowledge Networks's (Kull et al., 2004) study's speculation about Bush supporters' resistance to discrepant information: Pro-Bush resolve is a rationalist rather than an empirical perspective.<sup>2</sup> Their faith in the president and their resolve render empirical evidence evil temptations rather than proofs; indeed, the best way to demonstrate resolve may be to resist empirical proofs.

What emerges from all this heat and smoke is ultimately a contest between bin Laden's jihad and a presidential jeremiad. Faced with the horrors of 9/11, President Bush turned to the familiar themes of the modified sermonic form that have framed so much American political rhetoric in traumatic times (Bercovitch, 1978; Smith & Smith, 1994). Americans are characterized as a special people blessed by God with bounty—"America is a nation full of good fortune, with so much to be grateful for" (Bush, 2001e, p. 1109)—because of our commitment to a sacred mission. But periodically, according to Bush (2001e), "The world has produced enemies of human freedom. They have attacked America because we are freedom's home and defender. And the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time" (p. 1109). Such callings provide a renewing of the sacred mission:

Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger, we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. 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. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail. (Bush, 2001g, p. 1144)

All of our current trials and plagues have come about because we strayed from that mission and lost our faith. Ergo, we must demonstrate our faith in ourselves and America by extending freedom; but most of all, we must accept the preacher's guidance and show faith and, yes, resolve.

The notion of "infidel" can be used not only by Islamic militants to describe Westerners but also by believers in the president's jeremiad to characterize France, Kerry supporters, and scholars or journalists who encourage dispassionate consideration of data. For the president's congregation, Iraq has always been part of the effort to "bring justice to our enemies" and to "do so at a time of our choosing" because Saddam Hussein fit their conception of the kind of evil from which the world should be rid.

It was because of Bush's jeremiad that the "continuing threat" posed by Saddam Hussein could be transformed into an imminent and urgent threat requiring an American response. For only by returning to our sacred mission of extending freedom and showing resolve could we convince the Almighty that His chosen people deserved blessing and protection. Extending freedom required America to take justice to our enemies, and resolve required that we ignore those such as Pat Buchanan, Howard Dean, and our erstwhile European allies who advised against invading Iraq.

Indeed, many Americans balked at President Bush's jeremiad. Buchanan (2004) rudely dismissed the central belief of Bush's jeremiad—that we were attacked because

of our beliefs and character—arguing instead that it was because of our interventionist foreign policy. This is consistent with BBC correspondent Jane Corbin's (2002) analysis of an al Qaeda recruiting video:

The images are of dead Palestinian children, women being beaten. . . . The message is blatant and effective: give me support in the violence I am about to unleash on the real power behind the injustice inflicted on Muslims. . . . It is time to penetrate Israel and America and hit them where it hurts the most. (p. 100)

Without the organized belief system of the jeremiad to reconcile contradictions, these nonbelievers in Bush's jeremiad sought other forms of argumentation—reasons, data, testimony, expertise, corroborating narratives, and more. Unable to find such proofs (and sometimes finding counterproofs), the nonbelievers' confidence in the president's leadership waned, but this was precisely the kind of lost resolve that most alarmed the president and his supporters.

Tensions would grow between the believers in the president and his jeremiadic war on evil and the nonbelievers and their interest in proof of responsibility, consistency of policy, and the implications of our actions for the rest of the world. As they responded to one another, the gulf between elites continued to widen, and the horror and destruction begun by our enemies on 9/11 was continued by those who could not bring themselves to search for common ground with their fellow antiterrorists, be they liberal, conservative, neoconservative, French, or even the Pope.

## Conclusions

Windt's (1973/1992) description of presidential crisis rhetoric helps explain the successes and the difficulties of President Bush's war on terror. Immediately after the attacks, the president moved rhetorically to provide reassurance and to delegate policy direction. But President Bush's rhetorical transformation of a faceless coward's attack on our country into evil's attack on everything good and proper in the world prepared us to respond against enemies beyond those responsible for these attacks even as his top advisors warned against doing so. The devil-angel melodrama provided the dramatic proof Windt described, and when the president cast it in the form of a jeremiad, it reconciled contradictions and complicated counterargument and deliberation. President Bush, thus, developed a rhetoric in which the people of the strongest military power in the world, now protected by the Patriot Act and the Department of Homeland Security, need to live in a state of constant fear of terrorist attacks. It is a rhetoric that sanctions preemptive military responses against evil and, thus, provides a versatile rhetoric for any nation inclined to attack its enemies. But because it is a jeremiad—a sermonic form—it requires the occupant of the bully pulpit to interpret good and evil, to apply the jeremiad for the national congregation, and to shield them from false prophets who would lead them astray. In so doing, the president coalesces values, unifies the moral and political bases of his authority, and protects his supporters from

entertaining dissonant information, all in ways consistent with Rokeach's (1960) classic formulation of close-mindedness.

Windt's (1973/1992) analysis was based on speeches by Kennedy and Nixon, who in turn modeled Franklin D. Roosevelt, and it is interesting to contrast Bush's rhetoric with those predecessors. Bush's (2001g) go-it-alone rhetoric has been based on the premise that "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (p. 1142). How strikingly contrary that is to President Nixon's 1969 conception of the great silent majority of Americans who supported the Vietnam War because they were simply not demonstrating. The war against terrorists might have evolved quite differently had Bush followed Nixon's model and invoked the whole world in his condemnation of the acts: If you are not against us you are with us. Indeed, the president did say, "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" (Bush, 2001g, p. 1142). But Bush's rhetoric unnecessarily and unwisely excommunicated those who had a stake in the fight and who felt he needed to listen to a broader spectrum of opinion. Throughout the campaign year, his supporters pounced on all suggestions of negotiation to charge that Kerry or others sought negotiations with bombers and beheaders, rather than acknowledging the existence of people who hated both Saddam and the terrorists but who, nevertheless, had qualms about America's military presence in their country. Little effort has been made to understand the motivation of the insurgent forces now fighting against us.

