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The Rhetorical State of Alert before the Iraq War 2003

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Abstract

Initiating an attack on another country is always a questionable venture, whether one chooses to call it war or prefers euphemisms such as conflict, incident, action or peace-creating measures. This study examines how the arguments were developed prior to the military actions in Iraq 2003. The events have been presented in vague and often distorted value terms and metaphors where war becomes peace, attacks becomes 'pre-emptive defence', military invasion becomes 'change of regime', occupation becomes 'humanitarian intervention'.This study provides a diachronic survey of the chain of events from rhetorical perspectives, as well as a synchronic analysis of recurring rhetorical themes – especially of vague concepts and metaphors.

Manipulation and lies has of course always been a basic ingredient of warfare. The question is what approach democratic societies should take in relation to self-evidently deceptive influencing of public opinion; to manipulative rhetoric and destructive propaganda.

Key Words: rhetoric, war on terror, Iraq, George Bush, propaganda, euphemisms

Introduction

> So great are the psychological resistances to war in modern nations that every war must appear to be a war of defence against a menacing, murderous aggressor. (Lasswell 1927:47)

The so-called war on terror constitutes a unique period, not least from a rhetorical point of view. Never before have so many speeches been given prior to, during and after war events as in the period following September 11. The Gulf War as well as NATO's military action in the Balkans, to mention just a few other recent war events, were also particularly speech intensive, but not to the same extent that we have now witnessed – and are still able to witness. The media's intensive and more or less critical monitoring of the events do not always benefit the war strategists and are always an unpredictable factor. One way of guiding public opinion in a certain direction is therefore to sidestep the media by giving direct addresses from platforms and *via* the Internet. New rhetorical IT strategies have gained in importance as a result of recent events, although the process has not really been noticed by the media. The objectives of such strategies are to let leaders 'speak' directly to the people at the first possible opportunity. The possibilities

of the Internet also facilitate the publication of speeches in their entirety – to be read, heard or viewed by anyone, anywhere. The political and military leadership, primarily in the US, tries to keep the preferential right of interpretation by constantly defining and redefining the course of events. Naturally, the speeches are also aimed at journalists as a target group and are designed in such a way that particularly striking expressions can be inserted directly into headlines and articles. The White House home page collects public statements by George W. Bush and his staff. This open account of everything that has been said creates, in itself, a certain impression of credibility. However, the publication of the speeches is first and foremost a way of counteracting the news flow's depictions of reality by providing the administration's own definitions of the state of things.

Rhetoric scholar Murray Edelman claims that in times of uncertainty people need someone to give structure and meaning to a confusing reality: "People who are anxious and confused are eager to be supplied with an organised political order – including simple explanations of the threats they fear – and with reassurance that the threats are being countered" (Edelman, 1971:65). This is where propaganda comes in. Most simply, propaganda can be defined as active influencing of opinion, a unilateral form of rhetoric which tries to guide our thoughts and feelings towards a certain goal – and not necessarily without our conscious consent, for where war is concerned, reality is menacing and polarised to such an extent that unilateral messages are welcomed by many to provide reality with a sharper outline (Mral 2004: 12).

According to old rhetorical insight, the way in which things are perceived is dependent on the way in which they are denoted. Names and concepts create our perception of reality and govern our actions to a great degree. Since September 11, we find ourselves in a situation which has been defined as a state of war of new dimensions, a state of war which has at times evoked constant efforts to try, with the help of language, to convince the world of its justness. This became clear in connection with the preparations for, and realisation of, military action in Iraq in 2003. Initiating an attack on another country is always a questionable venture, whether one chooses to call it war or prefers to use euphemisms such as conflict, action or peace-creating measures. Whatever the term, military aggression is about sending sons and daughters on potentially fatal missions, allocating vast financial means from a budget often already strained, and risking vast damage in the form of civilian suffering and environmental disaster. In order to justify this, leaders have always made major rhetorical efforts to convince the public of the justness of war, and the Iraq War is no exception. This study will examine how the arguments were developed prior to the action. The study provides a diachronic survey of the chain of events from rhetorical perspectives, as well as a synchronic analysis of recurring rhetorical themes – especially of vague concepts and metaphors. The focus is on the rhetoric of the Bush administration.

Background: The Introduction of the Iraqi Theme

The Iraq War in 2003 was preceded by a succession of state-of-alert speeches. During the course of the autumn of 2002, President Bush painted a picture of Iraq as posing a great threat to the US, a menacing image as vague as it was frightening. The Iraqi theme was however integrated in the rhetoric on the so-called war on terror only days after September 11, when Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, among others, wondered whether any action should not have its starting-point in Iraq. In reality, the Pentagon

seems to have worked on a plan for military action against Iraq long before the attacks on the World Trade Center. And while Bush was generally of the opinion that the World Trade Center attacks provided an opportunity to strengthen the global influence of the US, Woodward, who attended many meetings in the Security Council, claims that Rumsfeld was more specific:

> Before the attacks, the Pentagon had been working for months on developing a military option for Iraq…Any serious, full-scale war against terrorism would have to make Iraq a target – eventually. Rumsfeld was raising the possibility that they could take advantage of the opportunity offered by the terrorist attacks to go after Saddam immediately (Woodward, 2002:49).

