

Spring 2015

# Presidential Rhetoric: A Call To War In the Post-Cold War United States

Benjamin Larkin

*University of New Hampshire, Durham*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.unh.edu/thesis>

---

## Recommended Citation

Larkin, Benjamin, "Presidential Rhetoric: A Call To War In the Post-Cold War United States" (2015). *Master's Theses and Capstones*. 930.

<https://scholars.unh.edu/thesis/930>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses and Capstones by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact [nicole.hentz@unh.edu](mailto:nicole.hentz@unh.edu).

PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC:  
A CALL TO WAR IN THE POST-COLD WAR  
UNITED STATES

BY

BENJAMIN C. LARKIN  
A.B., History, Dartmouth College, 1988  
J.D., The George Washington University, 1994

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
in Partial Fulfilment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Liberal Studies

May, 2015

PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC:  
A CALL TO WAR IN THE POST-COLD WAR  
UNITED STATES

BY

BENJAMIN C. LARKIN

This thesis has been examined and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies by:

Thesis Director, Marion Girard Dorsey  
Associate Professor, History

Kurk Dorsey  
Professor, History

Andrew E. Smith  
Associate Professor of Practice, Political Science

On May 1, 2015

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of New Hampshire Graduate School.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION	1
I. DESERT STORM: EXORCISING THE LEGACY OF VIETNAM AND SETTING THE COURSE FOR FUTURE UNITED STATES MILITARY INVOLVEMENT ABROAD	14
A. The Situation: President Bush's Character	16
B. The Situation: President Bush's Relationship with Congress and the American People	17
C. The Rhetoric	20
D. Congressional and Public Response	30
II. BOMBING KOSOVO: A HUMANITARIAN MISSION AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO AVOID A THIRD WORLD WAR	41
A. The Situation: President Clinton's Character	46
B. The Situation: Eastern Europe	49
C. The Rhetoric	52
D. Congressional and Public Response	61
III. POST 9/11: DEFINING TERRORISM AS WAR AND BEGINNING THE WAR ON TERROR DURING GEORGE W. BUSH'S FIRST TERM IN OFFICE	72
A. The Situation: The 2000 Presidential Election and Bush's Character	74
B. The Situation: The United States Congress in 2001	76
C. The Rhetoric	78
D. Congressional and Public Response	92

IV.	ASSAD'S USE OF POISONOUS GAS IN SYRIA IN 2013: A U.S. MILITARY RESPONSE OR A DIPLOMATIC APPROACH?	105
	A. The Situation: Syria	107
	B. The Situation: President Obama's Character and the Political Climate in the United States in 2013	110
	C. The Rhetoric	114
	D. Congressional and Public Response	126
	CONCLUSION	139
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	154

## ABSTRACT

### PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC: A CALL TO WAR IN THE POST-COLD WAR UNITED STATES

by

Benjamin C. Larkin

University of New Hampshire, May, 2015

This thesis considers the rhetoric advocating for the use of military force by United States Presidents following the end of the Cold War, using Aristotle's model of rhetoric as a persuasive tool as a framework. Aristotle asked: What is the character of the speaker? What logical arguments has the speaker made? Has the speaker understood and appealed to the emotions of the listener? As of this writing, there have been four United States Presidents since 1989: George H.W. Bush, William Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. Each used rhetoric to advocate for the use of military force. By considering the rhetoric of each of these Presidents in the context of the specific situation he confronted, and by examining United States Congressional and public response, it is clear that while the character of the speaker, actual or imputed, may have been important in persuading a listener, and while logical arguments were important in persuading a listener, it was absolutely critical that the sitting President understand and appeal to the emotions of the American people, including members of Congress, to successfully advocate for the use of military force.

The four cases considered here, one for each post-Cold War President, provide three examples where the President was able to understand and make that critical appeal to the emotions of his audiences and one example where the President did not initially understand or appeal to the emotions of his audiences. Presidents George H.W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush, who successfully understood and appealed to the emotions of their audiences, were able to successfully advocate for the use of military force. President Obama, who did not initially understand or successfully appeal to the emotions of his audiences, failed in his advocacy for the use of military force.

## Introduction

On September 24, 2014, President Barack Obama delivered a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in which he called Islamic State terrorists, specifically ISIL, a “network of death.”<sup>1</sup> He went on to detail how the United States, working with the international community, should and would “destroy” ISIL.<sup>2</sup> President Obama’s diction was no accident. He was not the first American president, or even the first post-Cold War American president, to use powerful, maybe even inflammatory, rhetoric to sway opinion in support of his position to use military force against a perceived threat. In fact, all four Post-Cold War American presidents have relied heavily on the power of their rhetoric to justify American military action and involvement in war. The term “network of death,” for instance, was a characterization of what President Obama considered a threat to the American way of life and lent support to his appeal for what he considered justified military action. Of the four post-Cold War presidents, George H.W. Bush, William Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, each faced situations where he believed United States military action was called for and justified. Each used powerful and dramatic rhetoric in an attempt to define and characterize an enemy and a threat to the United States and to call for military action. Three were successful. One was not.

### i. What is rhetoric?

To analyze post-Cold War Presidents’ use of rhetoric to advocate United States military involvement in various locales around the world requires some understanding of

the word “rhetoric.” Today “rhetoric” can have a negative connotation. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary states in one definition that rhetoric can mean, “language that is intended to influence people that may not be honest or reasonable.”<sup>3</sup> However, the perception by listeners about how honest or reasonable the speaker who is using rhetoric is turns out to be an important piece of a more classical definition of rhetoric. Merriam-Webster also provides the more classical definition, “the art or skill of speaking or writing formally and effectively especially as a way to persuade or influence people.”<sup>4</sup> Rhetoric, therefore, in the modern use of the term can be persuasive or effective, and yet still be less than honest. To be most persuasive, however, a speaker must be *perceived* as being honest and reasonable. Classically, being perceived as being honest and reasonable was evidence of character and added to the logical and emotional elements of the speaker’s argument.

ii. Aristotle’s model of rhetoric

The idea of persuasive rhetoric can be traced to Aristotle. Writing in 350 B.C.E., Aristotle defined rhetoric simply as the “faculty of observing (using) in any given case the available means of persuasion.”<sup>5</sup> A speaker, according to Aristotle, had not only to think about the subject matter upon which he or she was trying to be persuasive, but to think about the techniques available to be persuasive. Rhetoric, therefore, was not connected to any particular subject matter, but was a useful and necessary tool across all subject matters.

Aristotle identified three methods of effective persuasion. First, the better the character of the speaker, the more persuasive he or she was. Aristotle argued, “We

believe good men more fully and more readily than others . . .”<sup>6</sup> In Aristotle’s time the character of the speaker was an important factor in how the speaker was perceived and how persuasive the speaker was, although, perhaps it was more common then for a listener to know the speaker than it is today. The idea of “character” is tied directly to the question of “honesty” considered by listeners today. However, character also can be implied or imputed by the office held by the speaker, for instance the office of the presidency, rather than simply the person.

Second, Aristotle stated, persuasion could be achieved by the speaker understanding and appealing to the emotions of the listeners. Aristotle noted that, “Our judgments when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile.”<sup>7</sup> Characterizing or defining a situation can lead to an emotional response by the listener. By understanding, utilizing and appealing to those emotions, a speaker’s argument can be perceived as stronger or more persuasive.

Third, according to Aristotle, a speaker could be persuasive through the logic of the speech itself.<sup>8</sup> An argument in which facts could be proved, or apparently proved, was more persuasive. “Persuasive” did not necessarily mean the facts presented were accurate or truthful, but rather that they were perceived as accurate. In addition, as we will see, a logical argument is stronger if the speaker is able to connect the logical elements with the emotions of the listener.

Thus, Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric identified three distinct means of persuasion: through the character of the speaker, through the emotions of the listeners, and through the logic of the speech itself. A persuasive speaker in Aristotle’s time had to use and master all three means of persuasion. The same is true today, although I

argue below that while character and logic are important elements of persuasion, when making the decision to use military force in a post-Cold War world, understanding and appealing to the hearers' emotions is the most critical means of persuasion.

Though a complete discussion of why people make decisions based upon emotion, even more so than logic, is beyond the scope of this thesis, there is medical support for the proposition that in the absence of emotion, people find it very difficult to make even basic decisions even understanding the logical consequences.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps a simpler way to understand the importance of emotion in decision-making is to consider the concept of "official narratives."<sup>10</sup> An official narrative is a way for a government official, a President in the context of this thesis, to condense a complex foreign policy objective, such as going to war, into an easily communicated message.<sup>11</sup> As we will see, an "easily communicated" message often means a message evoking common emotions based upon a shared understanding of an historical use of military force or the consequences of not using military force.

### iii. Application of the Aristotle model of rhetoric to the rhetoric of post-Cold War Presidents

This thesis uses Aristotle's definition and applies it to the rhetoric of post-Cold War American presidents, specifically rhetoric in which the president was advocating for America to take military action or go to war. Presidents Bush, Clinton, Bush and Obama all used rhetoric to support the use of military force. Today, Americans are bombarded with rhetoric. At the national level, though, only the President has almost unfettered access to the American people primarily via his ability to speak live to all

Americans on television, especially during time of crisis. Some argue that this ability to communicate directly to the American public is the president's greatest power.

One supporter of this view, Richard Neustadt, argued in 1960, during the Cold War, and then later in 1990, right as the Cold War was drawing to a close, that the power of persuasion was the real power of the President.<sup>12</sup> According to Neustadt, the separation of powers contemplated and prescribed by the United States Constitution, was not so much a separation of powers as a "sharing" of powers. The president had executive powers granted by the Constitution; he had legislative powers; he had powers as the head of his party. However, with shared powers, Neustadt argued, the president had to rely on his ability to persuade: "The essence of a President's persuasive task is to convince such men that what the White House wants of them is what they ought to do for their sake and on their authority."<sup>13</sup> Persuasion, argued Neustadt, was even more important than the President's executive power granted by the Constitution or law or his power as head of his party. Because of the President's access to members of Congress and the American public via television, radio and other media, rhetoric has become an increasingly important tool in President's power of persuasion.

While Neustadt was primarily writing about the President's power to persuade lawmakers and the legislative branch of government, the argument can be extended to include the importance of being persuasive to members of the executive branch, members of the judicial branch, and, of course, members of the public. In times of crisis, especially when advocating the use of military force, presidents need the support of the public and the support of Congress. While Presidents undoubtedly look for international support as well, we will see that, most importantly, the President must

persuade members of Congress and the American public of the necessity of going to war. Thus, this thesis will address what effect post-Cold War presidential rhetoric had on these two most important groups, lawmakers and the public, and what influence these groups had upon the presidents.

#### iv. Defining the field of presidential rhetoric

Theodore Otto Windt, Jr., writing in 1986, summarized scholarship in the field of presidential rhetoric and provided a definition of the field at that time that is still relevant today. He referred to Neustadt's originally published book as a godsend.<sup>14</sup> Windt found that scholars generally agreed that the nature of the presidency had transformed from a "constitutional, administrative office to an executive, rhetorical office."<sup>15</sup> In other words, presidents were not solely relying on powers granted them by the Constitution or legislation to manage the country, but were increasingly formulating and advocating policy and using rhetoric to do it. Windt noted three influences for this transformation: increased activist leadership in the presidency, advancement of communications technology (he was talking about television in the mid-1980s, though today, of course, social media brings a whole new layer of communications technology), and the changing nature of the modern presidential campaign.<sup>16</sup>

The field of presidential rhetoric, as defined by Windt, was "concerned with the study of presidential public persuasion as it affects the ability of a President to exercise the powers of office."<sup>17</sup> Windt's point could be expanded to state that presidential rhetoric and public persuasion not only affected the ability of a president to exercise the powers of office, but affected a president's ability to continue to exercise the powers of

office by gaining re-election. In the situations considered below, not every post-Cold War president was necessarily concerned with being re-elected, but each was cognizant of his party and of public opinion. As we will see, each may also have been considering his legacy.

As an example, the extent of executive power was one issue that was raised for each post-Cold War President considered below. The President may have the executive power to take military action, but if the President could persuade Congress to support his policy choice, and rally the American public behind the decision, that exercise of executive power was much stronger. If it was not clear whether the President had the executive power of decision in a given situation, the President generally wanted Congressional support even if he felt it was not necessary by law. Similarly, if the general public supported the president's policy, Congress often felt the pressure to support the policy. With public and Congressional support, the President's ability to make decisions, especially the decision to use military force, became easier politically.

v. The power of defining a situation

David Zarefsky, then professor at Northwestern University, writing in 2004, further defined the field of presidential rhetoric. Zarefsky's primary thesis was that a President's real power was to "define" a situation. He argued, "Naming a situation provides the basis for understanding it and determining the appropriate response to it."<sup>18</sup> The power of presidential rhetoric, according to Zarefsky, was to "define a political reality."<sup>19</sup> If we accept Zarefsky's premise that the reality of a situation is not a given,

but can be and is characterized by the President through presidential rhetoric, then we can see how a President who has access to and who uses modern communications technology to advocate his position becomes so powerful. Zarefsky left no doubt by arguing that to “choose a definition” of a situation was to “plead a cause” and to “advance a claim.”<sup>20</sup>

While there remained little debate that American Presidents attempt to shape or frame the political debate about a given issue through rhetoric, there remained some question of how, exactly, presidents accomplish this feat and how to measure or define success. For instance, Zarefsky argued that the terms “presidential rhetoric” and “effect” were often too narrowly understood.<sup>21</sup> Presidential rhetoric, according to Zarefsky, should not solely focus on speeches, but should include the full array of speeches, interviews, press conferences, position papers, and other interactions with the media by the President and, at times, others in the administration. The effect of presidential rhetoric, according to Zarefsky, should not just be looked at quantitatively. Instead, he argued, while presidential rhetoric may result in a listener changing or replacing his or her attitudes, it may also reinforce an existing attitude or position, or result in modification in salience of a belief or attitude, or change the listener’s perception of what others’ attitudes or beliefs are in relation to his or her own, or cause a listener to think differently about what an attitude or belief means.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast, George C. Edwards struggled with what he found to be a lack of empirical evidence that presidential rhetoric affected listeners in a measurable way.<sup>23</sup> Edwards argued that presidents were frequently not successful in swaying public opinion in support of presidential policies.<sup>24</sup> Specifically, Edwards looked at the second

term of William Clinton's presidency and the failure of Clinton to achieve certain domestic policy goals. He concluded, therefore, that there were only "limited effects" of presidential rhetoric.<sup>25</sup> However, Edwards did not necessarily disagree that presidential rhetoric was very important in defining issues and shaping debate. As Zarefsky pointed out, few would argue that presidential rhetoric makes *no* difference.<sup>26</sup>

While this thesis will not attempt to fully answer or consider these questions, it argues that in certain situations, specifically referring to the call to use military force in response to perceived threats to national security in the post-Cold War world, presidential rhetoric was critical. Presidential speech defined the situation in each case and advocated for a specific response. Zarefsky noted that all rhetoric was "situational."<sup>27</sup> By examining four specific situations where the President advocated the use of military force in response to a perceived threat to national security, one situation each for the four post-Cold War presidents, this thesis argues that presidential rhetoric, though not always successful, clearly was critical to the decision to use military force.

vi. The four case-studies considered herein

The four case-studies considered in this thesis are: George H.W. Bush's decision to invade Kuwait as part of Desert Storm in 1991, William Clinton's decision to bomb Kosovo in 1999, George W. Bush's decision to invade first Afghanistan and then Iraq in the aftermath of 9/11, and Barack Obama's initial plea to use military force to intervene in Syria after Assad's use of poisonous gas in August of 2013. Below, in discussing each case-study, this thesis will endeavor to set forth the context of the rhetoric, analyze the rhetoric itself, and examine the response by Congress and the

American public in the aftermath of the rhetoric. Each situation was distinct. The situations occurred in a time period of almost twenty-five years. Two of the presidents were Republicans and two were Democrats. Each president in each situation set forth below had to consider questions, such as: How is American national security threatened? Is there a humanitarian reason for America to get involved militarily in the situation? What does history tell us? What sort of sacrifice are Americans willing to make? What will my legacy be?

In addition to the questions above, each president had to consider the reaction of Congress and the American public. To be sure, international reaction was important as well, but Congressional support and domestic public support, which often mirrored each other, was critical for a number of reasons. For instance, Congress could assist with or delay funding requests. In addition, while it may have been arguable whether Congress could stop a presidential decision to order military action, it was easier for the President if Congress supported the decision. Members of Congress, wishing to be re-elected or to keep their party in power, looked to the American public for support. The President, whether or not he was looking to be re-elected, generally had the same political concern that he not hurt his party. Thus, this thesis, while acknowledging that the President often has audiences outside of Congress and the American public, focuses on the interaction between the President and those two audiences specifically.

Three presidents, George H.W. Bush, William Clinton, and George W. Bush, successfully defined the situation, understood and appealed to the emotions of members of Congress and the American people and linked logical argument to those emotions. Those three presidents were successful in advocating for the United States

to take military action. Barack Obama, in the situation we consider, failed to define the events as a crisis and initially failed to identify and appeal to the emotions of members of Congress and the American people. Ultimately, Obama backed away from his advocacy for the use of military force.

Aristotle's model of rhetoric proved instructive. In all four cases, Aristotle's character of the speaker was important, but not as important as it may have been during Aristotle's time. Character meant different things depending upon the President: personal character, honesty, experience, or even the prestige of the office of the Presidency itself. Logic was also important. All four post-Cold War presidents used logical arguments to advocate for the use of military force, including arguments based on morality, humanitarian grounds, history and other themes. However, the most critical piece of Aristotle's model for each President who was advocating for the use of military force was emotion. Admittedly, elements of logical arguments often also evoked strong emotions. Words chosen by the President to define a situation so that there were logical arguments for the use of military force often were emotionally charged words. This overlap between logic and emotion supports the argument made below: the President had to understand and appeal to the emotions of the audience in order to successfully advocate for the use of military force. The importance of character diminished and the logical arguments became so much stronger when the President was able to understand and appeal to emotion.

## Introduction: notes

1. President Barack Obama: *Address to the United Nations*, September 24, 2014. <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/09/obama-un-address-111287.html>, accessed April 17, 2015.
2. Id.
3. Merriam-Webster Dictionary. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhetoric?show=0&t=1412533636>, accessed April 18, 2015.
4. Id.
5. Aristotle, Rhetoric, translated by W. Rhys Roberts, Book 1, Part 2, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.1.i.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.
6. Id.
7. Id.
8. Id.
9. Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, (New York, Penguin Group, 1994).
10. Susan A. Brewer, *Why America Fights*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 4.
11. Id.
12. Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*, (New York: The Free Press, 1990), preface and 29-30.
13. Id.: 30.
14. Theodore Otto Windt, Jr., *Presidential Rhetoric: Definition of a Field of Study*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 1, The Media and the Presidency (Winter, 1986): 102-116.
15. Id.: 103.
16. Id.
17. Id.
18. Zarefsky, David, *Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 3, The Public Presidency (Sep., 2004): 611.
19. Id.
20. Id.: 612.
21. Id.: 608.
22. Id.
23. George C. Edwards, III, *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
24. Id., introduction: viii-ix.
25. Id.
26. Zarefsky: 608-10. Note that Zarefsky also offered an updated version of Aristotle's model of rhetoric as a persuasive method. Zarefsky described rhetoric in a broader sense as a three-dimensional transaction between speaker and listener. One dimension was the relationship between speaker and the message. A second dimension was the relationship between the message and

the audience. The third dimension was the text of the message itself. These dimensions appear to echo Aristotle's model of character, emotion and logic. 27.Id.: 610.

## Chapter I: Desert Storm: Exorcising the Legacy of Vietnam and Setting the Course for Future United States Military Involvement Abroad

On March 6, 1991, President George H.W. Bush addressed a joint session of Congress to celebrate the end of the Persian Gulf War.<sup>1</sup> In front of a huge hanging American flag, and in front of lawmakers, each of whom had a small American flag sticking out of his or her front pocket, President Bush announced to members of Congress, and to the American people and to the world that the war was over. In the midst of congratulating Secretary of State James Baker and Generals Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf and others, President Bush acknowledged the Ambassador of Kuwait in the gallery and exclaimed, "Kuwait is free."<sup>2</sup>

This speech was, in essence, a victory lap for President Bush following the relatively easy and painless winning of the Persian Gulf War. It was symbolic of winning, patriotism and pride. This address, like most of President Bush's rhetoric surrounding the Persian Gulf War, though, spoke of more than simply the war in Kuwait. In defining Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and America's response, President Bush stressed two themes. These themes carry throughout Bush's initial address announcing Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and all the way through the victory address noted above.

The first theme addressed a vanquishing of Vietnam. Desert Storm presented an opportunity for President Bush, and for many Americans, not to forget necessarily, but to move beyond the less than successful – some argue disastrous – American military

involvement in Vietnam. The United States military had not been inactive with its military around the world in the approximately twenty years since the Vietnam War - - for instance, in “Operation Just Cause” in 1989 President Bush had ordered approximately 24,000 troops into Panama to assist with deposing Panamanian general and dictator Manuel Noriega - - but, to President Bush, Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, and potential invasion of Saudi Arabia, represented an ideal moment for the United States to flex its military muscle and regain some of its influence and credibility on the international stage in what Bush apparently considered another just cause.

The second theme looked to the future. Given that the United States had not utilized its military in such a major way in twenty years, the Persian Gulf War presented President Bush and the American people, as represented by Congress, with the opportunity to chart how and when and under what circumstances the United States could and would utilize military force abroad in the now post-Cold War world. Many Americans and many lawmakers wanted to avoid “another Vietnam” situation where war had been not really declared and America’s military mission had not really been defined and President Johnson and President Nixon had made a number of seemingly unilateral decisions. Ultimately, President Bush saw this situation as an opportunity to define the broader course of United States military involvement internationally in the future, beyond the Persian Gulf War.

Recall Windt and Zarefsky who wrote, among other things, that presidential rhetoric was “situational” and that the power of the president was to define a situation. Before examining President Bush’s Persian Gulf War rhetoric, therefore, it is necessary to understand what the situation was in the United States in 1990 when Iraq invaded

Kuwait. Once the backdrop situation is better understood, we can then turn to the presidential rhetoric itself surrounding the Persian Gulf War, and how that rhetoric shaped the situation and the American response. In considering the situation and the rhetoric, we will pay close attention to the elements of persuasion as set forth by Aristotle: the character of President Bush, the logical arguments he made, and whether he understood and appealed to the emotions of his audience. Finally, we consider the public and Congressional response to the Persian Gulf War and look at some of the legacies of Bush's Persian Gulf War rhetoric.

#### A: The Situation: President Bush's Character

A significant part of the situation leading into the Persian Gulf War was President George H.W. Bush himself. Aristotle stated that one way to achieve persuasion was through the character of the speaker himself. United States Presidents, by virtue of the prestige of the office alone, are granted a certain amount of authority and deference. In other words, the office imbues a President with a certain amount of character. However, character may or may not mean personal character. President Bush, however, was acknowledged for his personal character, primarily based on his experience, as well as the character imbued by the office. By the time he was elected president in the fall of 1988, Bush had had a long and distinguished political career, primarily in Washington, D.C. He had served in the House of Representatives in the late 1960s. He had been Ambassador to the United Nations. He had been Chief of the Liaison Office to the People's Republic of China. He had been the Director of Central

Intelligence in the mid-1970s and, of course, Vice President under Ronald Reagan during the 1980s.