Second, the exit polls from the 2004 presidential election surprised many observers by indicating that more voters decided on the basis of moral values (22%) than any of the anticipated issues, although terrorism at 19% and Iraq at 15% actually combined to account for 34% ("Voters Views," 2004). There are several reasons to accept these polls with caution (e.g., they predicted a Kerry victory and the issue questions were multiple choice rather than open ended). Nevertheless, it is surely safe to conclude that moral values played an important role in voters' decision making and that President Bush won a clear majority from those voters (even if the reported 79% was inflated) for combating evil. As we have seen, the president's post-9/11 rhetoric enabled him not only to respond to the attacks but also to transcend them with a rhetorical war on evil that provided an enthymeme easily completed by many voters. Evildoers included bin Laden and Saddam, of course, but also those behind Janet Jackson's Super Bowl wardrobe failure and Howard Stern, and those in favor of killing babies and destroying the sanctity of marriage. This enthymeme of evil could be breached neither by the Democrats' policy rhetoric nor by their empirical proof or evidence precisely because those who believed in President Bush's jeremiad believed in him and the need to be resolute in the face of the temptations to disbelieve.

The president's rhetorical choices and their impact on the campaign can be compared to the rhetoric he might have used after 9/11. Step one would have been to hold the line at responding to the attacks by bringing our enemies to justice—the president's position of 9/11. This would have justified the war in Afghanistan and the pursuit of bin Laden, but it would not have justified the invasion of Iraq. This becomes important because of the separate realities that have developed: Believers see the con-

nections between the wars but nonbelievers do not, and the president's initial rhetoric kept him from admitting mistakes, reprimanding his loyalists, changing his policy, or nuancing his case so as to reach nonbelievers with arguments they might find persuasive. War in Iraq would have been justified neither on the basis of Iraq's role in the 9/11 attacks, which the 9/11 Commission (Kean et al., 2004) rejected, nor on the presence of WMD, which the Duelfer Report (Duelfer, 2004) discredited and never found, but instead on the "other grounds" that satisfied 37% of the Bush supporters but only 6% of the Kerry supporters. In other words, the administration could have worked either to sell the Iraq War on the basis of its "real reasons" or at least avoid the embarrassment and divisions it incurred by basing the war on reasons that were later discredited.

If the president had continued his initial rhetoric of retaliation against those responsible for the attacks and those nations who harbored them, guilt would have been ascribed to al Qaeda, the Taliban, and bin Laden—not Iraq. It would, therefore, have been appropriate to pronounce the "mission accomplished" on the end of hostilities in Afghanistan and to indicate that the war on secret terror cells would continue full force but in ways mostly invisible to the press and the public. It would also have been important to reassure Americans and the world that safety and security had been restored and that although occasional acts of terror might occur as they had in the past, increased intelligence, vigilance, and security measures meant that people other than terrorists need not live in fear. In short, especially if "these acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our Nation into chaos and retreat" (Bush, 2001c, p. 1099), the president could have fought back by reminding us that we have nothing to fear but fear itself.

But by the time President Bush spoke on the aircraft carrier in front of the now infamous Mission Accomplished banner, the mission had changed from retaliation to WMD, and the scene had changed from New York and Afghanistan to Iraq. The Kerry campaign and most of the president's critics failed to understand the implications of Bush's jeremiad. For jeremiads reconcile contradictions: The Puritans' trials proved they were God's chosen people, and the path to the future lies in our traditions. Had President Bush's mission been accomplished without a dialectical tension between good and evil, his permanent war to rid the world of evil would have ended. Instead, insurgent and terrorist activities in Iraq reinvigorated the tensions that fueled the moral struggle behind Bush's jeremiad, thus, sustaining his authority. Although each beheading and bombing told Bush's critics that better policies must surely be available, they affirmed for his supporters the moral dimensions of the conflict and the need for a president able to lead the crusade against evil on all fronts and they helped his supporters combat the information that would lead them astray.

## Notes

1. It is interesting that the president's greatest obstacle to folding Saddam Hussein's Iraq into his account of evildoers and a war on terror came from a well-respected authority on evil—the Pope. On the eve of the Iraqi invasion, Fox News carried an Associated Press (2003) story on Vatican opposition to the war that said,

“Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran said a unilateral military strike would be a ‘crime against peace with no justification on grounds of self-defense’” (para. 9).

2. On October 21, 2004, the Program on International Policy Attitudes and Knowledge Networks released a study titled *The Separate Realities of Bush and Kerry Supporters* (Kull, Ramsay, Subias, Weber, & Lewis, 2004). The study examines not values but verifiable perceptions of reality and concludes in part that “the current election is unique in that Bush supporters and Kerry supporters have profoundly different perceptions of reality” (Kull et al., 2004, p. 12). But by attempting to explain the Bush supporters’ reasons for “clinging so tightly to beliefs that have been so visibly refuted” (Kull et al., 2004, p. 12), the study intermingles beliefs and reasons in ways that lead it’s authors to miss the larger point.

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