Bush's advisors, headed by Karl Rove, were also clear on the fact that Saddam Hussein was a simple and obvious enemy. We will never know exactly what was being said behind the scenes, but tolerably reliable sources of background information are Bush's own speech- writers, as well as the various pro-Bush columnists who provide accounts of the rhetorical moves and strategies of the administration. Two of these more or less admiring commentators, James Moore and Wayne Slater, describe the construction of Iraq as the enemy as follows, taking Rove's reasoning as a starting-point:

> We are good. Iraq is bad. We love freedom. They do not. A clear, accessible message for an electorate too busy to read deeper into the story. The language must not be bloody. It's regime change. Not war. Clean and antiseptic. More of a procedure than a battle (Moore & Slater, 2003:287).

Clear and simple antitheses, and an almost Orwellian double talk where war becomes peace and attack becomes defence, characterise much of the rhetoric produced by 'the White House Communications Shop' (Dubose, Reid & Cannon, 2003:204) and were reproduced time and time again in the speeches of President Bush.

State of the Union Address, January 29 2002

On January 29 2002, President Bush delivered his annual address to the nation, a speech which, in principle, was a victory speech following the military action in Afghanistan during the autumn of 2001.

In actual fact, this address is a key visionary speech for the continuation of the 'war on terror', because it establishes the path ahead with the central phrase 'axis of evil'. Bush characterised Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an

> axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html)

The metaphor is obviously an implied reference to the Axis Powers of the Second World War, primarily Germany, Italy and Japan, a coalition against the so-called Allies, Great Britain, France, the USA and the Soviet Union. The 'axis of evil' is of course a misleading term, as it suggests the existence of a coalition between these states when, in reality, two of them (Iran and Iraq) have been bitter enemies for decades. Furthermore, there is no manifest coalition with the third state, North Korea.

However, propagandistic images function at an emotional rather than a logical level, and the aim here was to paint a menacing picture. What is interesting is how this picture came about. David Frum, one of Bush's junior speech writers, says that about a month before the speech was to be delivered he was more or less encouraged by Mike Gerson, one of the strategists in Bush's staff, to come up with a motive for war: "Can you sum up in a sentence or two our best case for going after Iraq?" Frum did not think it appropriate to enumerate the cruel acts committed by Saddam Hussein over the past ten years, because the next question would be why the US did not finish the job during its previous attack on Iraq in 1991. Neither could he refer to Saddam's alleged murder attempt on George Bush Senior, as that would seem too personal a motive for starting a war. He knew that there were no confirmed connections between Saddam Hussein and the September 11 attacks. Bush, however, needed an argument that linked the two together. The solution was to go back in time to identify a similar situation: Pearl Harbour. Japan had been ruthless and unpredictable, and so was Saddam Hussein. Furthermore, an even deadlier attack could be expected if Saddam Hussein were to join forces with others, as Germany did with Japan – only Frum wanted to link Saddam Hussein with the terrorists, not with another country. This was accomplished in subsequent revisions of the speech. Condoleezza Rice, among others, wanted to take it a step further and focus on the theme 'weapons of mass destruction'. Reflecting on which other states had access to such weapons, it was clear that, for instance, Iran did and, remarkably enough, North Korea:

> It was attempting to develop Nuclear Weapons, it had a history of reckless aggression, and it too had been cosseted by the United States in the recent past and needed to feel a stronger hand (Frum, 2003:238).

Frum's use of language here is striking with respect to American self-perception: North Korea had been 'cosseted' and needed a firmer hand.

Frum called his creation the 'axis of hatred', thus connecting to Bush's previous 'hate' theme. However, Gerson wanted a link to Bush's use of religious terminology, and thus the end result in the address became the 'axis of evil':

> North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens. Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom. Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade.

This is an example of classic three-step argumentation, where the strongest card, Iraq, is played last. By including the other two threats and linking them, one of them certainly appears to be more menacing than if Iraq alone is the enemy. And all three are connected by that vague but alarming word 'evil'.

The 'Evil' Theme

In his book on propaganda after the First World War, Harold D Lasswell writes, under the heading, 'Satanism' that one has to make the enemy appear demoralised, presumptuous and cruel. The enemy nation should appear as arrogant and contemptuous; "Any nation who began the War and blocks the peace is incorrigible, wicked and perverse"

(Lasswell, 1927:77). In the First World War, nations – France, Germany, Britain as well as the USA – tried to outdo each other in depicting the atrocities of the opposing side. In the propaganda of today, there has been a certain shift: from depicting an entire people as cruel and inferior to describing the leaders in satanic terms. Saddam Hussein had already been described as the new Hitler during the previous war. Bush Senior used to refer to him by the name Saddam only, putting the stress on the first syllable, which is not only a way of diminishing the person, but inevitably also brings another prince of darkness to mind (Karlberg & Mral, 1998:76). The Iraqi people are depicted as victims, even as friends. People are being liberated from tyrants – the enemy becomes clear and tangible. Whoever sides with the tyrant defines themselves as an enemy and may be fought. The difficulty of distinguishing between friend and foe in the heat of the battle is suddenly logical and reasonable. 'Collateral damage', i.e. unintentional damage to civilians and civilian targets, is regrettable but unavoidable.

In the current war on terror, the alleged main enemies, bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, were easy to identify as menacing and murderous. Based on previous experiences, it was reasonable to characterise them as evil. But what is meant by evil?

There are different views on how to define evil (Rediehs, 2002:65pp). One theory claims that evil is something that can be found within certain people – suffice it to think of detective novels such as those by Agatha Christie, where the plot is often built around the existence of an evil human being or force acting as the invisible hand behind the evil deed. This existential and individual view regards evil as something constant, and which should be eradicated.