Equally important to his political experience, however, was Bush's military experience. President Bush had served with distinction, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and other military honors, during the Second World War. This was a critical part of Bush's persona because, as we shall see, Bush used the history of World War II in his rhetoric about the Gulf War. Bush made important parallels in his rhetoric between Hitler and his aggression in Europe in World War II and Saddam Hussein and his aggression in Kuwait during 1990. Hitler overran Belgium much in the way that Hussein overran Kuwait. Many Americans of President Bush's generation had fought in World War II and thought of World War II as the good war, with United States participation justified. Most Americans also felt that the United States had been victorious in World War II. Bush attempted in his rhetoric to invoke that same justification and pride in support of United States involvement in the Gulf War.

## B: The Situation: President Bush's Relationship with Congress and the American People

When the Gulf War began, President Bush was relatively popular with the American public, but had an uneasy relationship with Congress, including some members of his own party. Bush won the 1988 election, defeating the Democrat nominee, Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts, with a little over 53% of the popular vote, but about 79% of the electoral vote.<sup>3</sup> During 1989, the first year of his presidency, the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe began to have holes and, in a very real

and symbolic way, the Berlin Wall came down. Germany reunited in 1990 and retained its membership in NATO. The Soviet Union's power was rapidly declining, though President Bush maintained close, personal ties to Mikhail Gorbachev and saw the Soviet Union as a potentially valuable international ally. Domestically, President Bush publicly sparred with Congress about the best ways to address a sluggish economy and deficits left over from President Ronald Reagan's administration. In the end, President Bush was forced by a Congress controlled by Democrats to enact some new taxes, which did not please Republicans. Thus, Bush's relationship with Congress in 1990 was strained overall, even on the Republican side of the aisle.

President Bush was relatively popular outside of Washington, D.C., in the months prior to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in early August 1990, but his popularity had been declining in Gallup Polls since a high approval rating of 73% in February of 1990.<sup>4</sup> Domestic issues, primarily centered on the growing deficit and less than robust economy, were proving difficult to overcome and were concerns for most Americans. By June 1990 Bush's approval rating was 69% and by July 1990 it was 60%.<sup>5</sup> The polls were not complete reviews of President Bush's job performance, but demonstrated that the number of respondents to the polls who approved of the job President Bush was doing as President at the time had declined from almost three-fourths of the respondents to three-fifths of the respondents. Still, even as Iraq invaded Kuwait, President Bush enjoyed a 60% approval rating, which was still quite strong.

Thus, the situation leading into Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, which precipitated the response by President Bush and the United States in the form of Desert Shield in August 1990, and then Desert Storm in February 1991, was that, domestically,

Bush enjoyed strong popularity with the public and an uneasy relationship with Congress. Public feelings about the international situation were positive. There was optimism about the end of the Cold War. The Berlin Wall had been torn down and Germany was negotiating its reunification. The Soviet Union was on its last legs, though; just as importantly, Bush saw Gorbachev and a new Russia was seen as a potentially strong international ally for the United States. President Bush “basked in the success” of three international summit meetings in a six-week span during 1990, including meetings with Gorbachev, with leaders of the Group of Seven industrial countries, and with NATO heads of government.<sup>6</sup>

Initially, the Persian Gulf War only increased Bush’s popularity. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait provided a situation on which Americans could focus that, while certainly political, was not as divisive as the domestic economy. Most Americans wanted the president to do something in response to Iraq’s invasion. Within about a week after President Bush’s address on August 8, 1990, outlining the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and America’s response<sup>7</sup>, including a trade embargo and other economic sanctions against Iraq, discussions with world leaders, United Nations sanctions, and deployment of troops to Saudi Arabia at the request of Saudi Arabia, Bush’s popularity was up to as high as 76%.<sup>8</sup>

Another part of the situation leading into Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, and largely unknown by many Americans, was Saddam Hussein’s working relationship with President Reagan and, later, President Bush. Saddam Hussein had enjoyed a beneficial relationship with the Reagan administration of the 1980s, including working with then Vice President Bush during Iraq’s war with Iran, which included loans

guaranteed by the United States and the right to purchase United States arms.<sup>9</sup> The relationship had continued off and on during the first two years of President Bush's presidency, though it had been strained when Saddam Hussein attacked the Kurds in northern Iraq, using, in part, arms supplied by the United States. In addition, some of the weapons utilized by the Iraqi army in the invasion of Kuwait had been American provided or American funded. Based on this relationship, while Saddam Hussein may well have expected a public show of extreme consternation from the United States in reaction to his invasion of Kuwait, he probably did not expect the extent of President Bush's response and the threat and use of military force.

### C: The Rhetoric

President Bush addressed United States military involvement in the Gulf War a number of times, using his rhetoric to skillfully define the situation and characterize Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Bush used Aristotle's methods of persuasion - - character, logic and appeal to emotion - - in order to advocate for his preferred policy of United States military involvement in the Gulf: initially to establish a defensive posture by amassing troops in Saudi Arabia and American naval vessels in the Gulf, and, later, to attack Iraq and drive its forces out of Kuwait.

This chapter focuses on three important speeches in which President Bush both characterized what was happening in Kuwait and advocated for increasing United States military action. First, Bush addressed the nation on August 8, 1990, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Second, Bush addressed the nation on January 16, 1991, updating the nation only hours after the United States had joined in air strikes against

Iraqi targets. Third, Bush addressed Iraq during his January 29, 1991, State of the Union address. This third address reiterated some of the same themes that President Bush had already set forth, but was very important because, with members of Congress present, and occasionally on their feet applauding, the speech finally demonstrated a unified American response and Congressional support for President Bush. As will be discussed below, Bush had in January 1991 just finished a three months' long battle with Congress about whether he had unilateral authority to involve the United States military in the Gulf War or needed Congressional approval. That question was put to bed with the portion of the State of the Union address devoted to the Gulf War.

These three addresses also share Bush's recurring use of history to appeal to the emotions of the American public. Mark A. Pollack, currently a professor at Temple University, argued in an essay, recalling Windt, that presidents shape the facts of a situation in order to define a situation. Pollack further argued that presidents use "historical allusions" and "historical analogies" to marshal public support.<sup>10</sup> The use of history, in particular historical symbols of which there is a "collective understanding," Pollack argued, had a significant emotional impact and "legitimized" a president's decisions.<sup>11</sup> By using the collective American memory of World War II, and in particular comparing Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler, President Bush was able to appeal to emotions shared by most Americans to legitimize his decision to attack Iraqi forces and Iraqi targets. As we will see in subsequent chapters, President Bush was just the first of the post-Cold War presidents to use history to appeal to the logic and, more importantly, emotions of his listeners.

i. Address to the nation, August 8, 1990

On August 2, 1990, Iraqi troops rolled into Kuwait and quickly took control. President Bush addressed the nation on August 8, 1990. Stating that in the “life of a nation,” sometimes we are “called upon to define who we are and what we believe,” President Bush utilized his presidential power of rhetoric to define the situation, in this case Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.<sup>12</sup> President Bush outlined American interests in becoming involved, including the big economic interest of oil, and the interest of regional stability, but these logical arguments came later in the speech. He began his characterization of the invasion by calling it a “blitzkrieg” and an “outrageous and brutal act of aggression.”<sup>13</sup> Though perhaps not the best public speaker, Bush effectively chose charged words with historical significance to appeal to the emotions of his listeners. He decidedly did not recall the Vietnam War, a legacy he was trying to get past, but instead recalled the “good war,” World War II, a war in which most Americans agreed that Hitler and Nazism must be stopped. Bush stated that, “A puppet regime imposed from the outside is unacceptable.”<sup>14</sup> With the words “puppet regime,” President Bush did not need to refer directly to Hitler or to the Soviet Union, but just by evoking Hitler and the Soviet Union, Bush stuck with a post-World War II, Cold War theme that could be agreed upon and embraced by most Americans.

Bush more directly recalled Hitler again later, exclaiming that, “Appeasement does not work.”<sup>15</sup> The use of the word, “appeasement” was a referral to the 1930s European and American policy with Hitler. In addition, Bush stated bluntly that, “As was the case in the 1930's, we see in Saddam Hussein an aggressive dictator threatening

his neighbors.”<sup>16</sup> President Bush’s meaning was clear. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait was like Germany’s invasion of its neighbors in the 1930s, and Saddam Hussein was like Adolf Hitler. This historical appeal had elements of logic, but was clearly an appeal to the emotions of most Americans.

Only later in the speech did President Bush make a more logical argument, setting forth the American interests put at risk by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. Bush acknowledged that the United States imported about half of its oil, so oil, and with it, the “economic freedom” of the United States was the primary interest served by the United States doing anything in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.<sup>17</sup> Bush argued that the United States had other interests as well. For instance, noting that the world was “beginning a new era,” apparently referring to the end of the Cold War, Bush emphasized the importance of keeping the peace in the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> Noting the “vital” interest to the United States of an independent and sovereign Saudi Arabia, Bush emphasized the “long” United States friendship with Saudi Arabia and the importance of Saudi Arabia to regional stability and as a deterrence to further Iraqi aggression.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Iraq’s invasion provided the United States the opportunity to regain some of the prestige and international standing it had lost during the Vietnam War, though Bush did not explicitly state this.

Donald Neuchterlein, a political scientist who has authored a number of books on American foreign policy, identified similar of the United States affected by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. Neuchterlein argued that the economic interest represented by oil and the interest in a favorable (new) world order were of highest ranking “vital” interest to the United States and that the interest of “promoting American values” through

defending a non-aggressor nation against a clear aggressor was a lesser, but still “major” interest.<sup>20</sup> Thus, oil, promotion of a new world order including stability in the Middle East, and the opportunity to regain American standing on the world stage were all interests.

The American response outlined by Bush in the August 8, 1990 speech consisted of the deployment of troops to Saudi Arabia; the deployment of additional ships to the Persian Gulf; the enactment of a trade embargo and economic sanctions against Iraq; and a discussion of communications he had had with various world leaders, including support from Great Britain, NATO, and the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup> Bush also noted that the United Nations had passed a resolution “decrying” the Iraqi attack and allowing for international sanctions.<sup>22</sup> With the American response, Bush defined the attack as a “world issue” and not just an issue for the United States.

In considering this address within the context of Aristotle’s model of a persuasive speaker, Bush’s character was not at issue. Bush simply stated that he came to the nation, “as President.” Bush, however, came to the nation with a lengthy and distinguished background in politics and in Washington, D.C., and the public popularity and trust that accompanied that background. This popularity and trust, combined with the character imbued by the office of the Presidency, made Bush a formidable advocate for a military response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. Bush also used logic to persuade his listeners, successfully identifying American interests and explaining why the United States had to respond. However, while character and logic were important, President Bush’s understanding of and appeal to the emotions of the American people and members of Congress was even more important. By utilizing specific references to

Hitler and World War II, and by carefully avoiding references to Vietnam, Bush paved the way for an initial positive response by the American public and put Congress on notice that he would advocate for a military response.

ii. Address to the nation on January 16, 1991

President Bush addressed the nation on January 16, 1991 hours after “allied” forces began air strikes on targets in Kuwait and Iraq. This was the first direct engagement of Iraqi forces following five months of economic sanctions against Iraq, warnings to Iraq, and waiting. During the brief address, President Bush both listed logical reasons why the decision to attack had been made and appealed to the emotions of the American public and Congress. He also continued his themes of differentiating this situation and military involvement from the situation in Vietnam and of looking to the future.

The logic of the attack was that all reasonable efforts had been made to persuade Saddam Hussein to leave Kuwait and all reasonable efforts had failed. Sanctions had been tried for five months and had failed.<sup>23</sup> Secretary of State James Baker had attended a meeting in Geneva and had been totally “rebuffed.”<sup>24</sup> The Secretary General of the United Nations had tried twice to reason with Saddam Hussein, and had just made a “last-ditch” effort to prevail upon Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait and had failed.<sup>25</sup> The United States had tried to be reasonable.

President Bush also significantly noted that Iraq was a military threat not only to American interests in the Middle East and the interests of American allies, but potentially also to the United States directly. According to Bush, in addition to a “vast

arsenal” of weapons, Iraq had chemical weapons and, most importantly, a nuclear weapon that had to be destroyed.<sup>26</sup> President Bush left no doubt that the United States and its allies had to attack Iraqi forces and targets and had to do it then in order to control this threat. Bush’s mention of a nuclear threat in the hands of an out-of-control nation such as Iraq appealed both to the logic of the attack and the emotions of the American public. Mention of the nuclear threat recalled the Soviet nuclear threat and the legacy of the just ended Cold War. .

President Bush, however, also made other emotional appeals to the American public and members of Congress. Bush, using emotionally charged language, stated that Iraq had “raped, pillaged and plundered” a tiny nation.<sup>27</sup> Iraq had committed “unspeakable atrocities.”<sup>28</sup> Iraq had “maimed and murdered children.”<sup>29</sup> The acts committed by Saddam Hussein and Iraq were akin to the atrocities committed by Hitler and the Nazis, and so, Saddam had to be stopped.

At the same time, President Bush tried mightily to differentiate this attack on Iraqi forces and targets from the United States involvement in Vietnam. “I’ve told the American people before that this will not be another Vietnam, and I repeat this here tonight.”<sup>30</sup> The United States was not acting on its own when it attacked Iraqi targets. This attack was taken “in accord with United Nations resolutions and with the consent of the United States Congress.”<sup>31</sup> Unlike the sometimes muddled objectives in Vietnam, the objectives in the Gulf were clear: “Saddam Hussein's forces will leave Kuwait. The legitimate government of Kuwait will be restored to its rightful place, and Kuwait will once again be free.”<sup>32</sup> Ground forces from the United States and its allies were not engaged in the battle.<sup>33</sup> By not employing ground forces at this time, President Bush

implied that casualties would be fewer, and that there was a much smaller chance of getting pulled into a drawn-out war as had occurred in Vietnam.

The address also continued President Bush's theme of looking forward to the future, what Bush called a "new world order." President Bush stated that he envisioned a new world order where "the rule of law, not the rule of the jungle" governed the conduct of nations.<sup>34</sup> Again, Bush was referring to and moving beyond the jungles of Vietnam. In addition, Bush said he envisioned a new world order "in which a credible United Nations can use its peacekeeping role to fulfill the promise and vision of the U.N.'s founders."<sup>35</sup> With the significant weakening of the Soviet Union and the Cold War at an end, Bush implied that the often criticized United Nations could now finally fulfill its role without having its members being forced to choose to align with the United States or the Soviet Union. With the Cold War over, Bush saw an opportunity with the Persian Gulf War and attempted to define and characterize the War as a war for the future. As one author put it, Bush saw that with the Gulf War, America could act as an "agent of change."<sup>36</sup>

The themes raised in this January 16, 1991 address paralleled the themes raised in Bush's August 8, 1990, address immediately following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. President Bush successfully invoked an emotional response by comparing Hussein's invasion and occupation of Kuwait to Hitler's invasion and occupation of so many European countries in World War II. Bush successfully set forth the logic in the United States response by noting American interests. Bush also wanted to further his agenda of a new world order by offering his view of the future, a view where these kinds of unprovoked attacks did not occur. In addition, Bush reminded Americans that this was

not Vietnam. The difference though between this address and the address immediately following Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait was that the United States military response had increased significantly. Immediately following Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait, the United States had taken up a defensive position in neighboring Saudi Arabia and had deployed naval vessels to the Gulf. Now, however, the United States military had moved from Saudi Arabia into Kuwait. The United States began air strikes and launched missiles at Iraqi targets. Ground troops were about to engage with Iraqi troops in Kuwait. Thus, President Bush not only reiterated his themes, but strengthened them to justify the increased United States military response.

iii. State of the Union, January 29, 1991

In his State of the Union Address on January 29, 1991, less than two weeks after his January 16, 1991, address to the nation, President Bush again reiterated, but also elaborated on some of these same themes. For instance, Bush stated that America had a "responsibility" to be involved militarily in the Persian Gulf War.

As Americans, we know that there are times when we must step forward and accept our responsibility to lead the world away from the dark chaos of dictators, toward the brighter promise of a better day. Almost 50 years ago we began a long struggle against aggressive totalitarianism. Now we face another defining hour for America and the world.<sup>37</sup>

President Bush accomplished a lot in this one sentence. He invoked the legacy of Hitler by noting the "dark chaos of dictators." He noted an American responsibility to act, by referring back 50 years to American action during World War II. He also looked to the future and his vision for a new world order. Most Americans agreed, at least after World War II, that Americans had a responsibility to do something to fight Hitler and that

becoming involved in World War II had been the “responsible” and right thing to do. Bush not only asked for this memory to be applied to the Gulf War, but also used the Gulf War as an opportunity to look ahead.

Later in the address, President Bush called America a “catalyst for peace” in the region and said its responsibility would not end with the end of the war, but would carry on to the future.<sup>38</sup> Because, Bush claimed,

What is at stake is more than one small country; it is a big idea: a new world order, where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind—peace and security, freedom, and the rule of law. Such is a world worthy of our struggle and worthy of our children's future.<sup>39</sup>

These themes and this State of the Union address were important because, as noted above, President Bush and some members of Congress had fought a very public battle over three or four months about whether Congressional approval of President Bush’s decision to involve the United States military in the Gulf War was necessary. As we will see below, ultimately President Bush requested – sort of – Congressional approval of military action and Congress granted approval. However, Congressional approval had only been granted hours before United States airstrikes began and United States troops moved in, so this was the first opportunity for President Bush to appear with together with Congress to show the American people and the world a united response by the United States administration and Congress.

## D: Congressional and Public Response

### i. Was Congressional approval of military action necessary?

President Bush had an uneasy relationship with Congress at the time of the outset of the Gulf War. Because 1990 was a mid-term election year, however, both President Bush and Congress proceeded cautiously in the response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. President Bush had deployed thousands of troops to Saudi Arabia in August of 1990 and had ordered United States naval vessels to the Gulf. Prior to the mid-term election, because Bush had ordered troops to Saudi Arabia in a defensive posture, Congress was generally "compliant," passing resolutions of support for the build-up.<sup>40</sup> Congressional approval was not really an issue prior to the mid-term election. However, immediately after the mid-term elections, on November 8, 1990, Bush ordered 200,000 additional troops to Saudi Arabia.<sup>41</sup> This large build-up allowed the United States to be in a position to take a more offensive role in the Gulf as opposed to the defensive role it had taken to date. The build-up was also ordered by the Administration without the consent of Congress.

The Constitution grants Congress, and not the President, the power to declare war.<sup>42</sup> Some have argued that President Bush was ready to attack Iraqi forces with or without Congressional approval and that the Persian Gulf War was a "test" of who had what "war powers."<sup>43</sup> Senator Sam Nunn, a Democrat from Georgia, and chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, held a series of hearings in late November and early December of 1990 to discuss this issue. Nunn and certain other Democrats were skeptical of Bush's build-up. President Bush, whatever his own feelings on what

powers he had to order the build-up and possibly an attack, had wisely left open the door for cooperation with Congress in his rhetoric.

In his initial address to the American public on August 8, 1990, President Bush did not mention the role of Congress. He appealed directly to the American people and urged support for his decision to deploy troops to Saudi Arabia and to take other economic measures against Iraq. This caused members of Congress from both parties some concern. However, in an address to a Joint Session of Congress on September 11, 1990, President Bush made sure to include Congress in the decision-making process<sup>44</sup>, or at least he realized the importance of lobbying for Congress's support of his own decisions.

President Bush used his September 11, 1990, address to lobby Congress. He started by extolling the wonderful contributions of "every soldier, sailor, marine, and airman" serving in the Gulf, and thanking the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Powell, and thanking the commander in the field, General Schwarzkopf, and thanking the "men and women of the Department of Defense."<sup>45</sup> It would have been difficult for members of Congress not to join in with their appreciation for the armed services. Bush then went on to thank all Americans, "especially those here in this Chamber tonight, for your support for our armed forces and for their mission."<sup>46</sup> In essence, President Bush attempted to have members of Congress think like Americans first and rally to the (his) cause and, perhaps, make them feel as though they had already approved the mission. Thus, though he did not specifically acknowledge that Congress had the power to determine whether American forces could be sent into combat in the Persian Gulf – and he did not specifically acknowledge that he himself did

not have that power – President Bush acknowledged that he needed at least moral Congressional support, if not formal support.

President Bush also acknowledged that Congress held the purse strings. He defined America's military action in the Gulf as a part of the problem the nation was facing with the budget deficit. In his September 11, 1990, address to a Joint Session of Congress, Bush stated, "Higher oil prices slow our growth, and higher defense costs would only make our fiscal deficit problem worse."<sup>47</sup> Bush attempted to tie the Gulf Crisis into issues with the domestic economy, claiming the Gulf Crisis demonstrated how "economically vulnerable" the United States was.<sup>48</sup> President Bush's solution, of course, was for Congress to support the military effort in the Persian Gulf and to bring about a quick and decisive end to the situation.

Throughout the fall of 1990, President Bush attempted to win members of Congress over to the idea that the use of direct military force should be an option without explicitly admitting that he had to have Congressional support for that idea. As stated above, the Senate Armed Forces Committee held hearings in November and December. In the House, on December 3, 1990, the House Democratic Caucus approved a resolution explicitly stating that the President should first seek Congressional authorization for the use of force, unless American lives were in danger. There seemed to be many members of Congress who would support use of military force if only Congress were provided the opportunity to approve the use of force.<sup>49</sup>

Ultimately, President Bush sent a letter to leaders of Congress on January 8, 1991. In the letter, President Bush was careful not to say directly that he needed Congressional support for Constitutional reasons. In fact, there was no mention of the

Constitution. Instead, Bush claimed if Congress were to “go on record” supporting the position of the United Nations Security Council, which had recently passed a resolution authorizing all use of force against Saddam Hussein, then that action would “greatly enhance the chances for peace.”<sup>50</sup> In addition, Bush stated, “it would also help dispel any belief that may exist in the minds of Iraq’s leaders that the United States lacks the necessary unity” to use military force.<sup>51</sup> Thus, President Bush’s appeal was two-fold. He asked members of Congress to demonstrate that the United States stood with the world community by supporting the United Nations resolution. He asked members of Congress to demonstrate that the United States leadership was united in the cause.

There were hearings in the House and Senate over the next few days following delivery of the letter. In the end, the “Persian Gulf Resolution” supporting use of all necessary force was passed by margins of 250-183 in the House and 53-47 in the Senate. Members of Congress were careful to include language in the resolution retaining for themselves the power to declare war, thus the issue was not really settled. One scholar, writing in 1994, argued President Bush’s distinction between asking for “support” for the use of military force and asking for “authorization” for the use of military support was not a real distinction.<sup>52</sup> He argued further that the resolution signaled a “restoration of the pre-1950” understanding that Congress had the power to declare war.<sup>53</sup> Based on the carefully chosen language in his letter to Congress, President Bush would certainly have disagreed.

History proved that the issue was still up for debate. While one legacy of the Persian Gulf War rhetoric may be the necessity to include Congress in decisions to use military force, another legacy may be that there is a grey area. Apparently, there are

situations where a post-Cold War president may choose to use military force without direct support or consent or authorization of Congress. As will be discussed below, Presidents William Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama all wrestled with the issue at different times and in different ways.

Following the resolution of support from the House and Senate, President Bush wasted no time. On January 16, 1991, United States war planes attacked Iraqi forces and Iraqi targets in Kuwait and in Iraq. Ground forces attacked in late February of 1990. Five days after American tanks rolled out of Saudi Arabia and into Kuwait, the Iraqi army was routed and Kuwait was liberated. In a February 27, 1991, address to the American people, President Bush proudly exclaimed, "Kuwait is liberated. Iraq's army is defeated. Our military objectives are met. Kuwait is once more in the hands of Kuwaitis, in control of their own destiny."<sup>54</sup>

## ii. Public opinion

Most Americans experienced the Gulf War in a different way than they had experienced any war in the past. Cable news, in particular CNN, offered news coverage 24/7 that was accessible to most Americans. To be sure, the military carefully chose what images to release or what video to share, but cable television brought the war to almost everyone. In addition, the military was able to show off modern military technology. Apache attack helicopters, F-15 fighter bombers, and Tomahawk missiles launched from United States naval vessels in the Gulf were all on display.