The other view, which might be called structural, claims that there is no irrational force called evil, but that the actions called evil are the result of complex social and psychological factors which can in principle be identified and corrected. The Swedish legal system is essentially based on this view. Another example is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, which embraced the idea that the perpetrator of wicked deeds should not be punished with violence but rehabilitated through reconciliation with the victims.

The Old Testament essentially adopts the first notion of evil, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Exodus 21:24). The New Testament, however, upholds the second view, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke, 23:34).

The Bush administration seems to have based their views on the individual, existential perspective, originating from the Old Testament, even if Bush usually seems to prefer to quote the New Testament in his speeches. The individual strategy is much more useful in propaganda that aims at simplifying reality, allowing clear modes of action to be presented.

In the first sentences of the address on September 11, Bush had already used the word 'evil' to describe the terrorist attacs: "evil, despicable acts of terror". A few sentences later he proceeded to use an explicit existential description: "Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature". He firmly established the concept of evil, citing a passage from the Bible, and thus anchoring the war on terror, using Biblical undertones, as a just war: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me" (Psalms 23:4). (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html).

The speech writer David Frum, who praises Bush's rhetorical ability, comments on the use of the concept 'evil': "He described the murderers as 'the evil ones'. In a country where almost two-third of the population believes in the existence of the devil, Bush was identifying Osama bin Laden and his gang as literally satanic" (Frum, 2003:140).

In later speeches the idea of evil human beings becomes increasingly explicit. Five days after 9/11, Bush elaborates on the thought that evil is linked to human nature: "We've been warned there are evil people in this world. We've been warned so vividly – and we'll be alert. Your government is alert. The governors and mayors are alert that evil folks still lurk out there" (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html)

And at a press conference on October 11 he declares: "I think it's essential that all moms and dads and citizens tell their children we love them and there is love in the world, but also remind them there are evil people." These evil people, personified by Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, not only kill but enjoy it: "They kill thousands of innocent people and then rejoice about it", he says at the same press conference. By depicting the main representatives of terrorism as well as those who protect them, whether bin Laden or Saddam Hussein, as existentially evil, it becomes fully legitimate to destroy the enemy using all available means. No room is given for reflection or deliberation. The picture of the enemy is clear and the response is obvious.

Rhetorical State of Alert, Autumn 2002

After Bush's State of the Union Address on January 29 2002, relatively little was said about Iraq. However, following a visit by British Prime Minister Tony Blair for the anniversary of September 11, the rhetorical state of alert (i.e. the almost six month long period of rhetorical efforts to make credible the necessity of the Iraq War), gained speed with increasingly threatening imagery.

In a radio address on October 5, Bush, using alliteration for emphasis, describes the threat from Saddam Hussein as "grave and growing". Two days later he delivers a speech in Cincinnati which has very clear connections with the address given by Bush Senior at the start of the Gulf War. The setting is interesting and has been carefully chosen. Bush is standing in front of a world map with the US at the centre. The Internet page for this speech bears the headline "Denial and deception", the Iraqi flag and a map of Iraq. The heading of the speech is "President Bush outlines Iraqi threat". He begins by speaking about "a great threat to peace, and America's determination to lead the world in confronting that threat".

The speech that follows is seemingly based on a dialogue with the American people, in the form of detailed answers to questions people ask themselves. Bush presents all his main themes in a quick disposition: "Many Americans have raised legitimate questions: about the nature of the threat; about the urgency of action – why be concerned now; about the link between Iraq developing weapons of terror, and the wider war on terror".

He goes on to assure the public that the questions have been discussed "broadly and fully" within his administration. "And tonight, I want to share those discussions with you". He obviously wants to give an impression of competence and reflection as well as of complete transparency. The first question, relating to the nature of the threat, is answered by describing Saddam Hussein as the ultimate dictator, and using terms such as murderous, brutal, merciless and homicidal.

The second question, why the urgency (which was surely the most relevant question), is first answered: since 'we know' that Hussein has dangerous weapons today, there is hardly any point in waiting until tomorrow when he might have even more. On what does Bush base this statement, which we now know was false? Apart from the repeated 'we know' based on intelligence activities without evidence, he bases his statement on the

weapons inspectors. Another argument for military intervention is guilt by association as well as alleged cooperation between Iraq and al Qaeda: "We know that Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorist network share a common enemy – the United States of America".

The issue of urgency is then brought up again – twice – in the speech, which indicates the weight given to it. The second time, he uses the efficient metaphor of the 'smoking gun', a metaphor that is later to occur often. "Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud…we have every reason to assume the worst, and we have an urgent duty to prevent the worst from occurring".

The image of the mushroom cloud was already part of the official discourse concerning Saddam Hussein. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice had used it in an appearance on CNN on September 8 2002: "The problem here is that there will always be some uncertainty about how quickly he can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud" (http://www.spinsanity.org/).

The ominous picture is essentially and exclusively based on the concept of weapons of mass destruction. This term is, with some variation, used 32 times in the speech and it formed, as we know, the basis of the argument. Let us take a closer look at what this expression, hereafter shortened to WMD, really means.

The 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' Theme

The most straightforward gateway to understanding the meaning of a vague concept is sometimes the definition provided by an encyclopaedia. According to the Swedish encyclopaedia *Nationalencyclopedin*, 'weapons of mass destruction' is

> a generic term for nuclear weapons as well as biological, chemical and radiological weapons, defined in a UN resolution in 1948. Subsequently, some forms of environmental influence with the aim of inflicting harm on another nation have been added. The concept thus comprises a number of technically disparate, and in part hypothetical, types of weapons or methods, and the word is especially used in political contexts [transl.].

WMD is thus a frightening but vaguely defined concept. It is a powerful and threatening expression that is used to denote, not one's own weapons' production, but the enemy arsenal. According to the BBC News e-cyclopedia, the FBI's definition of WMD also includes conventional explosives: "A weapon crosses the WMD threshold when the consequences of its release overwhelm local responders". And: "WMD has had a mass impact of its own. Its recent ubiquity has earned it a place on Lake Superior State University's famed list of 'misused, overused and generally useless' words" (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2744411.stm).

The concept WMD already appears in the speeches following 9/11, before the Afghanistan War. At a press conference on October11 2001 (a month after the disaster), Bush explains, apropos the high degree of emergency measures in place to prepare for any new attacks:

> We received knowledge that perhaps an al Qaeda operative was prepared to use a crop duster to spray a biological weapon or a chemical weapon on American people. And so we responded…We knew full well that in order for a crop duster to become a weapon of mass destruction would require a retrofitting, and so we talked to machine shops around where crop dusters are located.

The use of the concept is especially frequent in connection with the anthrax episode in the autumn of 2001. A few mail items containing anthrax bacteria caused a world-wide fear of new terror attacks, this time with biological weapons. Five people died in the US and a large number of people were infected. The spread of the anthrax was without delay naturally linked to al Qaeda and intensified war preparations. When, after a couple of weeks, the bacteria proved to have originated from American laboratories, and when, a month later, a former employee at an American army military laboratory was arrested for the crime, the story quickly disappeared from the news headlines. However, the events made a lasting impression. According to the sociologist R. Danielle Egan, the anthrax scare, however legitimate it may have seemed, also drew attention away from the war in Afghanistan:

> The use of the term 'weapon of mass destruction' in the discourse of anthrax is the ultimate illusion, the ultimate way of producing a cultural panic and blindness to the massive contradiction between Anthrax…and the repeated dropping of ten-ton bombs on Afghanistan. The contradiction in logic is so obvious, but so obscured. How can a bacterium that a simple sixty-day course of the antibiotic Cipro can cure be viewed as more threatening than the continual air raids in Afghanistan? (Egan, 2002:18).

Egan's comparison is of course misleading, not only because the threats are aimed in opposite directions (anthrax at the Western World, bombs at Afghanistan), but also because anthrax, if it were to be used on a large scale, could not be fought easily with antibiotics. However, with anthrax and what Egan calls 'discursively produced panic' the vague concept of WMD has been given a concrete and, to the rhetoric of war, welcome, meaning.

Colin Powell's Speech, February 5 2003

Just how welcome is evident, for instance, from the address given by Colin Powell on February 5 2003, in which he presented what are now highly disputed 'facts' about the Iraqi possession of WMD. The speech was given a little over a week before the two weapons inspectors Dr Blix and Dr El Baradei presented their preliminary findings – findings which were generally expected to be largely negative. Powell's speech should be seen as an attempt at refuting this expert knowledge in advance, in order to forestall any further protests against the war plans. It was, in this context, a very long speech, one hour and 15 minutes, packed with figures, quotations and visual evidence. Powell claimed to have two objectives. One was to support what he defined as the core assessments made by Dr Blix and Dr El Baradei, namely that Iraq had neither accepted disarmament nor provided any new information on WMD. The second point of the inspectors, however, the fact that they had not found any traces of WMD, was not mentioned. Powell's second objective was to do just that – provide new information, "to share with you what the United States knows about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction as well as Iraq's involvement in terrorism, which is also the subject of Resolution 1441 and other earlier resolutions".

This is of course a problematic statement since it raises the question of why the inspectors did not receive this information. If the US had had access to more far-reaching information, they should have shared it with the inspectors. He meets any potential objection by saying that the inspectors had been provided with all relevant information.

From an argumentation-technical point of view, the actual submission of evidence is interesting. What we can see is, in rhetorical terms, a clustering of examples, an abundance of facts, pictures, quotations and statements, which by its quantity alone gives a sense of credibility. The degree of truth in these statements will not be studied here; the object of the study is the actual rhetorical form. Powell based his entire argument and credibility on UN Security Council Resolution 1441, which he defined as follows: "The purpose of that resolution was to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction…Resolution 1441 gave Iraq one last chance, one last chance to come into compliance or to face serious consequences". In its entirety, the long speech was an attempt at proving that Iraq had not complied. The submission of evidence seemed to be only about the presence of WMD (afterwards many journalists pointed out that the evidence produced was weak). The basic thesis was that Iraq had been un-cooperative and, tacitly, that it would face 'serious consequences'. Powell mentioned Resolution 1441 no less than 19 times.

The speech could be, and still can be, found on the White House web page where the overall headline is "Iraq – Denial and Deception". The page presents all the evidence in the form of still pictures, video as well as audio clips (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030205-1.html). Powell used 45 visual 'pieces of evidence' to support his argument. According to classical rhetoric, examples, concrete and easily comprehensible pictures, quotations and stories are the most efficient evidence (Johannesson, 1998:102pp). That which can be seen and heard with one's own eyes and ears always carries the heaviest weight. Added to this is the credibility of the speaker – the ethos that he brings with him as well as the ethos he creates as he speaks.