Patriotism surged. Lee Greenwood's song, "God Bless the USA" played on the radio. There were victory parades in New York City and Washington, D.C. Secretary of

Defense, Dick Cheney, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, were mentioned as possible candidates for President. General Norman Schwarzkopf was a hero. People expressing faith in President Bush's administration rose to incredible heights.

President Bush had always had solid presidential approval ratings. However, with the Gulf War, and particularly the winning of the Gulf War, the approval ratings went into unheard of territory. As noted above, when Iraq first invaded Kuwait and President Bush outlined the then defensive response of the United States, President Bush's approval ratings jumped from a solid 60% in mid-July 1990 to 75% in mid-August 1990.<sup>55</sup> Then the approval ratings slid down to a still solid, but lower 53% to 58% range, while America waited to see what Saddam Hussein would do.<sup>56</sup> This period in October, November and early December of 1990 was also when President Bush was sparring with Congress over the issue of whether he wanted Congressional "support" for using direct military force or whether he needed Congressional "approval" for that decision. Once Congress passed its resolution approving the use of military force and President Bush ordered the attack, Bush's approval rating shot up to an incredible 82% in mid-January of 1991.<sup>57</sup> President Bush's approval rating crested at an unheard of 89% in late February and early March of 1991 following the quick and decisive military victory in the Gulf War by United States and coalition forces.<sup>58</sup>

President Bush's approval rating did not last. It dropped steadily until reaching a low of 29% in mid-July, and it had only rebounded to about 34% in mid-October, heading into the presidential election of 1992.<sup>59</sup> Americans clearly enjoyed and approved of the Gulf War. Perhaps the biggest surprise of the 1992 campaign was "the

lack of bounce” that President Bush received.<sup>60</sup> Bush, of course, lost the 1992 presidential election to William Clinton, with domestic issues taking precedence. Scholars have advanced a number of theories about why the clear effect of the Gulf War on the American public did not last. Perhaps the war was too short. The outcome was not in doubt. There were very few casualties. Modern technology made it often appear almost like a video game. Most Americans were not asked to suffer or make personal sacrifice or to participate in the war effort. So, maybe Americans did not share in the war as in other wars.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps, some Americans felt that the war left unfinished business with Saddam Hussein and Iraq, which of course turned out to be the case.

Whatever the reasons for the American public’s short memory with regard to the successes of the Persian Gulf War, there were some important legacies coming from Bush’s rhetoric. First and foremost, one of President Bush’s themes in his rhetoric was to move America beyond Vietnam. He succeeded. As David Halberstam put it, the “Gulf War showed that the American military had recovered from the malaise of the Vietnam debacle.”<sup>62</sup> America was not rejuvenated in just a military sense, though. The lessons of the Gulf War extended in a larger psychological sense to a broader national view of American abilities.<sup>63</sup> Or more simply put, “We were back.”<sup>64</sup> This legacy proved important to the post-Cold War presidents who followed Bush. President Bush’s other major theme in his Gulf War rhetoric was about building a new world order. History ultimately denied that legacy. The balance of power in the world had changed and continued to change with the end of the Cold War, but new challenges arose. President Bush’s new world order envisioned a world where nations worked with each other, ensuring each other’s security, but what about new nations that had formed and were

still forming *because of* the end of the Cold War? What about rogue leaders? What about countries in which civil wars broke out upon ethnic or religious grounds? What about groups that transcended national boundaries?

We consider next President William Clinton's handling of a situation involving a rogue leader, a civil war based on ethnic and religious grounds, and a "new" nation formed at the close of the Cold War.

## Chapter I: notes

1. I do not define the word “war” in this thesis. Rather, I use war broadly to describe United States military involvement abroad. However, where the definition of the word is important to the subject matter, or defined by the speaker, it is discussed.
2. President George H.W. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the End of the Gulf War* (March 6, 1991), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches-3430>, accessed April 17, 2015.
3. Federal Election results, 1988, <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/scores.html#1988>, accessed April 19, 2015.
4. Presidential Job Approval Center, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/presidential-approval-center.aspx#>, accessed April 18, 2015.
5. Id.
6. Donald E. Nuechterlein, *America Recommitted: A Superpower Assesses Its Role in a Turbulent World* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 199.
7. President George H.W. Bush, *Address on Iraq’s Invasion of Kuwait* (August 8, 1990), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5529>, accessed April 17, 2015.
8. Presidential Job Approval Center, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/presidential-approval-center.aspx#>, accessed April 18, 2015.
9. John Robert Green, *The Presidency of George Bush* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 109-10.
10. Mark A. Pollack, “The Battle for the Past: George Bush and the Gulf Crisis,” in Amos Kiewe, editor, *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 205.
11. Id., 205-06.
12. President George H.W. Bush, *Address on Iraq’s Invasion of Kuwait* (August 8, 1990), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5529>, accessed April 17, 2015.
13. Id.
14. Id.
15. Id.
16. Id.
17. Id.
18. Id.
19. Id.
20. Donald Nuechterlein, 202.
21. President George H.W. Bush, *Address on Iraq’s Invasion of Kuwait* (August 8, 1990), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5529>, accessed April 17, 2015.
22. Id.

23. President George H.W. Bush, *Address to the Nation on the Invasion of Iraq* (January 16, 1991) <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3428>, accessed April 17, 2015.
24. Id.
25. Id.
26. Id.
27. Id.
28. Id.
29. Id.
30. Id.
31. Id.
32. Id.
33. Id.
34. Id.
35. Id.
36. Mark A. Pollack, 219.
37. President George H.W. Bush, *State of the Union Address* (January 29, 1991), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3429>, accessed April 17, 2015.
38. Id.
39. Id.
40. Charles Tiefer, *The Semi-Sovereign Presidency* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 125.
41. Id., 127.
42. United States Constitution, Art.I, section 8, <https://www.usconstitution.net/const.pdf>, accessed April 17, 2015.
43. Tiefer, 119.
44. President George H.W. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of Congress* (September 11, 1990), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3425>, accessed April 17, 2015.
45. Id.
46. Id.
47. Id.
48. Id.
49. Tiefer, 129.
50. President George H.W. Bush, *Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Persian Gulf Crisis*, January 8, 1991, [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=2599&year=1991&month=01](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2599&year=1991&month=01), accessed April 18, 2015.
51. Id.
52. Tiefer, 131.
53. Id.: 136.
54. President George H.W. Bush, *Address on the End of the Gulf War* (February 27, 1991), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5530>, accessed April 17, 2015.

55. Presidential Job Approval Center,  
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/presidential-approval-center.aspx#>, accessed  
April 18, 2015.
56. Id.
57. Id.
58. Id.
59. Id.
60. David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 156.
61. Id., 47, 48, 153-56.
62. Id., 12.
63. Id., 12-13.
64. Id., 13.

## Chapter II: Bombing Kosovo: A Humanitarian Mission and the Opportunity to Avoid a Third World War

President William Clinton addressed the American people from the White House on June 10, 1999, during prime time television hours to announce that the 79-day bombing of Kosovo by the United States and NATO allies had stopped and had been successful. Serbian paramilitary forces, led by Slobodan Milosevic, had retreated, and a cease-fire had been achieved. Like President George H.W. Bush had done before him at the conclusion of the Gulf War, President Clinton, in essence, was taking a victory lap. The United States involvement in the military action had consisted entirely of air strikes and missile launches from naval vessels and submarines. No United States ground troops had been utilized. No American lives were lost. American and NATO goals had been achieved.

As was the case with the Gulf War rhetoric of George H.W. Bush, one of President Clinton's overarching arguments for United States involvement in the Kosovo bombings was that the United States had a responsibility to the rest of the world. President Clinton also stressed two specific arguments for United States involvement: humanitarian reasons and avoidance of a larger scale war. The arguments contained both elements of logic and emotion, but ultimately relied on appealing to the emotions of Americans. The arguments used ideas similar to ideas stressed by President Bush in advocating for the use of military force in the Gulf War, but the arguments as expressed by President Clinton contained variations. The variations are important to understanding President Clinton's policy for United States military involvement in that

post-Cold War period. Understanding that the situation in Kosovo presented some different elements than were present in the Gulf War situation, President Clinton both borrowed and built upon President Bush's policies and ideas, but he also charted some new territory.

The first theme stressed by President Clinton in his June 10, 1999, address was that the Kosovo bombings were carried out for humanitarian reasons. It could be argued that humanitarian reasons as a basis for military intervention had logical elements, but this was essentially an argument meant to appeal to the emotions of Americans. Clinton wanted Americans to empathize with the people in Kosovo and to realize that others around the world were too. Clinton stated in his victory speech that, "The one million men, women, and children driven from their land are preparing to return home. The demands of an outraged and united international community have been met."<sup>1</sup>

As was the situation in the Gulf War, a rogue leader, here Slobodan Milosevic, was involved. President Bush dealt with Saddam Hussein of Iraq in the Gulf War and President Clinton dealt with Milosevic. Both rogue leaders had attacked innocent people. However, here, Milosevic was not attacking another nation, but rather was attacking inhabitants of his own country. The primary reasons had to do with the ethnicity of these people, although religion also played a role. Thus, President Clinton used the inappropriate aggression of an out-of-control leader as justification for American involvement in the Kosovo bombings, but here the situation was different than the situation in Iraq because the United States was intervening in what was really an internal or civil war.

In addition, it was only since World War II, and the subsequent realization of the enormity of the Holocaust, that Americans would have even considered entering a war for “humanitarian” reasons, especially a war happening in another country. President Clinton followed President Bush’s lead by invoking history, specifically the legacy of World War II. Clinton believed that what most Americans felt was the justified role that the United States took in stopping Hitler was justification for United States involvement in the Kosovo bombings. Clinton, however, was also attempting to create a crucial differentiation between the situations in World War II and Kosovo. In the Second World War, the United States and most of the world did not know until the very end of the war or even after the war the extent of the atrocities being committed. In Kosovo, Clinton was arguing that American involvement earlier could prevent atrocities from occurring.

President Clinton could also look to very recent history right in the same region in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Milosevic had committed a number of atrocities during the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the early and mid-1990s. Clinton clearly had Milosevic’s prior actions in mind, and was hoping to avoid similar actions in Kosovo, when making his argument for participating in the bombings in Kosovo. The United States had hesitated to become involved in that earlier conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina with one result being, according to Clinton’s thinking, that tens of thousands of innocent people died.<sup>2</sup>

The second theme stressed by President Clinton in his June 10, 1999, address following the Kosovo bombings was that the Kosovo bombings were necessary to avoid a larger scale conflict in the region. Clinton was proud to report, “Finally, we have averted the wider war this conflict might well have sparked.”<sup>3</sup> This too was an echo of

one of President Bush's arguments for coming to the aid of Kuwait in the Gulf War, and, like Bush's argument, Clinton's argument to engage in order to avert a larger regional crisis had elements appealing to both logic and emotion. However, Clinton's argument for intervening in Kosovo was necessarily more complex because the situation was more complex.

In the Gulf War, the aggressors and the victims were easy to identify. The Iraqis came into Kuwait and took control of the country away from the Kuwaitis. In Kosovo, a province of Serbia, the war was largely a civil war, though both sides had international support. The conflict came about as Serbian nationalists were trying to quell not always peaceful protests by ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, who were citizens of Serbia, but who were used to a certain amount of autonomy and who were supported by a number of outside nations. Clinton's argument was that absent United States military intervention, the conflict could spread to the entire Eastern European region.

This was essentially a logical argument, but also appealed to the emotions of many Americans. Like Bush before him, President Clinton invoked history to make his emotional appeal. The theme of avoiding a broader conflict resonated with many Americans, and certainly with Europeans, because the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo by Bosnian Serbs thought to be supported by an independent Serbia in 1914 was popularly believed to have been a catalyst for World War I. Sarajevo and Kosovo are located in the same region. Serbian aggression was again potentially threatening regional stability. President Clinton was concerned that Serbian nationalism, which had sparked the First World War, might spark another broader war.

He believed, probably correctly, that Americans and NATO allies did not want another world war to start in Eastern Europe.

To fully understand President Clinton's policy of United States involvement in the Kosovo bombings, one needs to look back at and appreciate the United States' involvement in the broader conflict in the region, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, during the early and mid-1990s. During his June 10, 1999, Kosovo victory lap speech cited above, President Clinton referenced the end of a "10-year campaign of repression"<sup>4</sup> by Slobodan Milosevic in an attempt to convey that the American decision to participate in the Kosovo bombings grew out of a series of events that occurred over a number of years. Of course, the situation in Serbia and Kosovo had developed not just over several years, but over centuries. In particular, by understanding President Clinton's policy and rhetoric addressing United States involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially during the period 1992-1995, we can see how President Clinton's policy and rhetoric addressing the bombings in Kosovo fit into a broader context and plan to address the instability in Eastern Europe. As in the prior chapter, we shall look first at the context surrounding Kosovo, meaning President Clinton's situation domestically and the situation in Kosovo. Then we can examine how presidential rhetoric helped shape that situation for the American public. Finally, we can look at how the public and Congressional responded to the decision to participate in the bombings in Kosovo.

## A: The Situation: President Clinton's Character

President Clinton was elected in 1992 with only 43% of the popular vote, less than a majority and only a 6% margin of victory in the popular vote over George H.W. Bush. Independent candidate Ross Perot won just below 19% of the popular vote, still a significant number of votes. However, Clinton won 370 electoral votes to 168 electoral votes for Bush.<sup>5</sup> The Democrats had a majority in Congress as well following the 1992 election, with Democrats in the House holding a 258-176 margin and Democrats in the Senate holding a 57-43 majority.<sup>6</sup> Thus, President Clinton was popular, though with less than a majority of the popular vote, and he had the advantage of his party holding relatively substantial majorities in the House and Senate. However, his presidential character leading into his presidency was not without blemish.

First, in contrast to President Bush before him, President Clinton did not have a long and distinguished record in Washington, D.C. Clinton was young for a President – only 46 years old – when elected. He was elected in part for being an “outsider,” uncorrupted by Washington politics, but the only political experience he had at the time of his inauguration was at the state level as Governor of Arkansas. He did not have a long list of contacts in Washington to help him initially. He had little professional international experience. So, while President Clinton brought lots of ideas to the table to address the economy, health care, education and other domestic issues, his foreign policy resume was thin at the time he had to address the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992. He had a bit more foreign policy experience by the time he was defending his actions in Kosovo in 1999, but President Clinton was never known as a great or experienced foreign policy president.

Second, President Clinton was dogged during his campaign by allegations that he had dodged the draft during the Vietnam War, and, had instead “fled” to England while he was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University. In fact, President Clinton had given up his deferment and had been fortunate to receive a very high draft number. However, his admitted opposition to the Vietnam War, and apparent negative feelings about the draft, hurt him publicly and politically.<sup>7</sup> This contrasts markedly with the situation of President George H.W. Bush who had not only served in World War II, but had come under fire and earned distinction.

Governor Clinton famously went on the late evening news program, *Nightline*, with Ted Koppel in February 1992 during the presidential campaign to discuss a letter he had written as a 23-year-old Rhodes Scholar in 1969 to Colonel Eugene Holmes, who headed up the ROTC program at the University of Arkansas. In the letter, Clinton thanked the Colonel for “saving” him from the draft. He also stated that no government “should have the power to make its citizens fight and kill and die in a war they oppose.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, during his presidential campaign, while he tried to distinguish the Vietnam War from World War II, a war most Americans thought worth fighting, and tried to distinguish a situation when a draft might not be appropriate from a situation when a draft would be appropriate, President Clinton had a hard time shaking the label of draft dodger.

Third, President Clinton was dogged by allegations of marital infidelity. During his campaign, there were a number of allegations of affairs, most prominently from former Arkansas state employee and part-time lounge singer, Gennifer Flowers. Ms. Flowers alleged that she and William Clinton had engaged in a twelve-year affair. During his presidential campaign, then Governor Clinton had gone on national television

on *60 Minutes* with his wife, Hillary, to address the allegations. He did not admit to the extramarital affair, but stated, “I have acknowledged wrongdoing” and “I have acknowledged causing pain in my marriage.”<sup>9</sup> It was an incomplete answer at best. Of course, it did not prevent Clinton from being elected as President, but allegations of marital infidelity and this habit of not quite answering the question directly would catch up with President Clinton in the year prior to Kosovo, severely damaging his credibility and, therefore, his character.

By the time President Clinton was urging Americans to support his policy of United States participation in the bombing of Kosovo in 1999, he was also being battered politically for his interactions during 1995-1997 with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. On January 26, 1998, President Clinton, standing with his wife, Hillary, at the White House categorically denied having sexual relations with “that woman” (Monica Lewinsky).<sup>10</sup> President Clinton later had to recant following testimony by Ms. Lewinsky before a grand jury about her relationship with him. Ultimately, in August of 1998, President Clinton was forced to admit an “improper physical relationship” with Monica Lewinsky. President Clinton’s allegedly false testimony in the scandal with Ms. Lewinsky led to impeachment hearings as well.

Considering Clinton’s actions within Aristotle’s model, it is clear that Clinton could not could not rely on his personal character while arguing for United States involvement in Kosovo in the way that President George H.W. Bush had been able to rely on his personal character while arguing for United States involvement in the Gulf War. Rather, President Clinton had to rely in large part on the character imbued by the office of the President. Importantly, while private actions do often impact public character, President

Clinton was very adept at keeping his private actions out of the discussions about both Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early and mid-1990s and later in the Kosovo crisis as it unfolded in 1998 and 1999. It might be too much to argue that President Clinton's character played no role in his rhetoric, but, if his character detracted at all from the power of his rhetoric, Clinton was able to minimize the detraction. He was also extremely charming. However, without personal character supporting his rhetoric, President Clinton had to rely even more on the other means of persuasion identified by Aristotle. Clinton had to make both a logical argument for American military involvement in the Kosovo bombings and he had to appeal to the emotions of the American people for support of his policy in Kosovo.

## B: The Situation: Eastern Europe

### i. Bosnia and Herzegovina

To understand the situation in Kosovo in 1998 and 1999, one has to have at least a cursory understanding of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina as it developed in the early and mid-1990s, before and immediately subsequent to President Clinton's election in November of 1992. Yugoslavia formed following the First World War, but fell apart during 1991 and 1992. There were many, many ethnicities that comprised Yugoslavia, and conflict among the various ethnic groups ultimately proved to be too much. Slovenia and Croatia seceded first. Bosnia and Herzegovina seceded later in 1992. Bosnia and Herzegovina was itself a multi-ethnic nation, comprised of Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. These three groups clashed, although ultimately, with the assistance of the United States and others, the Croats and Muslims were able to unite

against the Serbs. The Serbs were led by Slobodan Milosevic and supported by the Yugoslav National Army (JNA). The Serbs also controlled over two-thirds of the land. Milosevic and the Serbs killed tens of thousands of Croats and Muslims and attempted to force hundreds of thousands more out of their homes and out of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

George H.W. Bush had not really addressed the problems in the region, calling the situation a European problem. The United Nations had imposed an embargo on weapons to the area, but had done little else. President Clinton had campaigned for the presidency in 1992 with a Bosnia and Herzegovina policy of “lift and strike,” meaning lift the embargo so that the Croats and Muslims could arm themselves and strike back at Milosevic and the Serbs. Following his election, President Clinton advocated for a more active role by the United States and NATO allies. This advocacy helped lead to a United Nations and United States effort to air-drop food to Bosnian Muslims in 1993 and, ultimately, a United Nations sanctioned “no fly zone” over parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina primarily enforced by the United States through “Operation Deny Flight.”<sup>11</sup>

President Clinton, however, unsuccessfully continued to lobby for his “lift and strike” policy in the United States, and could not achieve a consensus among NATO members. Meanwhile, the violence continued to escalate. Serbians attacked a United Nations “safe area” in Srebrenica in June of 1993. Serbians fired a mortar shell into the Markala marketplace in Sarajevo in February 1994. A United Nations peacekeeper soldier was killed during a Serbian offensive against the city of Gorazde in April 1994. An attempted settlement negotiated by former President Jimmy Carter failed in the spring of 1995. In July 1995, over seven-thousand men, or by some accounts even

more, were massacred by the Serbs in Srebrenica. Finally, on July 21, 1995, NATO convened in London and authorized air strikes in response and to try to force an end to the violence. NATO launched Operation Deliberate Force in August 1995, which consisted of a two-week series of airstrikes on Serbian military targets. Cease fire in Bosnia and Herzegovina finally came in September of 1995.<sup>12</sup>

Following the cease fire, the Serbs, Croats and Muslims negotiated a tenuous peace plan at an air force base in Dayton, Ohio, known as the Dayton Accords. The plan called for a single Bosnia and Herzegovina state, a unified federal government, free democratic elections and many guarantees of human rights. Most importantly, the agreement called for an international peacekeeping force, including about one-third American forces, controlled by NATO. It wasn't a perfect plan or a perfect peace, but, as President Clinton noted, it ended "the worst conflict in Europe since World War II."<sup>13</sup>

By ending the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, President Clinton and NATO allies achieved both the humanitarian goal of stopping the slaughter of thousands of people and the more pragmatic goal of avoiding a larger conflict in the region. These themes came through in President Clinton's rhetoric advocating a larger United States role in Bosnia and Herzegovina and set the stage for Clinton's advocacy of United States participation in the Kosovo bombings a few years later in March of 1999.

## ii. Kosovo

Kosovo in 1998 and 1999 was a province of Serbia. The leader of the Serbian nation was Slobodan Milosevic, and he was a Serb. Most of the residents of Kosovo, though, were ethnic Albanians. In 1989, Milosevic had stripped Kosovo of its

constitutional autonomy and attempted to enforce Serbian customs, education and language requirements. The ethnic Albanians protested over a number of years, eventually forming the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Clashes between Serbian paramilitary forces and the KLA grew increasingly violent. The KLA sought outside support and got it. In 1998, Milosevic ordered Serbian paramilitary forces into Kosovo to quell what he considered a rebellion by ethnic Albanians. The clashes became even more violent and the Serbian paramilitary forces began forcing ethnic Albanians out of their homes, killing some and forcing many to flee as refugees. The civil war in Kosovo was not an isolated event, but the result of a series of events that had occurred over centuries, most recently, events that had occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the first half of the 1990s. Perhaps most alarming to President Clinton was that Milosevic was a primary actor in both the atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and now the civil war in Kosovo.

### C: The Rhetoric

In order to fully understand President Clinton's rhetoric surrounding the United States involvement in the Kosovo bombings in March of 1999, some understanding of Clinton's rhetoric surrounding Bosnia and Herzegovina is necessary. In many ways, Clinton's arguments for a more immediate United States response and involvement in Kosovo grew out of what Clinton perceived as the failure of the United States to become involved in Bosnia and Herzegovina earlier. Many of the themes that President Clinton introduced in defending American involvement in the resolution to the Bosnian war of the mid-1990s were used by Clinton to justify American involvement in the Kosovo

bombings in March of 1999. In this section, we focus on three speeches: President Clinton's November 27, 1995, address following the signing of the Dayton Accords that were supposed to lead to peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Clinton's March 24, 1999, address at the onset of United States participation in NATO bombings of Kosovo; and the June 10, 1999, victory speech following the ending of the Kosovo bombings.