A speaker's ethos can be described as a combination of his credibility in terms of competence, virtues and status (primary ethos) and the credibility he manages to achieve in the actual speaking situation (secondary ethos) (Mral, 2003:37p). Powell's primary ethos as Secretary of State, a potential presidential candidate and experienced high-ranking officer in the armed forces, was naturally strong. But as the situation was so sensitive the planned actions were questioned in the UN assembly, and proof that Iraq constituted an imminent threat was almost non-existent. Powell had thus to use both his personal qualities and his performance to reclaim the credibility of the Bush Administration.

The speech on the White House home page includes the video recording, thereby providing an opportunity to study not only the text but also the presentation, and allowing the study of Powell's body language. Powell strongly emphasises his words with the help of gestures, pauses and voice variations that indicate indignation. He stresses his words with rhythmic hand movements and by knocking on the table. Thus, he not only reads a text but puts his own ethos into it, expresses with his whole body a deep commitment and conviction of the validity of the evidence. Giving one's own commitment credibility is a rhetorical necessity if one really wants to carry conviction. This is best done, as it is here, by body language that corresponds to the essence of the words.

The speech is full of rhetorical strategies: rhetorical questions, emphasis, irony, indignation, clustering of menacing pictures, illusory exactness and vague statements. Powell claims 32 times that 'we know', sometimes without giving any sources at all, sometimes by referring to 'human sources' which are at times characterised as 'human sources who are in a position to know facts'. Names are rarely mentioned.

The slides and their interpretations constitute the strongest evidence. In a war situation, rational, logical and truth-seeking arguments should not be expected. It is, however, useful to weigh up at least some of Powell's arguments against a logical ideal of reason. According to such an ideal one should not be guilty of what are known as fal-

lacies, logical false conclusions and lack of objectivity. Without entering further into the complex field of logical argumentation analysis, it is still possible to benefit from its definition of lack of objectivity. The philosopher Arne Naess has listed a few deviations from the objectivity ideal in terms of tendentious accounts, ambiguities, descriptions and hasty conclusions (Naess, 1995:101-115). Powell offers some textbook examples of these and other fallacies. One of his first 'pieces of evidence' of Saddam Hussein's not making any efforts to disarm is a brief conversation between an alleged officer in the Iraqi Republican Guard Headquarters and an officer in the field. After playing the conversation (in English translation), he reads it out again with dramatic intonation. "Let me pause again and review the elements of this message":

> 'They're inspecting the ammunition you have, yes'
> 'Yes.'
> 'For the possibility there are forbidden ammo.'
> 'For the possibility there is by chance forbidden ammo?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'And we sent you a message yesterday to clean out all of the areas, the scrap areas, the abandoned areas. Make sure there is nothing there.'

Interesting here is that, using emphasis, Powell repeats the pretty thin message that everybody has already read. What is really remarkable, however, is that he misrepresents it. Because in the translation, the penultimate sentence reads: "And we sent you a message to inspect the scrap areas, the abandoned areas." The original thus mentions only inspecting the scrap areas and the abandoned areas, while Powell speaks of *all* areas, and not just about inspecting but cleaning out. The original could just as easily be interpreted to mean that the officer in the field is to check if there is really nothing left, even in the scrap areas – a fair request in the circumstances. Powell, however, claims that what is being said is about deliberately hiding ammunition. In terms of fallacy, this can be referred to as a tendentious account; it can also be called deliberate misquotation. From this and the concluding comment that the officer is to destroy the message so that no one will see it, Powell concludes that "they don't want that message seen, because they were trying to clean up the area to leave no evidence behind of the presence of weapons of mass destruction. And they can claim that nothing was there. And the inspectors can look all they want, and they will find nothing. This effort to hide things from the inspectors is not one or two isolated events, quite the contrary. This is part and parcel of a policy of evasion and deception that goes back 12 years, a policy set at the highest levels of the Iraqi regime".

The entire argument is based on *argumentum ex silentio*, i.e. the fact that the opposition is quiet is interpreted as an affirmation of their being in the wrong and that one's own arguments are valid. It can also be called *argumentum ad ignorantia*: "I am right since you cannot prove the opposite" (Sigrell, 2001:131).

A fallacy that recurs throughout the speech is *argumentum ad baculum*, the threat argument. The clearest, underlined by a remarkable example, comes in the middle of the speech when Powell introduces the anthrax theme. He displays a small tube containing some kind of powder and says:

> Less than a teaspoon of dry anthrax, a little bit about this amount – this is just about the amount of a teaspoon – less than a teaspoonfull of dry anthrax in an envelope shut down the United States Senate in the fall of 2001. This forced several hundred people to undergo emergency medical treatment and killed two

> postal workers just from an amount just about this quantity that was inside of an envelope. Iraq declared 8,500 litres of anthrax, but UNSCOM estimates that Saddam Hussein could have produced 25,000 litres. If concentrated into this dry form, this amount would be enough to fill tens upon tens upon tens of thousands of teaspoons. And Saddam Hussein has not verifiably accounted for even one teaspoonfull of this deadly material.

Let us hope that the tube did not actually contain anthrax. However, it takes careful studying of the wording to see that Mr Powell does not actually assert this either. The ambiguity is hardly a coincidence. We recognise the classic demand for *evidentia*, a presentation of exact and striking details. The figures appear to be most exact and at the same time vague; a teaspoon and "tens upon tens of thousands of teaspoons". They seem reliable and become credible when Colin Powell invests his entire ethos in the demonstration of evidence. As mentioned above, Powell, as a former officer of the armed forces and a politician, enjoys a high degree of credibility and because he is the one who, with great emphasis, presents this 'evidence', there are few reasons to doubt it. War propaganda expects people to have short memories. And who can remember statements dating back several years? Powell himself should have been aware that even if he did not deliberately lie, his information was dubious, because already in February, 2001 in reference to the USA's successful sanctions against Iraq and Saddam Hussein, he had already said:

> He has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction. He is unable to protect conventional power against his neighbours (http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/933.htm).