These public addresses are not only the most important speeches President Clinton gave addressing first American military involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and then advocating for American military involvement in Kosovo, but are the only widely public remarks he made. This may well be due to the perception that President Clinton was not known or respected as an able and experienced foreign policy president or to the fact that Clinton had so many domestic and personal issues on his agenda at the time these conflicts were occurring. Clinton might also have wanted to avoid debate on United States participation in the Kosovo bombings after the horrors of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There was only limited information that came from the State Department and Defense Department regarding the planned bombings in Kosovo. President Clinton, while leading with his rhetoric in these speeches, left much of the decision-making involved with Bosnia and Herzegovina and later with Kosovo to his advisors, as we will see below.

- i. Bosnia and Herzegovina Rhetoric: Setting the stage for Kosovo with the November 27, 1995 address to the American people

President Clinton's Bosnia and Herzegovina rhetoric in November of 1995

introduced themes and set the stage for his Kosovo rhetoric of 1999. President Clinton addressed the American people on national television on November 27, 1995, in an effort to explain why American values and interests “required” that America participate in the implementation of the Dayton Accords and assist in the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>14</sup> The themes he set forth were: 1) participation and assistance for humanitarian reasons, and 2) participation and assistance in order to avoid the ignition of a larger scale conflict in the region. President Clinton stated in his November 27, 1995, address, “In fulfilling this mission, we will have the chance to help stop the killing of innocent civilians, especially children, and at the same time, to bring stability to Central Europe, a region of the world that is vital to our national interests. It is the right thing to do.”<sup>15</sup> These same two themes would later justify President Clinton’s decision to participate in the bombings of Kosovo.

In discussing the humanitarian justification for United States participation in the Bosnia and Herzegovina peace process, President Clinton clearly invoked history, specifically the imagery of World War II Nazi concentration camps, and appealed to the emotions of Americans.

Horrors we prayed had been banished from Europe forever have been seared into our minds again: skeletal prisoners caged behind barbed-wire fences; women and girls raped as a tool of war; defenseless men and boys shot down into mass graves, evoking visions of World War II concentration camps; and endless lines of refugees marching toward a future of despair.<sup>16</sup>

By invoking the imagery of World War II, a war most Americans agreed had been *necessary* to fight in order to defeat the Nazis and the Japanese, and by appealing to the emotions of the American people by stressing the alleviation of tremendous suffering, which suffering was graphically described, President Clinton hoped to build

support for his policy of American involvement in the Bosnian peace process. However, Clinton also appealed to logic and stressed the more pragmatic goal of avoiding a larger conflagration in Eastern Europe.

President Clinton argued that though the Cold War was over, the United States could not afford to look only inward. He stated,

. . . problems that start beyond our borders can quickly become problems within them. We're all vulnerable to the organized forces of intolerance and destruction; terrorism; ethnic, religious and regional rivalries; the spread of organized crime and weapons of mass destruction and drug trafficking. Just as surely as fascism and communism, these forces also threaten freedom and democracy, peace and prosperity.<sup>17</sup>

Note that President Clinton again referenced the “fascism and communism” commonly associated with World War II, as well as the communism associated with the Cold War. By invoking history, and specifically fascism and communism, Clinton’s appeal to logic thus had appeals to emotion as well. He was arguing that these new threats, such as intolerance, terrorism, and ethnic, religious and regional rivalries, that were all present in Bosnia and Herzegovina were just as dangerous and need to be stopped before growing into a bigger conflict. How America responded would set a precedent. And, lest Americans forget how fragile and important Eastern Europe is, Clinton reminded Americans that,

Bosnia lies at the very heart of Europe, next-door to many of its fragile new democracies and some of our closest allies. Generations of Americans have understood that Europe's freedom and Europe's stability is vital to our own national security. That's why we fought two wars in Europe.<sup>18</sup>

Clinton invoked both World War I, which started in Eastern Europe, and World War II in his appeal to the American people.

President Clinton ended the address by recalling a conversation he had with Pope John Paul II, in which the Pope reportedly said, “I have lived through most of this century. I remember that it began with a war in Sarajevo. Mr. President, you must not let it end with a war in Sarajevo.”<sup>19</sup> This was another reference to World War I having its origins in Eastern Europe and an appeal by the Pope to the President and by the President to the American people to do everything possible to avoid another world war. Perhaps President Clinton also thought referring to his conversation with the Pope lent a bit “crusade” mystique to his argument, or thought that referring to the Pope lent a certain morality to his argument.

ii. Kosovo: Justifying the Bombings

These same themes and ideas were present four years later, when President Clinton announced on March 24, 1999, that American forces had joined with other NATO forces to begin airstrikes against Serbian forces in Kosovo. The reasons for United States military involvement were familiar:

We act to protect thousands of innocent people in Kosovo from a mounting military offensive. We act to prevent a wider war, to diffuse a powder keg at the heart of Europe that has exploded twice before in this century with catastrophic results.<sup>20</sup>

As was the case with President Clinton’s justification of United States military involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, he stressed the dual themes of humanitarian responsibility and avoidance of a greater war.

Putting aside the question of whether the members of the primarily ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) had been truly innocent, there were without question thousands of civilians of Albanian descent who had died and thousands more

forced to flee their homes. President Clinton used these facts and appealed to the emotions of Americans in three ways.

First, he situated Kosovo geographically by explaining that Kosovo was a province of Serbia, about 160 miles east of Italy, “less than the distance between Washington and New York and only 70 miles north of Greece.”<sup>21</sup> Describing the location in this way made it important to Americans of Italian and Greek descent, of which there are many, but also put in perspective how close Kosovo was to the Europe that most Americans believed they knew. Kosovo was not some out-lying province in a remote country. It was as close to Italy as Washington, D.C. was to New York City. President Clinton’s geography references brought the conflict home to Americans.

Second, diplomacy had been attempted and had failed. President Clinton referenced a peace agreement that Kosovar leaders had signed the previous month, even though it did not give them all they wanted. Clinton contrasted the actions of the Serbs: “The Serbian leaders, on the other hand, refused even to discuss key elements of the peace agreement. As the Kosovars were saying yes to peace, Serbia stationed 40,000 troops in and around Kosovo in preparation for a major offensive—and in clear violation of the commitments they had made.”<sup>22</sup> This was but the latest example of Serbian leaders, particularly Slobodan Milosevic, choosing war instead of peace. Clinton counted on Americans to see the Serbian aggression as unjust and hoped Americans realized that the bombings and use of force were a policy of last resort.

Third, as he had done in his discussion of American military involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, President Clinton described in graphic detail some of the horrors that the people of Kosovo had faced and were continuing to face.

Now they've started moving from village to village, shelling civilians and torching their houses. We've seen innocent people taken from their homes, forced to kneel in the dirt, and sprayed with bullets; Kosovar men dragged from their families, fathers and sons together, lined up and shot in cold blood. This is not war in the traditional sense. It is an attack by tanks and artillery on a largely defenseless people whose leaders already have agreed to peace.<sup>23</sup>

History again played a role. Though President Clinton did not specifically invoke the memory of the Nazi blitzkrieg of World War II, the imagery was present in his words. Americans may or may not have known about specific massacres that occurred during World War II, but they knew that Hitler and the Nazis had massacred hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of innocent people. Clinton had acted to avoid a massacre of a minority ethnic population by Slobodan Milosevic and the nationalistic Serbians.

President Clinton summarized his emotional appeal to the American population by calling it a “moral imperative” that the American military become involved.<sup>24</sup> Recall his reference to the Pope above. Clinton argued that American participation in the bombings of Serbian positions and paramilitary forces was the “right” thing to do. However, Clinton also provided a more practical reason, a more logical reason, for American military involvement in Kosovo, and that was that it was in America’s interest to avoid the situation blossoming into a larger scale war.

Kosovo, Clinton explained, is a “small place,” but it “sits on a major fault line between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, at the meeting place of Islam and both the Western and Orthodox branches of Christianity.”<sup>25</sup> Here, President Clinton used imagery associated with instability and the potential for an earthquake. He continued using imagery of a fire starting,

And all around Kosovo there are other small countries struggling with their own economic and political challenges, countries that could be

overwhelmed by a large, new wave of refugees from Kosovo. All the ingredients for a major war are there: ancient grievances, struggling democracies, and in the center of it all a dictator in Serbia who has done nothing since the cold war ended but start new wars and pour gasoline on the flames of ethnic and religious division.<sup>26</sup>

Not only were “all the ingredients” for a major war present, but there was a “dictator” ready to provide the spark. This was a clear reference to Hitler and his role in starting World War II, and an emotional element combined with a logical argument. And, just to make sure the American people understood the reference, President Clinton explained, “Sarajevo, the capital of neighboring Bosnia, is where World War I began. World War II and the Holocaust engulfed this region.”<sup>27</sup>

President Clinton invoked the two world wars, in part, because the use of force by the United States had ultimately proved necessary and was perceived as “successful.” In addition, the Kosovo bombings occurred only seven years after the Gulf War and only three years after the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina. United States military involvement in both of those cases had proven to be “successful” as well. There was no mention of Vietnam by Clinton, one, because he did not feel the need to “exorcise that demon” as President Bush had, and, two, because, having been perceived as a draft dodger, President Clinton could not afford politically to invoke any lessons learned there.

President Clinton, however, did not want lessons of the two World Wars and Bosnia and Herzegovina to go unlearned, so he focused on those. He noted how slow Europe was to recognize the dangers and how slow the United States was to enter the two world wars. Clinton exclaimed in his March 24, 1999, address, “Just imagine if leaders back then had acted wisely and early enough, how many lives could have been

saved, how many Americans would not have had to die.”<sup>28</sup> Appeasement did not work then and would not work now. Likewise, Clinton claimed, we learned some of the same lessons in Bosnia and Herzegovina just a few years ago. He tied the lessons of World War II and Bosnia and Herzegoviana together, describing the latter, “This was genocide in the heart of Europe, not in 1945 but in 1995; not in some grainy newsreel from our parents' and grandparents' time but in our own time, testing our humanity and our resolve.”<sup>29</sup> By using the word, “genocide,” President Clinton is appealing to the American memory of the Nazi blitzkrieg and the Holocaust. Clinton argued that by getting involved early enough in Kosovo in 1999, a greater war could be avoided and not only would “innocent” lives be saved in Kosovo, but American lives would be spare as well.

Following the cessation of the bombings less than three full months later, President Clinton, in his June 10, 1999, speech, the victory lap speech with which this section began, reiterated the same two themes. First, Clinton stated, the “firmness” of the American people and the involvement and participation of the American military in the Kosovo bombings “finally brought an end to a vicious campaign of ethnic cleansing.”<sup>30</sup> Second, Clinton claimed, “. . . we have averted the wider war this might well have caused.”<sup>31</sup> Here, again, was an emotional appeal and a logical appeal in President Clinton’s rhetoric. The emotional appeal was for United States military involvement in Kosovo based on humanitarian reasons. The logical, more practical appeal was for United States military involvement in Kosovo in order to avert a greater conflict in the region. We will turn next to consider how these themes were received by Congress and the American public.

## D: Congressional and Public Response

### i. Congressional Debate

President Clinton's personal character was at issue at the time he decided to involve the United States military in the bombings of Kosovo in March of 1999. However, Clinton and the White House were very adept at distinguishing the President's personal character from the character of the presidency. Thus, the Congressional debate about American participation first in Bosnia and Herzegovina and later in the Kosovo air-strikes was focused more on the issue than on the President, which was of course what Clinton wanted. President Clinton did not have the experience in international affairs that President George H.W. Bush brought to the office, nor did Clinton did not have the experience in Washington, D.C., that Bush had before he was elected President. Clinton had more international experience by 1999, but he was also fighting other battles at that time. President Clinton's personal life, described above, was in the national spotlight in 1998 and 1999, when the crisis in Kosovo occurred. Nevertheless, Clinton remained a popular President with the public, and somehow overcame a Republican Congress to advocate for, and then defend, his decision to involve the United States military in the Kosovo bombings.

President Clinton was elected President in November of 1992. By that time, Yugoslavia had fallen apart, and many parts of the former Yugoslavia were exhibiting strong nationalistic tendencies, including Serbia. Clinton received only 43% of the popular vote. The House of Representatives was controlled by the Democrats..

Nevertheless, Republican representatives picked up nine seats. The Senate balance remained unchanged with the Democrats holding a 57 to 43 edge.

In the November 1994 national elections, sometimes referred to as the “Republican Revolution,” Republicans picked up 54 seats in the House of Representatives to take a majority. Republicans also picked up eight seats in the Senate to command a 52 to 48 advantage. This advantage in the Senate was further increased when Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama and Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado switched parties, giving Republicans two additional seats.

By 1994, President Clinton was already pushing for increased United States military involvement in the Bosnia and Herzegovina crisis with his “lift and strike” policy. However, this probably did not factor too much into the 1994 election results because most observers agreed that the election results were a backlash against President Clinton’s first two years in office and his domestic policy failures.<sup>32</sup> For instance, much of the Senate’s time leading into the election had been taken up by debate of President Clinton’s ultimately unsuccessful national health care plan. Meanwhile, in the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich of Georgia led the charge for the “Contract with America” program of domestic reforms proposed by the Republicans.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Congress in 1994 was not focusing on international affairs while President Clinton contemplated the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nevertheless, in 1994 President Clinton advocated for his “lift and strike” policy, meaning lift the arms embargo then in place so that the United States, and others, could arm the Muslims and Croats so that they could better resist the Serbs, and, in addition, launch airstrikes against the Serbs to halt their advances against the Muslims and

Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina became better known to the American public during the summer of 1995, the Republican led House and Senate took notice. Proposed legislation passed in both the House and Senate calling for the United States to lift its embargo against supplying arms to the Muslim and Croat forces and to begin bombing the Serbian positions. However, President Clinton very much wanted the lift and strike policy to be accepted by the world community, and, in particular United States allies in the United Nations and in NATO. Clinton's preference resulted in an early August 1995 veto of the lift and strike legislation passed by the House and Senate.<sup>34</sup> Clinton could not go along with the unilateral approach. He felt he needed at least some international support.

Many European nations had contributed troops to peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina organized by the United Nations on humanitarian grounds. Some of these European troops had been in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1992. Thus, many European nations felt that NATO bombings of Serbian troops and positions would not only *not* be humanitarian, but would also put their troops on the ground in danger of reprisal from the Serbs. President Clinton believed strongly, though, that something new had to be attempted. More than 7,000 people had been slaughtered by Serbs in July of 1995. In the end, President Clinton had United States Ambassador to the United Nations Madeline Albright and National Security Advisor Anthony Lake lobby strongly with American allies in Europe, threatening that the United States was ready to go forward alone with bombings of the Serb positions in Bosnia and Herzegovina with or without allied support. Ultimately, though the United Nations did not condone or authorize the actions, it backed down and sat by while NATO authorized and undertook

the bombings for “humanitarian” reasons.<sup>35</sup> Cease fire followed, and the Dayton Accords, effectively ending the war, were reached in November of 1995.

When the Kosovo crisis flared up in 1998 and 1999, many felt that the lessons of Bosnia should have applied much earlier. Early intervention by the international community should have occurred. Many of Clinton’s critics later argued that the United States should have taken a strong leadership role internationally, and backed up its role with the threat of force much sooner than it did. However, as the crisis unfolded, diplomatic options were attempted first. When those failed, President Clinton vowed to move forward with a military option. By early 1999, the United States Congress was ready to do something, but the same issue of whether Congressional authorization was necessary that had confronted George H.W. Bush in 1991 during the Gulf War, was again front and center. In addition, President Clinton was battling impeachment proceedings domestically.

Congress in 1999 was controlled by the Republicans. The Republicans had a 223 to 211 majority in the House of Representatives and a 55 to 45 majority in the Senate.<sup>36</sup> President Clinton was reeling domestically in the wake of the Monica Lewinsky scandal and in the middle of impeachment proceedings in 1999. Nevertheless, Clinton was able to make the case for United States military involvement in Kosovo. The debates were messy and unfocused. Those in support of United States involvement had to overcome repeated references to and side-line debates concerning Clinton’s actions with Monica Lewinsky and the impeachment process. Consensus was hard to come by. Nevertheless, Congress appeared to support Clinton or, at least did not oppose Clinton. Many Republicans, while distrustful of Clinton, implicitly agreed that

something had to be done by remaining largely silent on the issue.<sup>37</sup> At a minimum Congress appeared to want to avoid another Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A more concrete vote of at least some Congressional approval came with the Senate introduction and passage of a resolution on March 23, 1999, with bipartisan support, “authorizing the President of the United States to conduct military air operations and missile strikes against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).”<sup>38</sup> The resolution passed with a 58-31 vote in the Senate, but, later failed to pass the House of Representatives in a April 28, 1999, vote.

The House vote, though, was rather after the fact though, literally as well as figuratively, because President Clinton had authorized the United States to participate with NATO in bombings to start on March 24, one day after the Senate passed its resolution. The House vote did not condemn President Clinton for not waiting, which was really its only option a month after the bombings had started. Instead, the vote seemed more a way for the House to catch up publicly, or perhaps to seem more relevant, to events already occurring.

## ii. Public Response

President Clinton remained an incredibly resilient and relatively popular president throughout his time in office. Public reaction to the United States military involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the summer and fall of 1995 was underwhelming at best. In fairness, the Oklahoma City bombing had occurred in April of 1995, so perhaps American focus and concerns were more turned domestically rather than toward an international crisis happening in a place about which they knew little.

At the time of the Bosnia and Herzegovina bombings in July and August 1995, President Clinton's public approval rating hovered around 44%-46%.<sup>39</sup> That popularity, or lack thereof, however, was primarily connected to his domestic performance and had little impact on how most Americans felt about Bosnia and Herzegovina. Though distracted by domestic issues and the horrific Oklahoma City bombing, Americans were not completely oblivious to what was happening in Eastern Europe. Americans were aware of the genocide occurring and felt that something had to be done. For instance, a Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) poll conducted by the University of Maryland in 1994 found that 76% of Americans agreed that an ultimatum should be given to Milosevic to withdraw the heavy artillery from Sarajevo that had been pounding Muslims and Croats, and 80% of Americans agreed that if Milosevic did not abide, then airstrikes were appropriate.<sup>40</sup> Another PIPA poll in 1994 found that Americans were concerned about genocide in general. When citizens were asked, "If genocidal situations occur, do you think that the U.N., including the U.S., should intervene with whatever force is necessary to stop the acts of genocide?" 65% said "always" or "in most cases." Only 23% answered "only when American interests are also involved," and only 6% said "never."<sup>41</sup>

These two polls show the importance to Americans of avoiding the genocide largely associated historically with the Second World War and more recently with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the willingness of most Americans to respond with force if necessary. The issue, for most Americans, was avoiding getting caught in a Vietnam-like situation, where troops were sent in without clear objectives or authority to fight. For instance, 58% of respondents in a poll conducted May 23-24, 1999, "disapproved" of

American ground troops being used in Kosovo in a “combat situation.”<sup>42</sup> President George H.W. Bush had avoided a Vietnam situation with the Gulf War; President Clinton knew that he had to do the same with Bosnia and Herzegovina in the fall of 1995, and with Kosovo in March of 1999. Ultimately, President Clinton was able to do just that. No American ground troops were used in Bosnia and Herzegovina until after the bombings and resulting cease fire and peace treaty. No American ground troops were used in Kosovo until after the bombing, and then only in conjunction with United Nations peace-keeping efforts.

President Clinton faced incredible obstacles domestically in early 1999 in the aftermath of the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the impeachment hearings. Nevertheless, in early March of 1999, Clinton’s public approval rating was a very robust 68%.<sup>43</sup> It was still a strong 60% in early April of 1999, just a week or two after the Kosovo bombings.<sup>44</sup> Again, these polls likely reflect Americans’ views on President Clinton’s domestic agenda and troubles rather than his decisions regarding Kosovo, but not all American attention was focused inward.

At least some attention was focused on Kosovo. A *CNN/USA Today* poll published on April 1, 1999, about a week after the NATO bombings of Kosovo started, showed that a majority believed that the NATO airstrikes would eventually make things better in Kosovo once the bombings concluded, and that two-thirds of respondents believed that Clinton could handle the situation in Kosovo.<sup>45</sup> A later *CNN/USA Today* poll published on June 7, 1999, about a week after the NATO bombings of Kosovo were suspended, showed that most Americans favored the Kosovo peace agreement that was reached, that most Americans viewed the situation in Kosovo as a “clear victory” for

the United States and Kosovo, and that Clinton was a “winner” as a result of the military action in Kosovo.<sup>46</sup>

Whether or not Clinton was a winner, it was clear that he had successfully understood and appealed to the emotions of Americans in order to gain support for a military response in Kosovo. The public reaction to President Clinton’s decision to involve the United States military in the NATO bombings of Kosovo was a testament to Clinton’s ability to invoke history and specifically appeal to the emotions of Americans with his themes of “humanitarianism” and “avoidance of another world war” in his Kosovo rhetoric. Public reaction was also a testament to Clinton’s political resilience.

Resiliency also describes President Clinton’s successor in the White House, George W. Bush. The second President Bush narrowly won election to the Presidency and then had to lead the United States in a new war and then expanding war on terror in the aftermath of the Al-Qaeda led terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001.

## Chapter II: notes

1. President William Clinton, *Address on the Kosovo Agreement* (June 10, 1999), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3933>, accessed April 18, 2015.
2. Id.
3. Id.
4. The Library of Congress, *U.S. Election Results: A Resource Guide*, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/elections/statistics.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.
5. Id.
6. Bill Clinton, *American President: A Reference Resource*, <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/essays/biography/9>, accessed April 18, 2015.
7. Bill Clinton, Letter to Colonel Eugene Holmes, December 3, 1969, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/clinton/etc/draftletter.com>, accessed April 18, 2015.
8. Clinton on Flowers, 60 Minutes interview, January 26, 1992, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwXE52e9JFg>, accessed April 18, 2015.
9. Bill Clinton, *American President: A Reference Resource*, <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/essays/biography/9>, accessed April 18, 2015.
10. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, Milestones, 1993-1998, *The War in Bosnia, 1992-1995*, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/bosnia>, accessed April 18, 2015.
11. Id.
12. Jim A. Kuypers 1997. *Presidential Crisis Rhetoric and the Press in the Post-Cold War World*, Praeger, 77.
13. President William Clinton, *Address on Bosnia* (November 27, 1995), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3929>, accessed April 18, 2015.
14. Id.
15. Id.
16. Id.
17. Id.
18. Id.
19. Id.
20. Id.
21. President William Clinton, *Statement on Kosovo* (March 24, 1999), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3932>, accessed April 18, 2015.
22. Id.
23. Id.
24. Id.
25. Id.
26. Id.

27. Id.
28. Id.
29. Id.
30. Id.
31. President William Clinton, *Address on the Kosovo Agreement* (June 10, 1999), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3933>, accessed April 18, 2015.
32. Id.
33. For a more comprehensive discussion of the 1994 midterm elections, see, Philip A. Klinker and Charles O. Jones, *Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Context* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).
34. Id.
35. Todd S. Purdum, Clinton Vetoes Lifting Bosnia Arms Embargo, August 12, 1995, *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/12/world/clinton-vetoes-lifting-bosnia-arms-embargo.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.
36. Ivo H. Daalder, "Decision to Intervene: How the War in Bosnia Ended," *Brookings*, December 1998, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/1998/12/balkans-daalder>, accessed April 18, 2015.
37. Julie Kim, Report for Congress, *Kosovo and the 106 Congress*, updated January 18, 2001, <http://congressionalresearch.com/RL30729/document.php?study=kosovo+and+the+106th+congress>, accessed April 18, 2015.
38. S.Con.Res. 21 (106<sup>th</sup>): Kosovo Resolution, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/106/sconres21#overview>, accessed April 18, 2015.
39. Presidential Job Approval Center, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/presidential-approval-center.aspx>, accessed April 18, 2015.
40. Steven Kull and Clay Ramsay, Public Seeks Sense of Purpose In US Bosnia Policy: Approval for airstrikes rose when need was explained, February 18, 1994, *The Christian Science Monitor*, <http://www.policyattitudes.org/bosnia3.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.
41. Samantha Power, "Never Again: The World's Most Unfulfilled Promise," *Frontline*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/karadzic/genocide/neveragain.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.
42. Frank Newport, Support for U.S. Kosovo Involvement Drops, May 16, 1999, *Gallup New Service*, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/3826/support-us-kosovo-involvement-drops.aspx>, accessed April 18, 2015.
43. Keating Holland, "Poll: Americans continue to support NATO strikes, but skepticism over success growing," April 1, 1999, *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/04/01/poll/>, accessed April 18, 2015.
44. Id.

45. Keating Holland, "Poll: Americans view Kosovo peace as a U.S. victory," June 7, 1999, <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/06/07/poll/>, accessed April 18, 2015.

46. Id.

### Chapter III: Post 9/11: Defining Terrorism as War and Beginning the War on Terror during George W. Bush's First Term in Office

On September 11, 2001, less than one year into the presidency of George W. Bush, members of an Islamic terrorist group, Al-Qaeda, hijacked four civilian airplanes, flying two of the planes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and one plane into one side of the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, just across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. The alleged plan for the fourth plane was for it to fly into Washington D.C., probably into the White House, but the plan was foiled by passengers on board who had heard what had happened at the World Trade Center and who then rushed against the terrorists, forcing the plane down. The plane ultimately crashed in Pennsylvania, killing all aboard.

The events of this day changed the way Americans thought about their security. Americans had been victims of domestic terrorism before, such as in Oklahoma City, and Americans had been victims of terrorism abroad before. This, however, was an attack by foreign group against Americans on American soil. This “new” kind of terrorism, later defined by President George W. Bush as an “act of war,”<sup>1</sup> had been brought by international forces into the United States. Terrorism was no longer something that happened “over there.” In response to this act of war, President Bush advocated in his rhetoric a response of equal measure. According to President Bush, Americans needed to prepare for war and begin war, a new kind of war, a war on terrorism.

This chapter considers President Bush's definition of the war on terror in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11, Bush's preferred response, and explores how this definition and response led to the United States beginning military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Three important addresses are highlighted. First, President Bush defined the "new" threat of terrorism and outlined America's role in the "war on terrorism" in his address to the nation presented on September 20, 2001, only nine days after 9/11. In many ways, this speech was the foundation for all later decisions by President Bush with regard to conduct and expansion of the war on terror. Second, less than three weeks later, on October 7, 2001, Bush announced the commencement of United States and British military action in Afghanistan, later called "Operation Enduring Freedom," not only as a response to 9/11, but as a necessary step in the broader war on terror. Though this October 7, 2001, address was short, it was an important piece of rhetoric that put the feelings, ideas and warnings of President Bush's September 20 address into action. Third, on March 17, 2003, President Bush expanded the war on terror even further, warning Saddam Hussein that an attack on his country was imminent. This attack, later known as "Operation Iraqi Freedom," began on March 19, 2003.

The above noted events and accompanying presidential rhetoric all occurred during President Bush's first term in office, and this thesis focuses on Bush's first term in office because it was during this time, in the more immediate aftermath of 9/11, that Bush used rhetoric to both call Americans to war and to establish the parameters of the war on terror. While the definition of the war on terror and the scope of American involvement in the war on terror continued to evolve with George W. Bush's second

term, and has continued to evolve during President Barack Obama's terms as President, the broader war on terror, first in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, began as a response to 9/11.

As with earlier chapters, George W. Bush's rhetoric is considered within the analysis of rhetoric initially proposed by Aristotle and expounded upon by Zarefsky and others. In considering how persuasive his rhetoric was, we will consider the character of George W. Bush, his use of logic and, most importantly, his ability to identify and appeal to the emotions of his audience. In doing this analysis, as in previous chapters, we examine the President's background and the domestic context of the rhetoric, the rhetoric itself, and the public and congressional responses to the rhetoric.

#### A: The Situation: The 2000 Presidential Election and Bush's Character

Much has been written about the 2000 election.<sup>2</sup> Because President Bush won so narrowly, the election itself was an important political event that shaped the early days of the Bush Presidency. To summarize, George W. Bush, then Governor of Texas, was elected, winning the electoral vote, yet losing the popular vote to then Vice-President Al Gore by over 500,000 votes. The public and electoral votes were disputed. The Florida Supreme Court and ultimately the United States Supreme Court both heard challenges. The end result was that no recount was needed and the Bush victory was confirmed. Conflicting views remain today about whether Bush would have won the election had the recount, using certain disputed criteria, been allowed to proceed. It was an inauspicious, if not tainted, beginning for Bush and the Bush presidency.

Bush's character coming into the presidency contrasted with both his father, George H.W. Bush, and his predecessor, William Clinton. Although George W. Bush came in with his father's name and accompanying significant familial name recognition, he did not come into office with the gravitas or experience or personal character his father had been able to demonstrate. The Bush name was certainly helpful to George W. Bush during the election, but once he was elected, Bush had to make his own way, but live up to his father's reputation – a reputation that had improved over time.<sup>3</sup>

More important than any credibility the Bush name may have lent was the fact that George W. Bush did not have the experience upon which his father had been able to draw. George W. Bush had served as Governor of Texas, but did not have a long list of Washington, D.C., contacts. He also did not have the extensive foreign intelligence and foreign policy experience that his father had had as Director of Central Intelligence, Envoy to China and Vice-President. Like Clinton, the younger Bush also did not have a particularly distinguished military career. Bush had served in the Texas Air National Guard, but how long he had served and what his duties had been and whether he had completed his service were all issues of controversy. In addition, Bush had earned a bit of a playboy image as a younger adult, with allegations of excessive partying and drinking.<sup>4</sup> However, while Bush was able to avoid the attacks on his personal character that Clinton had had to endure, or at least avoid the consequences, Bush came into the presidency like Clinton had before him. Both Clinton and Bush had executive experience at the state level, but both needed to learn Washington practices and foreign policy on the job and earn the trust of a significant portion of voters.

## B: The Situation: The United States Congress in 2001

The Republican Party controlled the House of Representatives by a slim 222 – 211 seat margin prior to the November 2000 federal election. Following the election, Republicans still held a majority, but it was even slimmer at 221-212 seats. In the Senate, the Republican Party lost seats in the 2000 election, with the end result being that Democrats and Republicans each held 50 seats in the Senate. George W. Bush, therefore, had to tread carefully when outlining his vision of the presidency and advocating his policy initiatives.

Bush did exactly that. During his first 100 days in office, he interacted only minimally with Congress, traveled the country reaching out to voters, and pointedly refused to support further congressional inquiries into the Clinton presidency and decisions that had been made prior to Bush's inauguration.<sup>5</sup> Bush Chief of Staff Andrew Card noted that the White House would "continue to defend the authority of the president - - no matter who he is," even if Congress chose to further investigate Clinton.<sup>6</sup> This separation from the Clinton Presidency allowed Bush to begin to create his own White House.

Bush also had to separate his presidency from his father's presidency. Bush therefore used the same theme, the authority of the office of the president, throughout his presidency. Bush's reliance on the office of the president rather than his own character often allowed Bush to deflect criticism that he was merely the "young George Bush" or just the "son of George H.W. Bush," and allowed him to create his own Presidential agenda.

The United States Congress, though very evenly split during these early days of the Bush presidency, moved on from the hard feelings of the Clinton presidency. President Bush's quiet approach and self-deprecating sense of humor seemed to have a calming effect on the country.<sup>7</sup> Though there was some Congressional bickering over budget proposals, Bush was also blessed with a relatively stable economy and few divisive domestic issues to immediately tackle.<sup>8</sup>

During his first 100 days in office and, in fact, during the first eight months of his presidency leading up to 9/11, George W. Bush proved to be quite popular with the American public. His approval ratings never dipped below 50%. Gallup Poll presidential job approval ratings for Bush were as high as 63% in early March of 2001 and 62% in mid-April of 2001.<sup>9</sup> These ratings were not only strong, but were even higher than approval ratings had been for George H.W. Bush and William Clinton at similar times in their presidencies.<sup>10</sup> The honeymoon period began to wane over the summer months of 2001, as Congress took up debate over domestic economic issues, with Bush's approval rating dropping at one point to 52% at the end of June.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the approval rating rose back up to 57% twice during the summer before coming down to 51% in early September, just before 9/11.<sup>12</sup>

There has been some discussion that Bush "became popular" as a result of his response to 9/11. However, he was a relatively popular President prior to 9/11, so perhaps a better way to describe his popularity is that it increased - - dramatically for a while - - as a result of 9/11. More importantly, though, Bush signaled early on by allowing the controversies and hard feelings left over from the Clinton presidency to die down, and poking fun at himself<sup>13</sup>, and reaching out to voters who he knew probably

had not voted for him, that he thought the office of the President was more important than the individual. Thus, in contrast to his father, and in similar style to President Clinton, in his Presidency and his rhetoric, Bush attempted to draw upon the character of the office of the Presidency rather than his own person.

In looking at President Bush within Aristotle's model, the "character of the speaker," therefore, was the office of the President, and not necessarily Bush, himself. This distinction was by design due to Bush's desire to distance himself from his father's presidency, Clinton's presidency and his own lack of national and international experience. However, as Bush's presidency continued, the public, specifically members of Congress and the American people, began to judge Bush increasingly on his experience and decision-making as President. The attacks of 9/11 and the initiation of the war on terror occurred very early in the Bush presidency, so for the purposes of this paper, we will focus on a time-period when Bush could rely on the power of the office of the President.

### C: The Rhetoric

The attacks against the United States on 9/11, which occurred in the United States, changed the way most Americans viewed their own security and the security of the United States. Emotions, such as anger, fear, and revenge, ran strong.<sup>14</sup> President George W. Bush, appealed to those emotions in his rhetoric, defining the attacks as an act of "war," and advocating a war-like response, especially in what was perhaps his seminal address on September 20, 2001, discussing the attacks of 9/11 and defining what became to be known as the "war on terror." The speech was not only an attempt

to discuss and define the events of 9/11, but also an outline for an American response, not just to 9/11, but to the “forces of terror” that could attack in the future.

Less than three weeks later, on October 7, 2001, Bush formally announced the beginning of United States military action, taken in conjunction with Great Britain, in Afghanistan. The speech itself is rather brief, more of an announcement than a persuasive statement of position. However, the address was important as President Bush carefully fit not only this decision into the outline of the war on terror that he had set forth in the September 20, 2001, address, but brought the ideas and warnings expressed in the September 20th address to life by taking action.<sup>15</sup>

George W. Bush advocated for, and then announced, a significant further expansion of the war on terror in the form of United States military action in Iraq in March of 2003. Iraq represented not only a new front for the war on terror, but a new war. During a dramatic public message to Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein on March 17, 2003, and a subsequent announcement to the American people that military action in Iraq had commenced on March 19, 2003, Bush let Americans and the world know that the war on terrorism had become broader and more complex.

These addresses set out the definition, the initiation and the expansion of the war on terror. The September 20, 2001, address immediately following the attacks of 9/11, defined the war on terror and set the parameters for the response to 9/11 and the initiation of the war on terror. The announcement of United States military action in Afghanistan formally initiated the war on terror. The announcement of United States military action against and within Iraq expanded the war on terror.

i. Address to the Nation on September 20, 2001

President Bush emphasized several themes during the September 20, 2001, address, setting his vision out as a series of answers to questions and concerns he thought Americans (and leaders of other countries around the world) had about the 9/11 attacks and the American response. He asserted to Americans and the world that America was strong and united. He defined the 9/11 attacks as an act of “war.”<sup>16</sup> He described the enemy and took pains to explain how members of the enemy were different than Americans. He outlined how America would fight the war. He emphasized that America would not be fighting alone. He explained why America would win the war.

Bush began the address by providing examples of how strong and how united Americans were during and after the 9/11 attacks. He claimed he did not have to report on the state of the Union because the report had “already been delivered by the American people.”<sup>17</sup> Bush emphasized the strength and decency of the American people: “We have seen it in the courage of passengers, who rushed terrorists to save others on the ground. . . We have seen (it) in the endurance of rescuers, working past exhaustion. . . We have seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers. . . We have seen the decency of a loving and giving people, who have made the grief of strangers their own.”<sup>18</sup>

These statements were meant to show that Americans were brave, relentless, patriotic, hopeful, and willing to make sacrifices for each other. These were the traits of Americans that President Bush was not only signaling to the rest of the world, but also clearly hoping would continue to be prevalent among Americans as the war on terror

began. Bush was not simply addressing the American public, though, but members of Congress, too. He continued his theme of a unified and strong America by noting that Congress, Democrats and Republicans, had gathered together on the Capitol steps to sing, "God Bless America."<sup>19</sup> He also thanked Congress for its swift authorization of funds to assist with a response.<sup>20</sup> In a few short sentences, Bush demonstrated to Congress, and the world, how strong and unified the American public was, and demonstrated to the American public, and the world, how strong and unified Congress was. It was a simple approach, but effective.

President Bush also made clear that America did not stand alone. He noted that he would ". . . never forget the sounds of our National Anthem playing at Buckingham Palace, and on the streets of Paris, and at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate."<sup>21</sup> He noted South Korean children who prayed outside the American embassy in Seoul, the prayers of sympathy offered at a mosque in Cairo, the moments of silence and days of mourning in Australia and Africa and Latin America.<sup>22</sup> Bush also remembered foreign nationals who had died in the attacks, from Pakistan, India, El Salvador, Iran, Mexico, Japan and Great Britain, and he noted that British Prime Minister Tony Blair had flown across the Atlantic to be present at this address.<sup>23</sup> By noting countries all over the world, Bush was not only bringing in allies as fellow victims of the 9/11 attacks to show unity of purpose in a response, but setting the stage for his vision of a broader definition of the war on terror.

In what was probably the most critical statement of the address, President Bush defined the 9/11 attacks as an act of war: "On September the eleventh, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country."<sup>24</sup> Once he defined the attack as

an act of war, Bush was able to use what Professor Zarefsky, cited above, called the “war metaphor”<sup>25</sup> to outline his discussion of the “enemy” and his vision of a war-like response. Calling the attack an act of war implied, according to the war metaphor, that the nation had to be unified, that agendas needed to be reprioritized, and that there had to be a commitment and resolve to win.<sup>26</sup> Bush was preparing the nation to go to war.

President Bush identified the enemy, but took care to clarify who was *not* the enemy. The enemy was not a specific sovereign state, although Bush later linked the terrorists to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The enemy was not the Muslim religion or Muslims in general. In fact, Bush explained that the actions of the terrorism were against the beliefs of the Muslim religion. The enemy was not Arabs. In fact, many Arab states were planning to join with the United States in the war on terrorism. Instead, Bush stated, “Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them.”<sup>27</sup> Already, Bush was differentiating the “war” on terrorism from a more traditional war against a sovereign state or people.

Many Americans that night heard, for the first time, about Al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden. Bush described Al-Qaeda as a loosely organized group of “fringe” Muslim terrorists, with a “directive” to kill Christians and Jews, including Americans, without regard for civilian loss.<sup>28</sup> He described Al-Qaeda terrorists as “heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century,” saying that they “follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism.”<sup>29</sup>

Like Clinton who characterized Milosevic and his Serbian followers as thugs in advocating for the Kosovo air strikes, and like his father who had characterized Hussein and the Iraqi army as Hitler-esque in advocating for the Gulf War, George W. Bush used

history, specifically imagery from World War II, to identify and characterize the enemy after 9/11. It was imagery that was familiar to most Americans and, generally, not controversial. There was little debate that “fascism” and “Nazism” and “totalitarianism” were bad ideas. Most Americans believed that the United States had been “right” to fight against ideas things in World War II. By equating terrorists with historical villains such as Hitler and Milosevic, and by equating terrorism with fascism and Nazism and totalitarianism, Bush hoped there would be strong support for fighting the war on terrorism.

Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda leaders, Bush went on to say, had great influence in Afghanistan and controlled the Taliban government. President Bush noted that Americans had no grievance against the Afghan people, and were in fact the greatest source of international humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. He condemned the Taliban, though, and made very war-like demands on the Taliban government, emphasizing that the demands were “not open to discussion.”<sup>30</sup> Bush demanded that the Taliban deliver to the United States all the leaders of Al-Qaeda; release all foreign nationals unjustly imprisoned in Afghanistan; and protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers in Afghanistan; and permanently close all terrorist camps in Afghanistan, handing over all terrorists to “appropriate authorities,” and granting the United States “full access” to the camps to make sure they were no longer operating.<sup>31</sup>

The demands were followed by a specific threat to the Taliban: the Taliban must act and hand over the terrorists, “or they will share in their fate.”<sup>32</sup> In addition, Bush made clear to other nations that they had a choice to make. “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”<sup>33</sup> There was no “neutral” position in the war on terrorism,

either domestically or internationally. Bush put the American people, members of Congress and the world on notice that in the war on terrorism, “either you are with us or against us.” This positioning laid the groundwork for later expansion of the war on terror.

Note the contrast with his father’s approach to the Gulf War in 1991. George H.W. Bush felt strongly about acting against Saddam Hussein’s invasion and occupation of Kuwait, but he could not take a position quite so aggressively. In 1991, memories of the United States actions in Vietnam were still relatively fresh. In 1991, George H.W. Bush reacted to events occurring in the Middle East. In 2001, George W. Bush reacted to attacks that had occurred specifically against the United States within the United States. George H.W. Bush, therefore, perhaps felt in 1991 that he had to act within certain restrictions that George W. Bush maybe felt did not apply to him in 2001. George H.W. Bush apparently felt he had to build a coalition, whereas his son could act more independently. George H.W. Bush apparently felt he had to restrict the military action to freeing Kuwait, whereas his son could plan for a broader action.

In his September 20, 2001, address, President Bush was not precise in his description of how America would fight the war on terrorism. He broadly stated, “We will direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the disruption and defeat of the global terror network.”<sup>34</sup> This allowed President Bush some latitude, but also allowed him time to plan. Remember, this address was delivered only a little over one week after 9/11, so plans were still being finalized.

The war on terrorism also contained a new element of defense at home, and accompanying increased security measures for all Americans. Bush announced the creation of a Cabinet-level position to coordinate homeland security. Henceforth, America would have a Director of Homeland Security and an Office of Homeland Security.<sup>35</sup> Americans, as discussed below, were also asked to compromise some of their personal liberties in the name of security.

President Bush was also careful to distinguish this war on terrorism from other more recent wars: “This war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with its decisive liberation of territory and its swift conclusion. It will not look like the air war above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat.<sup>36</sup> Instead, Bush said, Americans should prepare for a “lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have seen.”<sup>37</sup> Even though President Bush used the Gulf War and the Kosovo air strikes as examples of necessary military action by the United States, he also took care to differentiate this new war. And by differentiating the war, Bush prepared Americans for the idea that success or victory might have a different, perhaps not so easy, definition as well.

Bush closed this September 20, 2001, address by characterizing the war on terrorism as a fight for freedom. Asking Americans to fight for freedom, a concept Americans had fought for before, beginning with the American Revolution, Bush stated, “The advance of freedom – the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time – now depends on us.”<sup>38</sup> And though Bush acknowledged that the “course of the conflict” could not be known, he reassured Americans that, “we will meet violence with patient justice – assured of the rightness of our cause, and confident of the

victories to come.”<sup>39</sup> In addition, President Bush, as President Clinton and as President George H.W. Bush had done before him, invoked power of religious right and might. George W. Bush, though, could be far more explicit with his references to religious righteousness and his personal beliefs, given the raw emotions of Americans following 9/11. God was on America’s side, according to Bush: “Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus, as of September 20, 2001, President Bush in his rhetoric had defined the 9/11 attacks as an act of war, had defined the enemy, had demonstrated the unity of the American people and of the Congress, and had made specific demands of Afghanistan and the Taliban. America was ready to go to war.

## ii. Initiating the War on Terrorism: Military Action in Afghanistan

President Bush announced that American airstrikes in Afghanistan against terrorist camps and Taliban military targets had started only about two-and-a-half weeks later, during a relatively brief and business-like October 7, 2001, address from the White House. The emotions of the American public and members of Congress were still running very high, and Bush spoke to these emotions. Symbolically, President Bush spoke from the Treaty Room of the White house, a place where he said American presidents had “worked for peace.”<sup>41</sup> Yet, there was nothing peaceful about the announcement. Instead the speech was more of a demonstration and warning, to both the world and to the American people that the war had begun. Bush stated clearly that more than two weeks ago he had given the Taliban leaders a set of demands – in the September 20, 2001, address discussed above – and, “None of these demands were

met. And now, the Taliban will pay a price.”<sup>42</sup> The military action in Afghanistan became known as “Operation Enduring Freedom,” again a reference to Bush’s characterization of the war during his September 20, 2001, address as a war for freedom as much as a war against terror.

As he did in his September 20, 2001, address, President Bush emphasized that the military action would not be quick and that it was only part of the broader war on terror. Bush used the speech to further warn and prepare Americans for a long military campaign. He stated that while terrorists may go underground – literally – for a while, “Our military action is also designed to clear the way for sustained, comprehensive and relentless operations to drive them out and bring them to justice.”<sup>43</sup> Bush also used the speech to remind Americans that, “This military action is a part of our campaign against terrorism, another front in a war that has already been joined through diplomacy, intelligence, the freezing of financial assets and the arrests of known terrorists by law enforcement agents in 38 countries.”<sup>44</sup>

Finally, President Bush used the announcement of the beginning of military action in Afghanistan as an opportunity to ask for “patience” from Americans, both for the increased security measures at home and for the sacrifices made at home and by those fighting abroad.<sup>45</sup> Bush foresaw that this would not be a quick war. It would be a rout like the Gulf War. It would not be conducted solely with air strikes, like the Kosovo bombings. This speech, while echoing some of the same themes as the September 20, 2001, address, was not about symbolism or unity or pride as much as it was about a clear statement to members of Congress and the American people that the war on

terrorism had begun. America was doing what it could through various means, but the fighting had begun and sacrifices would be required.

iii. Expanding the War on Terrorism: Military Action in Iraq

Less than two years later, with fighting on-going in Afghanistan, in March of 2003, President Bush announced the invasion of Iraq by American and other allied forces. The invasion of Iraq represented a further expansion of the war on terror, and an expansion not directly related to the terrorist attacks against the United States of 9/11. While the memory of 9/11 was still vivid in the minds of most Americans, emotions had tempered a bit. Much of the fighting in Afghanistan was “building to building” in the towns and guerilla style attacks and counter-attacks in the rugged mountains. Clear victories were few and far between. Osama bin Laden had escaped. Members of the military died. Thus, in justifying and advocating for the invasion of Iraq, Bush used a combination of logic and appeal to emotion. The emotions of the American people and members of Congress were still important, but President Bush had to link those emotions to a logical argument for attacking Iraq.

President Bush made his argument directly to the American people in a televised address on March 17, 2003, entitled, “Message to Saddam.” Despite the title, the address had multiple audiences. The address was delivered as a warning to Saddam Hussein, specifically giving Saddam and his sons forty-eight hours to leave Iraq or else military action would begin, but more importantly it set forth for Americans, members of Congress and the world exactly why the United States was preparing to invade Iraq.