What we have here is thus a case where one propaganda statement jeopardises the other. In 2001 he assured the neighbours of Iraq that the US was in control of the situation, that the air patrols and the sanctions had worked and had prevented the production of WMD. Two years later he claims the opposite.

That WMD was a pretext is now relatively undisputed, but few have expressed this as clearly as Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. On May 28 2003, in an interview with the magazine *Vanity Fair*, Wolfowitz admits that WMD were never the primary reason for the US invasion of Iraq: "For bureaucratic reasons, we settled on one issue, weapons of mass destruction, because it was the one reason everyone could agree on."

The UN weapons inspectors' work has always been problematic for the US Government. In his 'victory speech' of May 1 2003, Bush implies that it had been completely useless, and that the search for weapons of mass destruction would start now: "We've begun the search for hidden chemical and biological weapons and already know of hundreds of sites that will be investigated." It was as if the UN weapons inspectors' work had never taken place.

Summit in the Azores, March 16 2003

A possible invasion of Iraq had been discussed for more than six months and time was beginning to run short, partly because of the summer heat. The protests against the approaching war were both extensive and global, and from a propaganda perspective the actions had, to the greatest degree possible, to be made to appear as non-war.

The statements given by the so-called Transatlantic Coalition, George W Bush, Tony Blair and Spain's Jose Maria Aznar, during the summit in the Azores on March 16 2003, two days before the outbreak of war, are an almost classical example of double-talk. At

the press conference, Aznar declared that they had not come to the Azores to declare war. Nor does the statement of the three statesmen refer to the war but, rather, to what is going to happen afterwards. Having again depicted Saddam Hussein as the root of all evil and as responsible for all adverse consequences, the Coalition presents its future actions as a major humanitarian operation.

> We envisage a unified Iraq with its territorial integrity respected. All the Iraqi people – its rich mix of Sunni and Shiite Arabs, Kurds, Turkomen, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and all others – should enjoy freedom, prosperity, and equality in a united country. We will support the Iraqi people's aspirations for a representative government that upholds human rights and the rule of law as cornerstones of democracy.

War always implies instability and uncertain consequences. The international community was not supportive of the action, which meant that a majority of public opinion considered it a highly risky venture. Therefore, one of the rhetorical aims at this point was to claim the opposite, to make the Coalition appear reliable. This was done by emphasising the security of the cooperation: "…we plan to work in close partnership with international institutions, including the United Nations; our Allies and partners; and bilateral donors". Security is a key word, which is again contrasted to the WMD threat: "Any military presence, should it be necessary, will be temporary and intended to promote security and elimination of weapons of mass destruction…"

The propaganda technique used here can, in the words of rhetoric researcher Lennart Hellspong, be called disguise by lies, indefiniteness, embellishing and abstraction (Hellspong, 1992:220pp).

The WMD falsehood does not need further comment. The indefiniteness lies in the fact that the action is described in terms such as 'if conflict occurs', and 'military presence, should it be necessary'. It is embellished by presenting the future action as a humanitarian and charitable deed, providing a vision of a better world following a possible 'conflict'. The abstraction lies in calling the actions a 'commitment', in redefining the planned military aggression as an act of peace.

The 'Helpfulness' Theme

That the Coalition is coming to help is a recurring theme in the war rhetoric following the September 11 attacks. Being helpful and generous is part of American self-perception (Hart, 1997:238f) and thus a worthwhile theme for justifying the war as well as for balancing aggression. Before the war in Afghanistan, in the autumn of 2001, Bush had already emphasised the generosity of the US:

> Even as we fight evil regimes we are generous to the people they oppress. Following World War II, America fed and rebuilt Japan and Germany, and their people became some of our closest friends in the world (Speech, October 6, 2001).

Although not all Germans or Japanese would agree with this statement, it is nevertheless interesting if one wants to understand the American self-image on which Bush bases his reasoning. The US does not want war, but peace; the American people do not want to wage war, but to help. The planned action is only violent by way of exception and force. In the address at the start of war on October 7 2001, Bush again underlines the friendly intentions behind the military action:

> At the same time, the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we will also drop food, medicine and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and children of Afghanistan.

On October 30 2001, at the height of the Afghanistan War, he says: "We are a generous people, a thoughtful people who hurt, and share the sadness when people lose their life or when people are hurt…We have shown in difficult times that we're not just a world power, that we're a good and kind and courageous people".

Among the photo essays on the White House web page, there are, under the headlines "Photos" and "Timelines" respectively, links called "Helping others", which are largely about aid action for Afghan children, as well as a link called "Helping those in need", providing speeches on relief initiatives. What is interesting here is that both these links deal almost exclusively with Afghanistan and with women and children. A corresponding collection of pictures of children receiving help from American soldiers can be found under the Iraq links: the women and children are well-dressed, well-nourished, happy, beautiful and thankful. The American soldiers appear almost as Messianic saviours (http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/photoessay/essay6/). The same theme – that the main objective of the action is to provide help – is also brought up in the speech on the eve of the Iraq War.