Bush's argument in the March 17, 2003, address was relatively simple. According to Bush, there were three reasons the United States had to attack Iraq at that point. First, Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Second, if left unchecked, Iraq could and would link with its "terrorist allies" and attack the United States. Third, the United States could bring democracy, or at least peace and order, to Iraq and the Middle East.<sup>46</sup> This was the logical argument, but Bush was careful to link each point with emotions.

For instance, President Bush began the address by reminding Americans that Iraq had pledged to destroy all weapons of mass destruction as a condition for ending the Persian Gulf War of 1991.<sup>47</sup> By reminding Americans of the Persian Gulf War and linking weapons of mass destruction to that war, Bush accomplished three objectives. First, the clear implication was that this threat of Iraq using weapons of mass destruction was not a new threat. Second, by linking the threat to a war that had occurred twelve years earlier, Bush implied that the threat posed by Iraq in 2003 was a continuation of the threat it had posed in 1991 and Iraq "had it coming." Third, and perhaps most importantly, by linking weapons of mass destruction to the Gulf War, Bush evoked feelings of a "successful" war against Iraq. The Gulf War, discussed earlier, had been quick, decisive and accomplished with very few American casualties, though some certainly felt that there was unfinished business. By trusting Americans to feel good, or at least justified, about involvement in the earlier Gulf War, Bush hoped that Americans would support this new war against Iraq.

President Bush also linked Iraq to Al-Qaeda, bringing up the much fresher emotions caused by 9/11. He called Iraq a "regime" with a "history of reckless

aggression” and a “deep hatred of America and our friends.”<sup>48</sup> He claimed that Iraq had “aided, trained and harbored terrorists, including operatives of Al-Qaeda.”<sup>49</sup> He laid out the danger to America: “The danger is clear: using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country. . .”<sup>50</sup> The implication was that if the United States did not act now another 9/11 – or worse – could happen in the future.

President Bush also referred indirectly to World War II and the dangers represented by Hitler. Again, this reference to a prior war, a war still considered by most Americans as a “good” war, or at least “necessary” war, was an important appeal to the emotions of the American people. Bush characterized Saddam as a “dictator,”<sup>51</sup> indirectly comparing him to Hitler and warning that Saddam could commit “Hitler-like” atrocities. Implying that Saddam was an “aggressive dictator,” Bush stated, “One reason the U.N. was founded after the Second World War was to confront aggressive dictators, actively and early, before they can attack the innocent and destroy the peace.”<sup>52</sup>

Bush continued his reference to the Second World War by later referring to “appeasement” and reminded Americans why that strategy would not work, stating,

In the 20th century, some chose to appease murderous dictators, whose threats were allowed to grow into genocide and global war. In this century, when evil men plot chemical, biological and nuclear terror, a policy of appeasement could bring destruction of a kind never before seen on this earth.”<sup>53</sup>

Bush clearly wanted Americans to apply lessons of the 20th century to the 21st century, and warned what could happen if the United States failed to act meaningfully.

President Bush ended this “Message to Saddam” address by appealing to ideals that he felt most Americans valued most: liberty, freedom and democracy. He stated, that, “As we enforce the just demands of the world, we will also honor the deepest commitments of our country. . .The United States, with other countries, will work to advance liberty and peace in that region.”<sup>54</sup> He continued, stating that when “the dictator,” referring to Saddam, had departed, Iraq could “set an example to all the Middle East of a vital and peaceful and self-governing nation.”<sup>55</sup> Two days later, on March 19, 2003, as promised by Bush, the United States and coalition forces attacked Iraq and Operation Iraqi Freedom began.

Thus, President Bush made a relatively simple argument, appealing to logic, to support his decision to invade Iraq. Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Iraq had links to Al-Qaeda. Iraq, on its own, or with its “terrorist allies” could use those weapons against the United States unless checked now. The attack against Iraq would ultimately result in more stability and peace in Iraq and the region. However, each of these pieces of the argument was linked to appeals to emotions still strongly felt about terrorism. And, while there was debate and some controversy about whether there really were weapons of mass destruction and whether what was in effect a pre-emptive strike was necessary, initially, most of the American public and members of Congress supported not only the war on terror in Afghanistan, but also the expansion of the war on terror in Iraq.

## D. Congressional and Public Response

### i. Congressional Action

Congress was quick to react to the attacks of 9/11 and continued to react during President Bush's first term in office. Recall that Republicans held a very narrow eleven seat advantage in the House in September of 2001, and Republicans and Democrats were evenly split in the Senate. Nevertheless, the incredible impact of the 9/11 attacks on America and the American way of life jolted Congress into bipartisan action. Nearly fifty pieces of legislation were passed by the House and Senate just in reaction to 9/11, with nearly one-hundred additional pieces of legislation considered.<sup>56</sup> President Bush asked Congress for authorization to use military force in response to the attacks and got it in the form of Senate Joint Resolution 23. There were also a series of laws enacted with the goal of providing greater security to Americans, most importantly the "USA Patriot Act of 2001." These pieces of legislation changed the way Americans lived and continue to affect American life today.

On September 12, 2001, one day after 9/11, President Bush proposed legislation to the Senate allowing for the use of military force in response to 9/11. The House and Senate jointly passed Senate Joint Resolution 23 with some modifications, and President Bush signed the legislation into law on September 14, 2001. Though Bush got what he wanted, almost word for word in the section authorizing military force, Congress did add an important section discussing the requirements of the 1973 War Powers Resolution, commonly referred to as the War Powers Act, which had not even been mentioned in the White House draft legislation. Congress acted very quickly,

therefore, but was careful to acknowledge and confirm its authority under the War Power Act.<sup>57</sup>

The final text of what became known as the “Authorization for Use of Military Force” included broad language authorizing the President to,

. . . use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, President Bush had authority to use military force against organizations and individuals, as well as against nations, and the ability to use that military force not only as a response against those who may have participated or aided in the 9/11 attacks, but as a preventative measure in an attempt to prevent future acts of terrorism against the United States. This language reflected the very broad view of the war on terrorism that Bush set forth less than a week later in his September 20, 2001, address to the Joint Congress and the nation, discussed above.

Nevertheless, Congress added language in the final version of Joint Resolution 23 specifically entitled, “War Powers Resolution Requirements,” reserving to Congress the authority to “declare war.” Under Section (b)(1) of the legislation, entitled, “Specific Statutory Authorization,” Congress declared that the section was “intended to constitute specific statutory authorization within the meaning of section 5(b) of the War Powers Resolution.”<sup>59</sup> Additionally, Congress stated that, “nothing in this resolution (Joint Resolution 23) supercedes (*sic*) any requirement of the War Powers Resolution.”<sup>60</sup>

President Bush did not quibble with the constraints, real or implied, placed by Congress in the second section of Joint Resolution 23, but instead relied on the broad language of the first section to expand the war on terrorism by first beginning military operations in Afghanistan in October of 2001, less than one month after 9/11, and by later attacking Iraq, in March of 2003. However, the timing of the beginning of military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq is important. Whereas Bush felt he did not need any further authorization when he ordered the military into Afghanistan so soon after 9/11, the beginning of military operations in Iraq was a broader expansion of the “war on terror,” and took a longer time and additional interaction with Congress before occurring.

Bush started moving the United States toward war with Iraq in the fall of 2002. Bush presented an address in Cincinnati on October 7, 2002, in which he set forth the “threat” that Iraq posed to the United States in the same way in which he would present it five months later in his message to Saddam. According to Bush, Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and Iraq had links to terrorists, specifically Al-Qaeda.<sup>61</sup> The October 7, 2002, speech in Cincinnati was in a way a platform for President Bush to lobby Congress one last time before it voted on authorizing military action in Iraq, because Bush had made the formal request to Congress and the issue was up for vote later that same week.

On October 11, 2002, four days later, Congress passed House Joint Resolution 114, entitled, “Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002.”<sup>62</sup> The legislation began with references to working with and through the United Nations Security Council to enforce resolutions “regarding

Iraq,” but then went into broad language authorizing the President to use United States armed forces to “(1) defend U.S. national security against the continuing threat posed by Iraq; and (2) enforce all relevant Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq.”<sup>63</sup> There was additional language stating a requirement that diplomatic means had to be attempted first, and further language that the President was supposed to report to Congress every 60 days.<sup>64</sup> And, as was the case with Senate Joint Resolution 23, discussed above, Congress specifically reserved the right to declare war by stating that the section was “intended to constitute specific statutory authorization for the use of the armed forces, consistent with the requirements of the War Powers Resolution.”<sup>65</sup>

Even with Congress reserving the right to declare war, and even with the constraints of having to attempt diplomacy first and having to report to Congress, the legislation affirmed that Iraq posed a threat to the United States and provided broad authority to the President to wage war on Iraq to counter that threat. And while the President could choose to work with American allies and others on the United Nations Security Council, the legislation did not make that mandatory. This was a victory for Bush, who attempted to work closely with Great Britain and other United States allies, but retained the flexibility for the United States to go it alone if necessary.

Note that this lobbying effort by Bush and the passing of subsequent legislation occurred in October of 2002, right before mid-term elections. Members of Congress, especially those up for re-election, probably acutely felt the pressure of Bush’s theme of: “either you are with us or against us” on the war

on terrorism. Members of Congress did not want to be seen as being “against” the war on terrorism. Clearly, this helped Bush push the legislation through.

While the initiation of the war on terrorism represented by the start of military action in Afghanistan and the expansion of the war was reflected in the legislation discussed above and the advent of military action in Iraq, there was equally important Congressional action at home in the form of sweeping legislation commonly known as the Patriot Act. The USA PATRIOT ACT, which stands for, “**U**niting and **S**trengthening **A**merica by **P**roviding **A**ppropriate **T**ools **R**equired to **I**ntercept and **O**bstruct **T**errorism Act of 2001,” is a 131-page piece of legislation originating in the House that addressed a number of issues domestically in an effort to make America more secure against terrorists.<sup>66</sup> The result, however, was a significant chilling effect on the civil liberties of Americans and foreign nationals residing in the United States.

For instance, the Patriot Act grants the President broad authority to confiscate property of “any foreign person, foreign organization or foreign country,” subject to “the jurisdiction of the United States,” that the President “determines has planned, authorized, aided, or engaged in such hostilities or attacks against the United States.”<sup>67</sup> In short, the Act increased the jurisdiction of the United States, allowing the President to seize the property of foreign nationals or organizations if he could, and if he determined that those nationals or organizations were in any way involved in terrorism.

The Patriot Act granted broad authority to the federal government to “intercept wire, oral, and electronic communications relating to terrorism.”<sup>68</sup> The

Act, however, did not specifically describe how the federal government was to determine whether communications “related to terrorism” before intercepting them. The Act included a section relating to the movement of currency in and out of the United States.<sup>69</sup> The Act included stricter border controls, for Americans and foreign nationals, as well as “enhanced” immigration provisions.<sup>70</sup> The Act broadened the criminal definition of terrorism.<sup>71</sup> In short, the Patriot Act attempted to address any facet of American life that could be related to terrorism.

Despite its very broad scope, the Patriot Act was quickly drafted and quickly passed.<sup>72</sup> It had been introduced as House Bill 3162 on October 23, 2001, just over a month after 9/11. The House voted to approve the legislation, 357-66, on October 24, 2001. The Senate confirmed, by a vote of 98-1, on October 25, 2001. Though the scope of the Patriot Act was to spawn a number of issues and questions and legal challenges later, at the time, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, there was little debate about its necessity.

Interestingly, the Patriot Act was introduced, debated and ultimately signed into law with little participation from President Bush or the White House, except for the final signing. Rather, the Patriot Act was more of a Congressional attempt to reflect the seriousness of the issues raised by the new war on terror by addressing those issues that presented themselves at home, within the United States. President Bush, of course, did not oppose the legislation as it gave further credence to his position that this crisis demanded a broad response, including the use of military action in Afghanistan and later in Iraq.

i. Public Response

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and President Bush's strong response, both in his rhetoric and his actions, resulted in a wave of patriotism and a strong sense of national unity. In effect, Americans rallied around their president. Bush's approval rating on September 21-22, 2001, immediately after he outlined his vision for the American response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the war on terror, spiked to a 90% level, up from just over 50% immediately prior to the attacks.<sup>73</sup> This spike in approval rating perhaps cannot be completely attributed to Bush's address of September 20, 2001, but Bush's strong rhetoric and demonstration that the United States would respond and had a plan undoubtedly played a role. Bush's approval rating gradually declined as war on terror grew. Americans began losing their lives in Afghanistan, and the realities of the Patriot Act and a new way of life took its toll, but Bush's approval rating was still an extremely positive 84% at the beginning of 2002.<sup>74</sup>

Bush's rhetoric during his first term, however, was effective in rallying the country. When he announced that Iraq posed a threat to the United States on October 7, 2002, and Congress passed House Joint Resolution 114, entitled, "Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002," four days later, Bush's approval rating was still above 60%.<sup>75</sup> When he delivered his "Message to Saddam" address on March 17, 2003, his approval rating went from 57% in early March to 71% during the first week after his speech and the subsequent attack on Iraq that began on March 19, 2003.<sup>76</sup>

As the war in Iraq dragged on in 2003 and 2004, and American troops continued fighting in Afghanistan, President Bush's approval rating continued to steadily decline. Nevertheless, the approval rating was still at 53% in early November of 2004, just prior to the 2004 presidential election.<sup>77</sup> Bush was able to defeat Democrat challenger John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election, although the margin of victory was quite small, with Bush winning 50.73% of the vote and 286 electoral votes.<sup>78</sup> This represented the smallest margin of victory for a sitting President who was re-elected.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, Bush was re-elected.

A majority of Americans supported President Bush throughout his first term, though they continued to be deeply affected by the 9/11 attacks. There were a number of studies conducted which had similar findings. For instance, immediately after the 9/11, 70% of Americans reported crying, 74% of Americans reported praying more than they usually did, 71% of Americans said that they felt depressed, over 90% thought that another terrorist attack in the United States was either very likely or somewhat likely, and 82% of Americans reported displaying an American flag.<sup>80</sup> Approximately 88% of Americans in October of 2001 thought the American government was doing fairly well or very well in reducing the threat of terrorism.<sup>81</sup> About 61% of Americans in September of 2001 felt that it was necessary for the average person to give up some civil liberties.<sup>82</sup>

It would be easy to argue that President Bush had an easier job than his father or President Clinton had to persuade Americans to go to war on terrorism. In considering Aristotle's model, most would agree that American emotions in the

immediate aftermath of 9/11, and even two years later, were so raw that it was simple for Bush to appeal to those emotions in his advocacy, almost without regard for his character or logical arguments. However, Bush was careful to go beyond appealing to emotion alone. He very astutely defined the war on terrorism and set the parameters for the United States involvement initially in the war on terror and later for an expansion of the war on terror. Without doubt, Bush appealed to the emotions of Americans, but he also set forth a logical framework for his advocacy for American involvement, particularly for starting and expanding military involvement in the war on terror.

The support for President Bush and the emotions noted above did not last into Bush's second term, but by that time, Bush's vision for a response to 9/11 and his vision for an expanded war on terrorism had been put into motion. President Bush did not run for re-election in 2008. By that time, the war on terror had taken a toll on Americans. The domestic economy was struggling. The country was ready for a new leader. President Barack Obama was elected in November of 2008. The war on terror, however, was not over, and President Obama would have his own decisions to make.

### Chapter III: notes

1. President George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, September 20, 2001, The Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address\\_001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address_001.asp), accessed April 18, 2015.
2. For a variety of views and discussions about the 2000 Presidential election, see: George W. Bush, *American President: A Reference Resource*, <http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/essays/biography/3>, The American Presidency Project, *2000 Presidential Election*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=2000>; U.S. Constitution on Line, *The Election of 2000*, <http://www.usconstitution.net/elec2000.html>, all accessed April 18, 2015.
3. The George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, George W. Bush, *Early Life and Career*, <http://www.georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu/en/The-President-and-Family/George-W-Bush.aspx>, accessed April 18, 2015.
4. George W. Bush, *American President: A Reference Resource*, <http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/essays/biography/1>, accessed April 18, 2015.
5. Randy Lilleston, "After shaky start, Bush gains public approval," 2003, *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/bush.100/stories/overview.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.
6. Id.
7. Id.
8. Id. Internationally, the only major crisis to occur during the early days of the Bush presidency was an April 1, 2001, incident where a United States reconnaissance aircraft was forced to make an emergency landing in China after apparently clipping a Chinese aircraft. Though the Chinese pilot died as a result of the accident, Bush was able to successfully negotiate the release of the American pilot and crew and defuse the situation. Bush did not take a hard line approach against the Chinese until after the American crew was safe. CNN reported that Bush's "carrot and stick" approach of expressing regret for the loss of the Chinese pilot followed by tougher talk following the release of the American crew "appeared to resonate with the public."
9. Presidential Job Approval Center, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/presidential-approval-center.aspx#>, accessed April 18, 2015.
10. Id.
11. Id.
12. Id.
13. Bush read from a book of his own "Bushisms" at his first White House correspondents' dinner in March of 2001.
14. Michael Traugott, et al, "How Americans Responded: A Study of Public Reactions to 9/11/01," *Institute for Social Research*, The University of Michigan, [www.isr.umich.edu/cps/har/ps\\_article.pdf](http://www.isr.umich.edu/cps/har/ps_article.pdf), accessed April 18, 2015.

15. Timeline of Operation Enduring Freedom,  
<http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/28/world/operation-enduring-freedom-fast-facts/>,  
accessed April 18, 2015.
16. President George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, September 20, 2001, The Avalon Project,  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address\\_001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address_001.asp), accessed April 18, 2015.
17. Id.
18. Id.
19. Id.
20. Id.
21. Id.
22. Id.
23. Id.
24. Id.
25. David Zarefsky, “George W. Bush Discovers Rhetoric: September 20, 2001 and the U.S. Response to Terrorism” in *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, edited by Michael J. Hyde, South Carolina University Press, 2004, 140-42.
26. Id.
27. President George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, September 20, 2001, The Avalon Project,  
[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address\\_001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address_001.asp), accessed April 18, 2015.
28. Id.
29. Id.
30. Id.
31. Id.
32. Id.
33. Id.
34. Id.
35. Id.
36. Id.
37. Id.
38. Id.
39. Id.
40. Id.
41. President George W. Bush, “Bush Announces Strikes Against Taliban,” October 7, 2001, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress\\_100801.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_100801.htm), accessed April 18, 2015.
42. Id.
43. Id.
44. Id.
45. Id.
46. President George W. Bush, *Message to Saddam*, March 17, 2003,  
<http://presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.17.03.html>, accessed April 18, 2015;  
and see Susan Brewer 2009. *Why America Fights*, Oxford University Press, 243-44, for a discussion of the Bush administration’s case for invading Iraq.

47. President George W. Bush, *Message to Saddam*, March 17, 2003, <http://presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.17.03.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.
48. Id.
49. Id.
50. Id.
51. Id.
52. Id.
53. Id.
54. Id.
55. Id.
56. The Library of Congress, *Legislation Related to the Attack of September 11, 2001*, <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/terrorleg.htm>, accessed April 18, 2015.
57. Id. See also: Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, “Authorization For Use of Military Force in Response to the 9/11 Attacks (P.L. 1007-40): Legislative History,” prepared by Richard F. Grimmett, last updated January 16, 2007, accessible at [fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22357.pdf](http://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22357.pdf), accessed April 18, 2015.
58. The Library of Congress, *Legislation Related to the Attack of September 11, 2001*, <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/terrorleg.htm>, accessed April 18, 2015.
59. Id.
60. Id.
61. President George W. Bush, *The Iraqi Threat*, October 7, 2002, <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/10.7.02.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.
62. H.J.Res.114 - Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002, 107<sup>th</sup> Congress (2001-2002), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-joint-resolution/114>, accessed April 18, 2015.
63. Id.
64. Id.
65. Id.
66. USA PATRIOT ACT, 2001, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c107:H.R.3162>, accessed April 18, 2015.
67. Id.
68. Id.
69. Id.
70. Id.
71. Id.
72. USA PATRIOT ACT, 2001, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c107:H.R.3162>, accessed April 18, 2015.
73. Presidential Job Approval Center, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/presidential-approval-center.aspx#>, accessed April 18, 2015.
74. Id.
75. Id.
76. Id.
77. Id.

78. Official General Election Results for United States President, Federal Election Commission, November 2, 2004, [www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/2004pres.pdf](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/2004pres.pdf) and [www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/tables.pdf](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/tables.pdf), accessed April 18, 2015.
79. Id.
80. Bowman, Karlyn and Rugg, Andrew, *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research*, Political Report, Volume 7, Issue 8, September 2011, citing various polls, accessed at <https://www.aei.org/publication/the-war-on-terror-ten-years-of-polls-on-american-attitudes/>, accessed April 18, 2105.
81. Id.
82. Id.

## Chapter IV: Assad's Use of Poisonous Gas in Syria in 2013: A U.S. Military Response or a Diplomatic Approach?

In August of 2013, Bashar al-Assad, President of Syria, ordered the use of chemical weapons against Syrian citizens who were protesting his government. Almost all of the victims, including men, women and children, were civilians. The attack, however, was not an isolated incident, nor was it entirely unforeseen. Syria had been experiencing unrest for years and on the brink of civil war since 2011, and Assad's troops had killed tens of thousands of people already. President Barack Obama and the United States had been monitoring the situation, and in particular Assad's potential use of chemical weapons, for years. One year earlier, in August of 2012, in a statement that would come back to haunt him, President Obama had issued what became to be known as his "red line" statement, saying, "We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus."<sup>1</sup> By utilizing chemical weapons, specifically poison gas, against his own people, Assad had crossed Obama's red line.

President Obama's rhetoric and proposed response to Assad's use of chemical weapons, and the situation in Syria in general, was influenced by a number of factors, including the presidential rhetoric and responses considered in earlier chapters. In addition, the situation in Syria in 2013 shared some elements with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the genocide in Kosovo and the terrorist attacks of 9/11. For instance, Assad, like Saddam Hussein, was considered by world opinion to be a dictator and a rogue

leader. Assad, like Milosevic, used mass genocide of his own country's civilians as a tactic in fighting a civil war. Moreover, beyond what Assad was doing domestically, Syria's links with Al-Qaeda, and in particular Osama bin Laden, brought a renewed fear of potential terrorist use of chemical weapons against the United States in a post-9/11 world. An incident such as the use of chemical weapons against protestors, seemingly isolated and occurring on the other side of the world, could escalate and could affect Americans at home. It was time once again for the United States to gear up and make ready for war. Or was it?

In the relatively short span of just over three weeks, President Barack Obama began by strongly advocating a military response to Assad's use of chemical weapons and the situation in Syria, then moving to a position of considering both military and diplomatic options, and finally moving to a position of diplomacy with the threat of military force. President Obama's movement along this spectrum of possible responses was highlighted in three addresses. Obama addressed the nation from the Rose Garden on August 31, 2013, calling the massacre "the worst chemical weapons attack of the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>2</sup> Obama addressed the nation again on September 10, 2013, appearing to waver between the necessity for a strong military response and the potential for a diplomatic resolution.<sup>3</sup> Two weeks later, on September 24, 2013, President Obama addressed the United Nations General Assembly, confirming that the American response was going to be diplomacy.<sup>4</sup>

The change in President Obama's tone and policy recommendations in a matter of only a few weeks was dramatic. The humanitarian concerns present when President Clinton ordered the bombings in Kosovo were still present, and perhaps even

magnified. The potential for escalation into regional conflict was still present. The consideration of the cost of doing nothing that Obama was afraid might lead terrorist groups to act more brazenly was still present. This chapter considers why President Obama moved from his original position of using military force to address the situation in Syria to a position of using diplomacy.<sup>5</sup>

The simple answer to that question may be that the political climate in the United States in August 2013 would not support Obama's initial advocacy of a military response. However, if we consider Obama's rhetoric in the aftermath of Assad's use of poisonous gas on his own people in the context of Aristotle's model of persuasion, a more complete answer is that, despite significant efforts to do so, President Obama was unable to link his arguments for the use of military force to his appeals to the emotions of the American public and members of Congress. After more than a decade of war, Americans were exhausted. They may not have been emotionally numb, but they were not easily outraged about events occurring on the other side of the world. Americans simply did not feel strongly enough to support the use of military force in Syria.

#### A: The Situation: Syria

To better understand President Obama's response to President Assad's use of chemical weapons in August 2013, some understanding of the Syrian civil war is necessary.<sup>6</sup> The civil war did not occur suddenly. Syria had endured centuries of domestic conflict, but this most recent, and currently on-going, civil war had its origins in Assad's "election" as President in 2000. The unrest in Syria increased throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century. By 2011 and 2012 there was significant fighting

between protestors and troops loyal to Assad. The United States monitored the situation closely. The *Washington Post* reported on January 26, 2012, about 18 months prior to Assad's use of chemical weapons, that then Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, John F. Kerry, said that Syria was "pretty close" to civil war, and that Kerry's impression following a trip around the Middle East was that the situation in Syria had "the feel" of a civil war.<sup>7</sup> The civil war had been brewing for several years during Assad's presidency.

Bashar al-Assad effectively took over as President of Syria upon the death of his father Hafez al-Assad in 2000. The elder Assad, a former general and Minister of Defense, had seized power in the early 1970s and never relinquished it. Thus, while Bashar al-Assad was elected President to succeed his father, the elections were not necessarily free elections and were used as little more than justification for continuing what had become a family dictatorship.<sup>8</sup> However, Assad's role as President actually started on a bright note. Syria had experienced a bit of the Arab spring in 2000, and Assad allowed talk of "reform" to occur, informally and more formally in political forums that had sprung around the country.<sup>9</sup> This period of open discussion, however, ended quickly as Assad began to crack down on reformers, sometimes violently, in late 2001.

The increasing unrest in Syria during Assad's rule also had an important religious element. President Assad's family belonged to the Alawite religious tradition, linked with Shi'ite Muslims. However, Alawites comprised only about 12% of the Syrian population. The majority of the Syrian population, about 74%, followed the Sunni Muslim tradition. Thus, some opposition to Assad's rule derived not just from a desire

for reform, but also had roots in long-standing religious conflicts between the branches of the Muslim faith.<sup>10</sup>

After about a decade of skirmishes with protestors, primarily political, but religious as well, the situation turned increasingly violent in 2011. The protestors were a mix of primarily younger people who were either Sunnis or pro-democracy or both. Pro-democracy protests erupted in March of 2011 in the city of Deraa after some teenagers who had painted anti-government slogans on a wall allegedly were arrested and tortured. Syrian troops were called in to quell the protests and opened fire, killing several protesters.<sup>11</sup> This incident led to more organized, broader protests in a number of areas around Syria. By July of 2011, hundreds of thousands of protestors were taking to the streets in many cities in Syria.<sup>12</sup> The protestors began to take up arms, and eventually the protestors went on the offensive, attacking local security troops.<sup>13</sup> Fighting between various protestor groups, now self-called rebels, and government troops reached the capital city of Damascus and the second largest city of Aleppo by mid-2012. By June of 2013, approximately 90,000 people had been killed, with hundreds of thousands more displaced from their homes.<sup>14</sup>

The world took notice after the unrest expanded. A United Nations inquiry launched in 2011 found evidence of human rights violations and war crimes on both sides of the conflict, including murder, torture and rape.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the United Nations found that both sides in the conflict used human suffering as a weapon, by blocking or restricting access to food, water and health services to members of the other side.<sup>16</sup> However, the United Nations investigation appeared to be almost meaningless, and the United Nations took no concrete action to intervene. Thus, the situation in

August of 2013, when President Assad authorized the use of chemical weapons by government troops against protestors, had eroded into near civil war, if not outright civil war, with both political and religious issues playing a role.

## B: The Situation: President Obama's Character and the Political Climate in the United States in 2013

### i. The election and re-election of President Obama

President Barack Obama was the first African-American elected President and he came in to office with a sparkling, almost unblemished record. President Obama had originally been elected President in November of 2008, running on a platform that included, among other goals, the ending of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama had defeated Senator John McCain, a decorated war veteran and a decidedly more hawkish supporter of United States military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, winning 52.9% of popular vote and decidedly winning the electoral vote 365-173.<sup>17</sup> This election victory for Obama followed a very fast rise in politics, first as a community organizer in Chicago, then as a legislator in the Illinois state senate, and then as a United States Senator for Illinois.<sup>18</sup> Obama was able to defuse what was probably the only true crisis situation of his campaign against McCain when he denounced sermons given by his former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah White, in which White had questioned whether the United States was to blame for the 9/11 attacks and also whether the federal government was to blame for the proliferation of AIDS as a way to control people of color.<sup>19</sup>

Obama had also been steadfast in his opposition to the war in Iraq during his campaign. The American people were tired of war in 2008. He delivered a significant address at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, on February 27, 2009, less than a month after being sworn in as President, in which he set a timetable for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.<sup>20</sup> Obama then largely kept to the timetable he proposed, which earned him significant personal capital and a Nobel Peace Prize. However, it also became quickly clear that the situation in Iraq was not as stable as desired and that the United States would not be able to consider the situation a problem solved. In addition, at the same time President Obama was drawing down troops in Iraq, he was significantly increasing American troops in Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup> Thus, American military involvement in the Middle East was far from over.

During the next election in 2012, President Obama won by a much closer margin, defeating Romney, but only earning 51.1% of the popular vote and 332 electoral votes.<sup>22</sup> The election victory was not exactly a ringing endorsement of Obama's first term. By August of 2013, President Obama was enduring a tough first year of his second term as President. Obama and his administration were facing significant criticism and opposition to some of its foreign policies. To be clear, there were also a number of domestic issues on Obama's agenda, most of them carried over from his first term, including righting a sluggish economy, health care, immigration and others.

ii. The political climate with domestic and foreign policies

In the domestic arena in 2013, President Obama faced numerous issues left over from his first term. For instance, Obama had to work through significant budget issues,

a sequestration vote, challenges to his immigration policy and, of course, continued debate about the necessity of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which had been signed into law in March of 2009 and rolled out with numerous problems over the next few years.<sup>23</sup> The health care issue, in particular, was divisive along party lines. All of these issues were still cause for concern in August of 2013, and all presented hurdles to overcome when President Obama proposed a new military initiative in Syria in his August 31, 2013, Rose Garden address.

In the foreign policy arena, President Obama had been able to take credit for the successful assassination of Al-Qaeda Leader Osama bin Laden by Navy Seals on May 1, 2011.<sup>24</sup> The political capital he earned from this victory, however, was long since spent by August of 2013. Obama also had to deal with the fall-out of a deadly attack on the United States embassy in Benghazi, Libya, by Muslim extremists on September 11, 2012, in which the United States ambassador and others were killed. In another blow to the administration, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was accused of attempting to cover up not only what had happened in Benghazi, but what American security measures were – or were not – in place.<sup>25</sup> The fall-out had not significantly affected the Presidential election held in November 2012, but Secretary of State Clinton's testimony before the House of Representatives in January 2013 did not go well, and the investigations into and allegations of cover-up were still on-going in the summer of 2013.

President Obama also had to acknowledge and account for the diminishing American appetite for war in 2013. Americans felt battle fatigue acutely. The war in Iraq was “over,” or at least winding down, but the war in Afghanistan continued.

American servicemen were still fighting and dying in the Middle East. Americans had been tired of fighting when Obama was elected in 2008. Now, five years later, and after more than a decade of war in the Middle East, Americans were even more tired of fighting. This was the political setting in August 2013 when President Obama responded to the use of chemical weapons by President Assad in Syria.

iii. Could President Obama rely on personal character to bolster his rhetoric?

Unlike President George H.W. Bush, President Obama did not have a distinguished military record. Obama had not served as an Envoy or Director of Central Intelligence or Vice-President. Also, though George W. Bush had a limited foreign policy background when he was elected, he was able to capitalize on and appeal to the immediate fear and anger and other strong emotions that most Americans felt in the years immediately following 9/11. President Obama did not have either the experience of George H.W. Bush or the immediacy of an attack on American soil. In many ways, Obama's background was more like President Clinton's. A major difference, however, was that Obama did not have to overcome the significant challenges to his integrity or character that Clinton faced. In addition, by 2013, Obama had significant experience as President. But, because of continuing battles with Congress about significant domestic policy issues that had diminished his personal capital, Obama had to rely on the authority of the office of the President when he addressed the nation following Assad's use of chemical weapons.

## C: The Rhetoric

President Obama addressed Assad's use of chemical weapons in three addresses that covered a spectrum of response, beginning with advocating for a strong military response, then leaning toward a mixed military response, and then ending with a commitment to use diplomacy. Obama's movement along that spectrum occurred over a relatively short, twenty-five day period beginning on August 31, 2013, and ending on September 24, 2013.

### i. An initial strong response from President Obama

President Obama addressed the nation on August 31, 2013, from the Rose Garden. He announced that, "Ten days ago, the world watched in horror as men, women and children were massacred in Syria in the worst chemical weapons attack of the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>26</sup> He went on to say that there was strong evidence that the Syrian government was responsible for the attack on its own people.<sup>27</sup> President Obama gave an impassioned argument for a strong response, including the use of military force, to President Assad of Syria. However, from the very beginning, Obama seemed ambivalent about the seriousness of the situation and the appropriateness of a military response by the United States.

For instance, the timing and setting of the address were curious. President Obama chose not to address the American people from the symbolic power of the Oval Office or in front of a joint session of Congress. Instead, he chose to make his address from the Rose Garden, on the White House grounds. To be fair, the Rose Garden was often used by Obama for announcements during the warmer months, but it was also

used for more ceremonial functions, such as greeting dignitaries and school children and championship athletic teams. In addition, President Obama chose to make the announcement in the mid-afternoon on a Saturday over Labor Day weekend rather than in prime-time during the work week, when far more Americans would be watching their televisions. Thus, neither the setting nor the timing of the address appeared to lend the expected gravitas associated with what Obama called “the worst chemical weapons attack of the 21st century,” and a call for a strong military response.

Nevertheless, President Obama made his case. He claimed that “well over 1,000 people were murdered” in the chemical weapons attack.<sup>28</sup> It was not the number of people who had died – remember 90,000 people had already died in fighting over the last three years, with hundreds of thousands more displaced – but the fact that President Assad’s troops had used chemical weapons. The use of chemical weapons was “an assault on human dignity” and it represented a “serious danger to our (United States) national security.”<sup>29</sup> It was, largely, because Assad had used chemical weapons that Obama felt so strongly. The use of chemical weapons by Assad moved him from participation in a civil war with allegations of genocide against protestors of his regime to the use of weapons of mass destruction. In addition, the use of chemical weapons had long been considered taboo, with most countries in the world signing treaties banning their use.<sup>30</sup>

President Obama also tried to make the case that the United States had to worry about the escalation of violence in the Middle East and the proliferation of terrorism: “It endangers our friends and our partners along Syria’s borders, including Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq. It could lead to escalating use of chemical weapons, or their

proliferation to terrorist groups who would do our people harm.”<sup>31</sup> Obama was warning that in a post-9/11 world, it could be disastrous for chemical weapons to fall into the hands of terrorists.

Obama felt, though, that the implications of the attack went beyond chemical warfare. He felt that if “we,” meaning the United States, did not “enforce accountability in the face of this heinous act, what (did) it say about our resolve to stand up to others who flout fundamental international rules?”<sup>32</sup> President Obama was concerned that the United States needed to show its resolve to confront countries and terrorist groups that could harm the United States with nuclear arms, biological weapons, and armies who carried out genocide.<sup>33</sup> The United States had suffered a blow to its role as a world leader with the terrorist attacks of 9/11. And, though the United States had reacted strongly and militarily, sending troops into Afghanistan and then into Iraq, those wars had become bogged down and had been on-going for over a decade in 2013. Obama may have felt that a strong, military response to Assad would assist the United States to regain some of its world leader status.

President Obama also made the argument that the United States had a responsibility, a moral responsibility, to the protestors in Syria. He stated that Americans believed that the “rights of individuals to live in peace and dignity depends on the responsibilities of nations. We aren’t perfect, but this nation more than any other has been willing to meet those responsibilities.”<sup>34</sup> This approach was similar to the approaches of the other post-Cold War presidents considered above. President George H.W. Bush stated that sometimes we are “called upon to define who we are and what we believe.”<sup>35</sup> President Clinton called the bombing of Kosovo “a moral imperative.”<sup>36</sup>

President George W. Bush stated that the “advance of freedom . . . depends on us.”<sup>37</sup>

Each of these Presidents had also attempted to demonstrate that he was advocating for a decision that was the right or moral decision for America.

President Obama continued, stating that America need to show the world that “America keeps our commitments. We do what we say. And we lead with the belief that right makes might – not the other way around.”<sup>38</sup> America, according to Obama might act on the premise that it was fulfilling its moral responsibility to the world, a general moral responsibility and not just fulfilling his “red line” promise, by responding to Assad with military action. This approach also reinforced the idea that the United States, though battered by long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, remained not only on the side of “right,” but remained a world power on the side of “right.” Obama’s conclusion was that he believed the United States should take action, and his plan was that “the United States should take military action against Syrian regime targets,” but he also acknowledged that he had some significant hurdles to clear.<sup>39</sup>

Congress was the first hurdle Obama faced, and Obama had to reconcile the moral imperative for military action that he had described with the political reality in August of 2013. For reasons discussed above, including multiple contentious domestic issues such as the economy, health care and immigration, as well as foreign policy issues such as the slow withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iraq, President Obama had a rocky relationship with Congress in August 2013. Thus, Obama had to walk a fine line between reserving the power of the President to use military force and the political reality of needing to involve Congress in the decision. While Obama stated that he had “made the decision” to use military force as Commander-in-Chief, and while he was

“prepared to give that order,” he further stated he was nevertheless mindful that he was “President of the world’s oldest constitutional democracy,” and that he had made a “second decision” to seek authorization for the use of military force from Congress.<sup>40</sup>

Referring to the moral imperative to act discussed above, Obama stated that American values dictated a response to this “massacre,” but he also stated that “our democracy is stronger when the President and the people’s representatives stand together.”<sup>41</sup>

Obama may also have been ambivalent and truly wanting a second opinion.

This approach contrasts with the approach taken by President George H.W. Bush in announcing the commencement of Desert Storm. President George H. W. Bush ordered a military intervention without involving Congress. Admittedly, Bush set up a “defensive” posture first by putting troops in Saudi Arabia to “protect” a United States “ally,” but he did not hesitate to warn Saddam Hussein of the impending movement of United States troops into Kuwait and subsequently follow through with quick and decisive military action during Desert Storm.

President Obama’s approach also stands in contrast to the approach taken by President William Clinton in announcing the American participation in the air strikes in Kosovo. In 1999, President Clinton felt acutely the lessons of the war in Bosnia and wanted to avoid further genocide. Clinton ordered the Kosovo airstrikes and then justified them afterwards. The situation in Syria, and the humanitarian reasons for intervening with military force, may seem analogous at first glance, but times had changed. When Clinton made his decision in 1999, the United States had not been involved in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq stretching back over a decade. President Obama had to account for American battle fatigue.

Obama's approach also stands in contrast to the approach taken by George W. Bush following 9/11. In the aftermath of 9/11, with American emotions running high, President George W. Bush did not have to worry about Congressional consent to use of military force. Members of Congress wanted to authorize the use of military force to demonstrate that they were helping the President in the new war on terrorism. An authorization of force bill was signed into law only three days after 9/11. The feeling that reaction must be immediate, however, was not present twelve years later when Assad used chemical weapons. Assad's use of chemical weapons had not occurred on American soil. Neither American troops nor American citizens had been put in danger. And, after more than a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, Congress was not about to jump quickly into another military effort despite the use of a weapon of mass destruction.

The voice and spirit of the American people proved to be a second hurdle for President Obama. As was the case in his dealing with Congress, Obama also had to walk a fine line with the American people. He acknowledged that, "I know well that we are weary of war."<sup>42</sup> He continued, "We ended one war in Iraq. We're ending another in Afghanistan. And the American people have the good sense to know we cannot resolve the underlying conflict in Syria with our military."<sup>43</sup> He stated that while he respected the views of those who called for "caution," and acknowledged that that America was emerging from a time of war he had "been elected in part to end,"<sup>44</sup> America needed to respond with military action. Obama tried to gain the confidence of American citizens and find common ground, claiming that his proposed military action was not going to be an "open-ended" intervention, and there would be no "boots on the ground," but that he

felt that the cost of doing nothing was greater than the cost of acting with a strong show of military force.<sup>45</sup>

ii. Use of military force or diplomacy?

President Obama next addressed the nation on the situation in Syria ten days later on September 10, 2013. The address was confusing because Obama seemed to equivocate. He reiterated his disgust for the use of chemical weapons by Syrian President Assad and reiterated his case for using military force, but then said he had asked Congress to delay a vote on the use of military force because diplomacy appeared to be working. For instance, Syria seemed to be willing to discuss a discontinuance of its use of chemical weapons, as long as Russian President Vladimir Putin was involved as an intermediary in the discussions. Syria had a long standing relationship with Russia, and, apparently felt more comfortable negotiating with Russia. Using Russia as an intermediary was probably a way for Syria to “save face” as well. President Obama was unclear about what course of action he wanted to follow. Apparently, Obama wanted to try to keep all options open, and pursue a course that would be supported by all viewpoints, all while buying some time to see what Assad would do next.

For instance, Obama began the address with an admission that “we” (the United States) could not resolve the civil war in Syria. He stated that, “I have resisted calls for military action, because we cannot resolve someone else’s civil war through force, particularly after a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.”<sup>46</sup> Compare Obama’s approach here to Clinton’s approach with Kosovo. President Clinton had at least been

able to stop, if not resolve, the civil war in Kosovo, but, again, times had changed by the time President Obama had to react to Assad's use of chemical weapons in 2013. Clinton had the advantage that NATO was at least interested in Kosovo, although Clinton certainly took a risk that the bombings would work. NATO was not interested in Syria, but Russia and China were. Given the political climate and the battle fatigue of Americans in 2013, President Obama seemed to realize that he just could not afford to attempt to liken the situation in Syria to the situation in Kosovo. Given the difference in times and all that the United States had been through in Afghanistan and Iraq, President Obama could not simply tap into the emotions of the American public as easily in August of 2013 as Clinton had in 1999.

Instead, President Obama began a more thoughtful, public consideration of diplomatic options alongside his advocacy of military intervention. Obama stated "over the last few days," we have seen some "encouraging signs" that diplomacy was working.<sup>47</sup> In part because of the "credible threat of U.S. military action," and discussions involving Russian President Vladimir Putin and Syrian President Assad, the Syrian government had at least acknowledged that it had chemical weapons and was open to joining the Chemical Weapons Convention which prohibited their use.<sup>48</sup> These sentiments seemingly indicated that diplomacy was working and seemingly contradicted President Obama's position from a mere ten days earlier stating that quick and decisive military intervention was the most appropriate response.

However, in other parts of the address, President Obama continued his advocacy for a military response with rhetoric reminiscent of the rhetoric used by George Bush, William Clinton and George W. Bush. Perhaps, Obama did not want to completely

forego a military option. Like the other post-Cold War presidents before him, Obama used arguments appealing to emotions and appealing to logic to make his case. For instance, Obama spoke of “dictators” who “commit atrocities.”<sup>49</sup> George Bush had referred to Saddam Hussein as a dictator. Clinton had referred to Milosevic as a dictator. All of them were conjuring the memory of Hitler as a dictator and the slaughter he had caused. This was an appeal to emotion, using what each considered a shared American perception of history.

Obama stated that humanitarian organizations had told stories after the attack of “hospitals packed with people who had symptoms of poison gas.”<sup>50</sup> Clinton had used a “humanitarian” justification for the Kosovo bombings. Again, by highlighting the horrible effects of the use of chemical weapons, Obama was appealing to emotion. He was also hedging his bets by not completely letting go of the idea of a potential military response.

Obama spoke of a “violation of international law” and a “threat to our security.”<sup>51</sup> George H.W. Bush had called Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait a violation of international law.<sup>52</sup> Clinton called the genocide perpetrated by Milosevic a violation of international law.<sup>53</sup> George W. Bush called the terrorist acts of 9/11 a violation of international law and a threat to United States security.<sup>54</sup> These arguments appealed to logic, or more specifically, to logic connected with emotion. Without some legal order in the world, what was to stop terrorists acting at will?

Obama worried about “escalation” of violence in the Middle East.<sup>55</sup> He spoke of the “burdens of leadership.”<sup>56</sup> He stated, “Our ideals and principles, as well as our national security, are at stake in Syria . . .”<sup>57</sup> George Bush worried about the potential for the escalation of war in the Middle East if Iraq were simply allowed to take over

Kuwait.<sup>58</sup> Clinton worried about the escalation of violence in Eastern Europe if Milosevic were not stopped.<sup>59</sup> George W. Bush argued that the United States must engage in military action in Afghanistan and later in Iraq to prevent an escalation of terrorism against the United States and around the world.<sup>60</sup> All of them argued that the United States must take a leadership role. This line of reasoning had elements of logic and emotion. Logically, it could be argued that if the United States did not take a stand in each of these decisions, no other countries could or would take a stand. Emotionally, these Presidents appealed the American sense of being a world leader with a moral responsibility to lead.

Thus, in his September 10, 2013, address, Obama made all of the same arguments he had made ten days earlier in support of using military force, and many of these arguments were quite similar to the arguments put forth by George Bush, William Clinton and George W. Bush before him. However, this address was so interesting because Obama was trying to advocate a diplomatic response at the same time.

Despite all of the strong rhetoric advocating a military response, and despite the stating that he had authority to order a military response, the course of action that President Obama chose (at least for then) was diplomacy. He spoke of Secretary of State John Kerry meeting with his Russian counterpart and his own continued discussions with Russian President Putin.<sup>61</sup> These discussions were apparently going well. Obama spoke of working with Great Britain, France and China to put forward a resolution to the United Nations Security Council.<sup>62</sup> Despite the earlier less than interested response from the United Nations, it appeared that members of the United Nations were becoming interested in playing an active role. Thus, President Obama

specifically referred to his request to Congress to delay its vote on the use of military force.<sup>63</sup> Diplomacy, with a threat of military force, and not military force itself, appeared to be President Obama's new position.

iii. Confirming a course of diplomacy with a threat of military force

Two weeks after his second address to the American people about his planned response of diplomacy with a threat of military force to Syrian President Assad's use of chemical weapons, and three-and-one-half weeks after his initial address strongly advocating a military response, President Obama addressed the United Nations General Assembly on September 24, 2013. In his remarks, Obama addressed a number of international issues, but first and foremost he addressed the situation in Syria. Obama confirmed that he would pursue a diplomatic option in Syria, but that the threat of military force was necessary to make diplomacy more effective and powerful.