War Address, March 19 2003

On March 19, the eve of the invasion of Iraq, Bush gives the war address, this time from the Oval Office, the same place from where Bush Senior had announced the Gulf War. On the windowsill behind him, two family photos can be seen – one of his daughters and one of his wife and dog.

In the introduction of the war address, Bush defines the action as "military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger". Big words with many undertones and associations. The word 'operations' is reminiscent of the clinical warfare so cherished in the Gulf War. Disarming someone may involve the use of violence, but it is a peace-creating measure; here Iraq represents only military power, as its people are to be 'set free'. The entire action is thus about defence – the whole world will be defended. The war becomes an aid action:

> I want Americans and all the world to know that coalition forces will make every effort to spare innocent civilians from harm…And helping Iraqis achieve a united, stable and free country will require our sustained commitment. We come to Iraq with respect for its citizens, for their great civilisation and for the religious faiths they practise. We have no ambition in Iraq, except to remove a threat and restore control of that country to its own people.

The word 'war' occurs twice, both times in connection with Saddam Hussein. Firstly, the aim is to prevent him from waging war, and secondly, he does not have any respect for conventions of war. In order to really emphasise the threat which is being fought, there is no longer talk of weapons of mass destruction but of 'weapons of mass murder'. In this context, the satanic theme is brought up again:

> In this conflict, America faces an enemy who has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality. Saddam Hussein has placed Iraqi troops and equipment

> in civilian areas, attempting to use innocent men, women and children as shields for his own military – a final atrocity against his people.

Since this speech is aimed largely at the fighting troops, this statement should be interpreted as a justification for civilian areas to potentially also become legitimate targets – should the enemy be suspected of hiding there. That the enemy disguises itself again alludes to the cowardice theme. The American military, on the other hand, is described as possessing 'skill and bravery' as well as an 'honourable and decent spirit'. In addition to military operations, the actions of the Allies are described in terms of 'striking selected targets of military importance', 'broad and concerted campaign', 'common defence', 'remove a threat', 'decisive force'. They are pure, well-organised and just.

The war is described as inevitable ('Now that conflict has come'), as is the coming victory – a necessity in war propaganda. The conflict is a part of America's 'work for peace'. The 'work' metaphor, in particular, is interesting as part of the rhetorical efforts to make the war appear as normality: "And you can know that our forces will be coming home as soon as their work is done".

'Business', 'work' and 'job', as well as 'mission', are recurring concepts in Bush's rhetoric. American identity is, to a high degree, constituted by the image of its citizens as a hard-working people. Working hard is a matter of honour (Hart, 1997:238f).

The 'Work' Theme

From the very beginning, as the chain of events after September 11 unfolded, Bush defines the war on terror as a 'job'. In his speech on November 16 2001, he places military action on a par with civilian work: "I also have faith in our military. And we have got a job to do – just like the farmers and ranchers and business owners and factory workers have a job to do. My administration has a job to do, and we're going to do it. We will rid the world of the evil-doers".

What happens when a war is defined as a job? The metaphor gives the action a kind of everyday status, something familiar. Political leaders presume that individuals know their jobs should contribute to the nation's success. But in principal work is a civilian activity. Work is necessary. It has a certain traditional, masculine quality. Work is honourable and has little to do with feelings except, of course, pride.

A job is assigned to you, it is serious, secure and involving great responsibility – a metaphor which, in the current war rhetoric is, interestingly, complemented with factors that to all appearances do not have anything in common with war: games, sports and entertainment.

The 'Games' and 'Sports' Theme

In the first days after the September 11 attacks, Bush had already coined the hunting metaphor. "Make no mistake: The United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts". And thus the opponent was defined as cowardly, unmanly and fair game. Hunting is a traditionally male sport and animals are the objective. Hunting can be a way of gathering food, but people are not normally the prey. In war, the hunting metaphor is a worthwhile one in order to degrade and dehumanise the opponent. But hunting is also an accepted pastime, perhaps even a necessity in order to limit damage to land and property.

Hunting is just one of the game and sports metaphors used to describe the war as something acceptable and familiar, even entertaining. Another sign of patriotic playfulness in connection with the Iraq War is an issue of collector's picture cards. The company Topps, which issues cards of, for example, sports stars, has issued a series of 90 cards entitled "Enduring Freedom". The writer Clay Risen explains in the independent *Flak* Magazine:

> Enduring Freedom picture cards are only the latest in a long line of Sept 11 kitsch. And while the idea of making money off the tragedy is questionable, these cards go one step further by presenting the 'New War on Terrorism' as a fun, pleasant way for kids to learn about current events.

The cards thus target children. Printed on the back of the packets is:

> An encyclopedic record of America's war against terrorism. Cards contain biographical information on civilian and military leaders entrusted to guide us through this fight, statistical data, and photos of military hardware.

Topps' own explanation for the issue of the cards is that the collection "presents the New War on Terrorism in a format that children understand. Not included are the disturbing images shown repeatedly on national newscasts. Instead, Topps has chosen to focus on America's strengths – its elected leaders, the security of its military, its worldwide support…and the courage and unity of its people".

The pictures are fairly dull, showing Bush on the phone, Condoleezza Rice in a speaking pose, soldiers in formation ("Marines Head Out For Overseas Duty"), but nothing 'disturbing', nothing from the fields of war, no advanced weapons and, as Clay Risen sarcastically remarks, nothing about the human side of the war, "of refugee camps, of wounded soldiers or of anti-war protests. That would be 'disturbing'. And anyway, this is the 'New War', in which the bad guys get incinerated, civilians go untouched and U.S. servicemen don't die. A kid-friendly war, and that means a profit-friendly war as well. With merchandise like this, who needs Fox News?" (http://flakmag.com/misc/topps.html).

Even the Swedish media used games metaphors during the Gulf War in 1991 to imply its inevitability. A game should not be interrupted until one of the sides has won (Johannesson, 1992:44pp). Trade cards had already been used during Operation Desert Storm, as analysed by Matthew Nadelhaft: "The prevalence of sports metaphors in discourse about the war illustrates both the utility of sports as a conceptual tool and as means of legitimation, and the pervasiveness of sports in American cultural logic; its almost unconscious residence in the American mind" (Nadelhaft, 1993:26).

However, the sports and games metaphors are not only useful in an American context, but are part of a male conceptual world in which life appears as a fighting sport. Perhaps they represent a way of giving war more human proportions, even entertainment value. That the Iraq War was considered a game of positions is, from a rhetorical point of view, unequivocal. Mr Bush as well as Mr Blair readily uses the concept 'game' to describe the events. At the press conference in the Azores, Tony Blair, for example, states: "Saddam plays these games and we carry on allowing him to play them". And in reply to the question of how they were going to vote on a second UN resolution, Mr Bush says:

> I was the guy that said they ought to vote. And one country voted – at least showed their cards, I believe. It's an old Texas expression, show your cards, when you're playing poker. France showed their cards. After I said what I said, they said they

> were going to veto anything that held Saddam to account. So cards have been played. And we'll just have to take an assessment after tomorrow to determine what that card meant.

This could be the statement that led to a PR gimmick particularly appreciated by the media: a pack of cards featuring Iraq's 52 'most-wanted' leaders, 54 men and one woman.

Brigadier General Vincent Brooks, the spokesperson of the US Alliance at the US Central Command outpost in Qatar explains on April 11 2003 (transcript from CBC News):

> /.../Coalition governments have identified a list of key regime leaders who must be pursued and brought to justice. The key list has 55 individuals who may be pursued, killed or captured…This list has been provided to Coalition forces on the ground in several forms to ease identification when contact does occur. And this deck of cards is one example of what we provide to soldiers and marines out in the field, with the faces of the individuals and what their role is. In this case there are 55 cards in the deck.

It was of course a rhetorically brilliant move to turn the enemy into a parlour game. The effect is ridicule and minimising of the enemy. On their TV screens, Americans were able to watch as card after card was collected methodically by the military. The US was the winner. Journalists had a worthwhile main thread to follow. The enemy became tangible and comprehensible, even to the smallest child. The deck of cards was at first distributed only to the troops in Iraq, but subsequently also sold very well at home, as the distributor writes:

> You've seen these cards on the nightly news. They've been featured in newspapers worldwide. Now you can own the one true collector's item from Operation Iraqi Freedom. This is the same 55-card deck given to Coalition soldiers featuring Iraq's 52 'most-wanted' leaders.

The deck of cards can now also be purchased as a poster and, as the distributor writes: "This may be the last time anyone will ever see these faces again" (http://www.greatusaflags.com).

Defining Time

In his major address to Congress on September 20 2001, Bush said, "…this country will define our times, not be defined by them". Great events sometimes require big words. In times of crisis, it is expected, in Europe as well, that politicians become rhetoricians, explaining what is happening so that we can understand, as well as get instructions(?) for future action. In Sweden, however, there is suspicion against pathos-filled, emotional rhetoric and there is a sound scepticism towards big words. We are not used to having politicians speaking to the people at all times of the day. The prime minister very seldom takes on the role of the interpreter of Parliament's (not to mention the whole people's) views and opinions. It is therefore with astonishment that we view the American way of using public language, which we often find exaggerated, pathetic and packed with religious terms, and which is exactly why we tend to underestimate the significance of what is being said. We do not really take it seriously ('mere rhetoric') and often miss the real meaning and significance of the words. Our lack of practice with linguistic analyses easily results in an underestimation of the hidden meaning in pictures and concepts, especially when they are vague and ambiguous. If they are viewed purely as

wordy desk products, it is easy to miss the power contained in continuously repeated statements and in indistinct but forcible terms and phrases.

In the current war on terror, such expressions are clustered together. There are plenty of 'God terms' and 'Devil terms', according to Richard M. Weavers modern rhetorical theory (Weaver 1985), positively and negatively charged words, often arranged in pairs of opposites: freedom – fear; civilisation – barbarism; war – peace. The current war has generated a wealth of big words and emotionally loaded pictures. Events have been interpreted in vague and often distorted value terms and metaphors in which war becomes peace, attack becomes 'pre-emptive defence', military invasion becomes 'regime change', occupation becomes 'humanitarian intervention'. This distortion of language is of course not new. Manipulation and lies have always been a basic ingredient of warfare. The question which should be asked today is, however, what approach democratic societies should take in relation to self-evidently deceptive influencing of public opinion; to overtly manipulative rhetoric. One way would be to train one's sensitivity to verbal card-sharping. It is not necessary to be an opponent in principle to military operations in order to demand fairly plain and above-board public language. The mainstay of a democratic society is rational dialogue. When democratic societies initiate war, one should therefore be able to demand an open account of the reasons for its legitimacy, instead of the current 'perception management' (Rampton & Stauber, 2003:5f), knowledge gearing or indoctrination, intended through deception to create and recreate our feelings, our motives and our reasoning.

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