Obama began his discussion of the situation in Syria by reminding the United Nations of what he believed the United Nations role should be. In short, Obama stated that the international community, working through the United Nations Security Council, "must enforce the ban on chemical weapons."<sup>64</sup> He stated that "98 percent of humanity" had agreed to the ban on the use of chemical weapons, with the implication that the other two percent must be rogue nations or terrorists or worse.<sup>65</sup> He reminded the United Nations of the history associated with the use of chemical weapons, of the "searing memories of soldiers suffocating in the trenches, Jews slaughtered in gas chambers, Iranians poisoned. . ."<sup>66</sup> In that single sentence, Obama recalled World War

I, World War II and the Iraq-Iran War. Obama stated that the evidence that Syrian President Assad had used chemical weapons on his own people was “overwhelming.”<sup>67</sup> According to Obama, the United Nations had to act.

President Obama defended his use of a threat of military force, with or without a Security Council mandate. He further justified the United State threat of military force, in part, by stating it was necessary to make the United Nations take notice: “without a credible military threat, the (United Nations) Security Council had demonstrated no inclination to act at all.”<sup>68</sup> He tempered that statement, however, stating immediately afterward that, “However . . . my preference *has always been* a diplomatic resolution to this issue. And in the past several weeks, the United States, Russia and our allies have reached an agreement to place Syria’s chemical weapons under international control, and then to destroy them.”(Emphasis added.)<sup>69</sup> In addition to the words italicized in this last quote, the other key words were probably “in the past several weeks” because, as will be discussed below, much had happened between the time Obama initially called for a military response and this address where Obama embraced diplomacy and called on the United Nations to follow up and verify that Assad was keeping his word.

President Obama concluded the Syria portion of his remarks to the United Nations General Assembly by reiterating that the United States was “committed to working this political track.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, Obama was looking for a political solution rather than a military solution. He reminded the world that the Cold War was over, and that the American interest in Syria was solely “the wellbeing of its people, the stability of its neighbors, the elimination of chemical weapons, and ensuring that it does not

become a safe haven for terrorists.”<sup>71</sup> He welcomed “the influence of all nations” that could assist in bringing about “a peaceful resolution to Syria’s civil war.”<sup>72</sup>

Thus, in a short, three and one half week span, President Obama went from advocating for a strong military response to Syrian President Assad’s use of chemical weapons against his own people to advocating for a decidedly more diplomatic approach. He moved from arguing that the use of chemical weapons was a threat to American security to arguing that it was a broader, international threat. He moved from arguing that American had a specific, moral responsibility to act, to arguing that the international community had a responsibility to act. Obama moved from arguing that the United States should consider acting alone to stating that the United States would work with the international community.

#### D: Congressional and Public Response

The key to understanding President Obama’s movement from a position on August 31, 2013, of advocating for a strong military response to Assad’s use of chemical weapons to a position on September 10, 2013, of advocating for a strong military response, but looking toward a potential diplomatic resolution, to a position on September 24, 2013, of embracing a diplomatic response with the assistance of the United Nations is to look at what was occurring in public opinion during that 24-day period during September 2013. Internationally, discussions were on-going between the United States and Russia and Russia and Syria, which seemed to be bringing Assad into line with the ideas of destroying Syria’s chemical weapons and having that destruction monitored. President Obama, however, also faced significant resistance to

military action domestically, both from members of Congress and from the American public, and he began to realize that his appeals to the emotions of Americans, including members of Congress were not having the effect he expected.

i. Congressional Action

President Obama addressed the nation from the Rose Garden on August 31, 2013, about Assad's use of chemical weapons. He knew he had an uphill battle in Congress even before the address. Republicans held a 234-201 seat margin the House of Representatives, and Democrats held a 53-45 seat margin in the Senate.<sup>73</sup> Any successful vote authorizing military force would have to be in some part bipartisan. However, Obama was in a difficult position because, as noted above, he had drawn a "red line" during a news conference about one year earlier in August of 2012. President Obama said in 2012 that the United States was monitoring Assad's stockpiling of chemical and biological weapons very carefully, but Assad would cross a "red line" if he started moving or using those chemical weapons.<sup>74</sup> Assad clearly appeared to have crossed this red line drawn by Obama, so, politically, Obama was under pressure to act.

Many Republican leaders in Congress, including House Speaker John Boehner, urged Obama to act and act quickly. Boehner sent Obama a detailed letter on August 28, 2013, three days prior to Obama's Rose Garden address, in which Boehner said he had determined that Assad had crossed Obama's red line, and in which he urged Obama to set forth his planned response.<sup>75</sup> Boehner asked a series of questions in the letter, almost all of which concerned the use of military force to respond to Assad.<sup>76</sup> Although Boehner was not against the use of military force, and in fact he seemed to be

urging the use of military force, he seemed to be asking Obama to make a case to Congress and the American people for using military force, stating that “after 12 years of fighting,” we “all have a better appreciation” of the costs of entering war, and reminding Obama that he would need the support of Congress and the American people to enter into and sustain a military action against Assad.<sup>77</sup>

Boehner’s letter to Obama was important because it not only contained elements of the argument for obtaining Congressional authorization, but it also contained a warning that the American public had to be won over before Congress would be won over. This was in fact how the domestic response to Obama’s initial advocacy for a military response played out. The public did not embrace Obama’s position, and therefore Congress did not embrace Obama’s position. Congress also did not attempt to bend public opinion in favor of a military response. Ultimately, Obama back-tracked, but this all occurred before Obama’s initial Rose Garden address on Assad’s use of poisonous gas in Syria.

On August 30, 2013, two days after Boehner’s letter and one day prior to President Obama’s Rose Garden address, there was still a lot of debate occurring in Congress about how the President and the United States should respond to Assad’s use of chemical weapons. And though there was some minor debate about whether the President must consult Congress, there seemed to be consensus from both sides of the aisle that Obama should consult Congress before authorizing any military action in response to Assad. According to one Republican representative, more than ninety members of Congress, most Republicans, signed a letter to President Obama urging him to consult Congress and receive authorization for use of military action.<sup>78</sup> In

addition, fifty-four Democrats sent a letter to Obama stating “we strongly urge you to seek an affirmative decision of Congress prior to committing any U.S. military engagement to this complex crisis.”<sup>79</sup>

President Obama requested authorization from Congress to respond militarily in his August 31, 2013, address from the Rose Garden. By doing so, though, he invited debate. Members of Congress were far from unified. As of September 4, the majority of Representatives were either against the use of military force or were leaning toward a “no” vote or were undecided, and this was in the House where Republicans had a majority.<sup>80</sup> Debate in the Senate was similarly not definitive. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee approve a resolution on September 4 authorizing the use of military force, but there was not a sure majority in the full Senate that thought the same.<sup>81</sup>

This uncertainty in both the House and Senate, coupled with the apparent progress of United States talks with Assad through President Putin of Russia, resulted in Obama being appearing more open to diplomacy in his September 10, 2013, address, than he had been in his initial August 31st address. Ultimately, he later expressed a preference for diplomacy in his September 24, 2013, address to the United Nations. Apparently, President Obama originally favored a military response, or at least wanted to have that option, but he assumed he did not have the votes before his August 31, 2013, address, so he opted to request Congressional authorization. However, once he made that request, it only stirred up more debate. Without the votes for certain authorization, Obama then requested that Congress delay voting on a military response

in his September 10, 2013, address, and he let the issue go by the time he addressed the United Nations on September 24, 2013.

ii. Public Response

The simple reason that Congress was hesitant to support President Obama's plan for a military response to Assad's use of chemical weapons against his own people was because most Americans were not ready to support a military response. As Obama acknowledged in both the August 31, 2013, address and the September 10, 2013, address, Americans were tired of fighting wars in the Middle East. Thus, while the humanitarian aspect of military intervention and the potential for escalation of violence and unrest in the region might have made the situation seem analogous to the situation Clinton faced in Kosovo, given all they had suffered with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Americans were not ready to jump back into war - - even a limited military action with no boots on the ground and even when poisonous gas had been used.

A Pew Research Center poll conducted over Labor Day weekend, August 29, 2013 – September 1, 2013, (recall that President Obama made his Rose Garden address on August 31, 2013), found that public opinion was running against conducting airstrikes in Syria. About 50% of Democrats and 50% of independents and 40% of Republicans were "against" airstrikes, with over another 20% of Democrats, independents and Republicans undecided.<sup>82</sup> Overall, only about 29% of respondents favored conducting airstrikes.<sup>83</sup> About 74% of respondents were concerned about a backlash against the United States from conducting airstrikes, while 61% of respondents were concerned that airstrikes could lead to a long-term military

commitment in Syria, and only about 33% of respondents thought airstrikes would be an effective deterrent against the further use of chemical weapons by Assad.<sup>84</sup>

The public response did not become more supportive in the time between President Obama's August 31, 2013, address and his September 10, 2013, address. A CNN poll conducted from September 6-8, 2013, found that 59% of respondents felt that Congress should not authorize the use of military force.<sup>85</sup> About 55% of respondents opposed United States airstrikes even if Congress authorized them, and 71% of respondents opposed airstrikes if Congress did not authorize them.<sup>86</sup> In addition, as was the case with the earlier poll, a great majority, 72%, of respondents felt that airstrikes would not achieve significant goals for the United States.<sup>87</sup> With this lack of public support for military action, it was not a difficult decision for President Obama to ask Congress to delay holding a vote in his September 10, 2013, address.

A Gallup poll conducted September 3-4, 2013, provided a comparison between Americans' support for military action in Syria as compared support for military action, prior to its commencement, in the other conflicts considered in this paper. The Gallup poll found that only 36% of respondents favored military action in Syria.<sup>88</sup> In contrast, 55% of Americans favored a military response following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; 43% favored the bombings in Kosovo; 82% favored military action in Afghanistan in October of 2001, immediately after the 9/11 attacks; 64% of Americans favored military action in Iraq in March of 2003.<sup>89</sup> Even in Kosovo, perhaps the most similar of situations, the "rally effect" pushed support for the bombings to 51% after they had occurred.<sup>90</sup> Here, however, President Obama could not depend upon any rally effect.

President Obama began September 2013 with a 49% disapproval rating and only a 43% approval rating.<sup>91</sup> Following his September 10, 2013, address in which he discussed giving diplomacy a chance and asked Congress to delay a vote on the authorization of the use of military force, Obama's approval rating rose only incrementally to 44% and he still had a 46% disapproval rating.<sup>92</sup> Given the public reticence about taking military action in Syria, and the resulting Congressional reticence about authorizing such military action, coupled with the apparent, at least short-term success of diplomatic efforts, Obama chose diplomacy.

Obama's relatively rapid movement from advocacy of military action in response to Assad's use of chemical weapons on his own people to support of a diplomatic resolution can be attributed to a number of factors. He realized he did not have the personal capital remaining in order to persuade Congress or the American public that military action in Syria was necessary. More importantly, despite good, logical arguments, including arguments similar to arguments made by other post-Cold War presidents, President Obama was just not able to connect his arguments to a successful appeal to the emotions of Americans. Americans were just too worn out from years of fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq to care as deeply about Assad and Syria as they had cared when other post-Cold War Presidents had advocated for the use of military force.

#### Postscript

Following the actions of the Islamic State, sometimes referred to as ISIS or ISIL, in 2014, including the beheading of American citizens, President Obama renewed his call for airstrikes in Syria, which, with Iraq, was suspected of harboring and aiding Islamic State terrorists. Obama gave an impassioned address on September 10, 2014, just over one year after Assad used chemical weapons against his own people, calling for airstrikes in Syria and citing both humanitarian grounds and counterterrorism as justification.<sup>93</sup> The beheading of American citizens was apparently enough to re-stir the emotions of the American people and Congress. Airstrikes began and have been on-going. However, the results and consequences of the airstrikes are not yet clear. As this is being written, in March of 2015, President Obama is seeking Congressional authority to put troops in Syria in addition to the airstrikes that are on-going.

The more recent emotions felt by Americans, including members of Congress, following the beheading of American citizens and others, were strong. In our concluding section, when comparing the four incidents and four post-Cold War Presidents considered above, we see that emotions and the President's ability to link his arguments to strong emotions and appeal to those emotions represent the key to successful advocacy for use of military action.

## Chapter IV: notes

1. James Ball, "Obama issues Syria a 'red line' warning on chemical weapons," August 20, 2012, *The Washington Post*, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-issues-syria-red-line-warning-on-chemical-weapons/2012/08/20/ba5d26ec-eaf7-11e1-b811-09036bcb182b\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-issues-syria-red-line-warning-on-chemical-weapons/2012/08/20/ba5d26ec-eaf7-11e1-b811-09036bcb182b_story.html), accessed April 19, 2015.
2. President Barack Obama, *Statement of the President on Syria*, August 31, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.
3. President Barack Obama, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*, September 10, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.
4. President Barack Obama, *Remarks By the President To The United Nations General Assembly*, September 24, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address>, accessed April 19, 2015.
5. This chapter does not consider more recent events in Syria, including the rise of the Islamic State and President Obama's response to ISIS activities because events are still unfolding, consequences are still unknown, and there is as yet a lack of perspective to consider these events.
6. The story of domestic unrest in Syria stretches back centuries. The situation summarized here is only the situation as it stood in the years immediately prior to President Assad's use of chemical weapons in August of 2013.
7. Josh Rogin, "Kerry: Syria 'pretty close' to civil war," January 26, 2012, *The Washington Post*, A17, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.unh.edu/hottopics/lnacademic>, accessed April 19, 2015.
8. Max Fisher, "9 Questions about Syria you were too embarrassed to ask," August 29, 2013, *The Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/08/29/9-questions-about-syria-you-were-too-embarrassed-to-ask>, accessed April 19, 2015.
9. Id.
10. Syria: The story of the conflict, March 12, 2015, *BBC*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>, accessed April 19, 2015.
11. Id.
12. Id.
13. Id.
14. Id.
15. Id.
16. Id.

17. Federal Elections 2008: Election Results for the U.S. President, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives, November 4, 2008, <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2008/federalelections2008.shtml>, accessed April 19, 2015.
18. Barack Obama, *American President: A Reference Resource*, <http://millercenter.org/president/obama/essays/biography>, accessed April 19, 2015.
19. Id.
20. Obama's Speech at Camp Lejeune, N.C., February 27, 2009, *New York Times*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/27/us/politics/27obama-text.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/27/us/politics/27obama-text.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0), accessed April 19, 2015.
21. Barack Obama, *American President: A Reference Resource*, <http://millercenter.org/president/obama/essays/biography>, accessed April 19, 2015.
22. Federal Elections 2012: Election Results for the U.S. President, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives, November 6, 2012, <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/federalelections2012.shtml>, accessed April 19, 2015.
23. Barack Obama, *American President: A Reference Resource*, <http://millercenter.org/president/obama/essays/biography>, accessed April 19, 2015.
24. Id.
25. See: "What They Said, Before and After the Attack in Libya," September 9, 2012, *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/12/us/politics/libya-statements.html>; "Benghazi Timeline," *FactCheck.org*, updated May 2, 2014, <http://www.factcheck.org/2012/10/benghazi-timeline/>; "Hillary Clinton testifies before House committee on Benghazi – live," *The Guardian*, updated January 23, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/23/clinton-testifies-congress-benghazi-live>. All accessed April 19, 2015.
26. President Barack Obama, *Statement of the President on Syria*, August 31, 2013, <http://www.whithouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.
27. Id.
28. Id.
29. Id.
30. Chemical Weapons Convention, 2008, *Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons*, <https://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention/>, accessed April 19, 2015.
31. President Barack Obama, *Statement of the President on Syria*, August 31, 2013, <http://www.whithouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.
32. Id.
33. Id.
34. Id.

35. President George H.W. Bush, *Address on Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait* (August 8, 1990), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5529>, accessed April 17, 2015.
36. President William Clinton, *Statement on Kosovo* (March 24, 1999), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3932>, accessed April 18, 2015.
37. President George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, September 20, 2001, The Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address\\_001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address_001.asp), accessed April 18, 2015.
38. President Barack Obama, *Statement of the President on Syria*, August 31, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.
39. Id.
40. Id.
41. Id.
42. Id.
43. Id.
44. Id.
45. Id.
46. President Barack Obama, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*, September 10, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.
47. Id.
48. Id.
49. Id.
50. Id.
51. Id.
52. President George H.W. Bush, *Address on Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait* (August 8, 1990), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5529>, accessed April 17, 2015.
53. President William Clinton, *Statement on Kosovo* (March 24, 1999), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3932>, accessed April 18, 2015.
54. President George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, September 20, 2001, The Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address\\_001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address_001.asp), accessed April 18, 2015.
55. President Barack Obama, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*, September 10, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.
56. Id.
57. Id.
58. President George H.W. Bush, *Address on Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait* (August 8, 1990), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5529>, accessed April 17, 2015.

59. President William Clinton, Statement on Kosovo (March 24, 1999), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3932>, accessed April 18, 2015.
60. President George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, September 20, 2001, The Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address\\_001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address_001.asp), and President George W. Bush, *Message to Saddam*, March 17, 2003, <http://presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.17.03.html>, both accessed April 18, 2015.
61. President Barack Obama, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*, September 10, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.
62. Id.
63. Id. See also, President Barack Obama: weekly address: *Pursuing a Diplomatic Solution in Syria*, September 14, 2013; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/14/weekly-address-pursuing-diplomatic-solution-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.
64. President Barack Obama, *Remarks By the President To The United Nations General Assembly*, September 24, 2013, <http://www.whithouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address>, accessed April 19, 2015.
65. Id.
66. Id.
67. Id.
68. Id.
69. Id.
70. Id.
71. Id.
72. Id.
73. Federal Elections 2012: Election Results for the U.S. President, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives, November 6, 2012, <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/federalelections2012.shtml>, accessed April 19, 2015.
74. Shawna Thomas, "Obama draws 'red line' for Syria on chemical and biological weapons," August 20, 2008, [http://firstread.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2012/08/20/13379062-obama-draws-red-line-for-syria-on-chemical-and-biological-weapons](http://firstread.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/08/20/13379062-obama-draws-red-line-for-syria-on-chemical-and-biological-weapons), accessed April 19, 2015.
75. John Boehner, Press Release, "Boehner Seeks Answers from President Obama on Syria," August 28, 2013, <http://www.speaker.gov/press-release/boehner-seeks-answers-president-obama-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.
76. Id.
77. Id.
78. Tom Cohen, "How much say will Congress have on Syrian chemical weapons response?" August, 29, 2013, *CNN*,

- <http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/29/politics/obama-congress-syria/>, accessed April 19, 2015.
79. Id.
80. Karen DeYoung, "Obama's decision to turn to Congress on Syria decision triggers debate," September 4, 2013, *The Washington Post*, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-decision-to-turn-to-congress-on-syria-decision-is-fodder-for-debate/2013/09/04/e59aace6-14ca-11e3-a100-66fa8fd9a50c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-decision-to-turn-to-congress-on-syria-decision-is-fodder-for-debate/2013/09/04/e59aace6-14ca-11e3-a100-66fa8fd9a50c_story.html), accessed April 19, 2015.
81. Anne Gearan, Ed O'Keefe and William Branigin, "Senate committee approves resolution authorizing U.S. strike on Syria," September 4, 2013, *The Washington Post*, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/officials-press-lawmakers-to-approve-syria-strike-obama-invokes-congress-credibility/2013/09/04/4c93a858-155c-11e3-804b-d3a1a3a18f2c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/officials-press-lawmakers-to-approve-syria-strike-obama-invokes-congress-credibility/2013/09/04/4c93a858-155c-11e3-804b-d3a1a3a18f2c_story.html), accessed April 19, 2015.
82. "Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes," September 3, 2013, *Pew Research Center*, <http://www.people-press.org/2013/09/03/public-opinion-runs-against-syrian-airstrikes/>, accessed April 19, 2015.
83. Id.
84. Id.
85. Paul Steinhauser and John Helton, "CNN poll: Public against Syria strike resolution," September 9, 2013, *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/09/politics/syria-poll-main/>, accessed April 19, 2015.
86. Id.
87. Id.
88. Andrew Dugan, "U.S. Support for Action in Syria Is Low vs. Past Conflicts," September 6, 2013, *Gallup*, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/164282/support-syria-action-lower-past-conflicts.aspx>, accessed April 19, 2015.
89. Id.
90. Id.
91. Presidential Job Approval Center, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113980/Gallup-Daily-Obama-Job-Approval.aspx>, accessed April 19, 2015.
92. Id.
93. President Barack Obama, *Statement by the President on ISIL*, September 10, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1>, accessed April 19, 2015.

## Conclusion

In considering the four post-Cold War Presidents, and the specific incidents when each attempted to use rhetoric to advocate for the use of military force, we see that the factors of character, logic and appeal to emotion considered by Aristotle remain relevant factors to consider today. Each factor was relevant to understanding how effective each President was in his use of rhetoric as a call to war. However, the analysis demonstrated that each factor was not necessarily equally important for each speaker. In fact, while character could be important, it was not critical, or at least not as critical as it may have been to Aristotle. While logical arguments were important, they were ultimately only as successful as the speaker's ability to connect those arguments to emotion and appeal to the emotions of the listener. Of the three factors, successfully understanding and appealing to emotions was the key to persuasion. In the case studies presented in this thesis, Presidents George H.W. Bush, William Clinton, and George W. Bush successfully understood and appealed to the emotions of their listeners and were able to persuade their listeners that United States military action was necessary. President Barack Obama did not successfully understand the emotions of his audience, and, though he tried to appeal to emotions, he ultimately failed to make a winning case for use of military force.

- i. The personal character of the speaker was not as important as it may have been to Aristotle.

The character of the speaker, even when the speaker is the President of the United States (or maybe because the speaker is the President of the United States), was not as important as it may have been in Aristotle's time. Aristotle said, "We believe good men more fully and more readily than others . . ." <sup>1</sup> When the speaker is the President, however, we saw character imputed by personal experience prior to becoming President, experience as President, family name and other factors. For instance, personal character was a large factor in President George H.W. Bush's rhetoric and his successful call to war in the context of the Gulf War. Remember, the United States had not been involved in a major war since Vietnam. President Bush was a decorated World War II veteran, and had served as Director of Central Intelligence, had been Special Envoy to China, had been an Ambassador to the United Nations, and had served as Vice-President. Bush had significant foreign policy credentials. He was able to parlay that experience and the personal character it imputed to present himself as a believable and thoughtful and trustworthy speaker when he announced first Operation Desert Shield and then Operation Desert Storm. In part due to his personal character, President Bush was able to help Americans overcome the uncomfortable legacy of Vietnam and restore the American belief that it should play a role in world leadership.

However, contrast the character imputed to Bush based on his experience before being elected President with the character imputed - - or more specifically, not imputed - - to his successors based on their pre-Presidential experiences. This form of imputed

personal character seemed to become less important to the effectiveness of the rhetoric calling Congress and other Americans to war. Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama did not have extensive foreign policy experience, though Presidents Clinton and Obama had significant time in office at the times we considered them. Instead, other factors, such as the symbolism of the office of the President, imputed a certain amount of character to its occupant. The character of the office overrode the character of the person, especially in times of crisis.

One key, therefore, in having the character of the office of the President imputed to the President was for the President to successfully define his particular situation as a time of crisis. Presidents George H.W. Bush and William Clinton were successful in defining their situations as crisis situations where the President would be expected and required to act, and specifically to take military action. President George W. Bush, responding to 9/11 did not have to work to define that situation as a crisis, though he did work to define the crisis requiring expansion of the war on terror and the attack on Iraq. President Obama tried but failed to successfully define President Assad's use of poison gas in Syria as a crisis requiring Presidential action beyond diplomacy.

President William Clinton provided perhaps the best example of defining the Kosovo situation as a crisis and of the character of the office of the Presidency being imputed to him. Clinton was in the midst of the fall-out from a personal scandal with intern Monica Lewinsky at the time he announced the United States participation in the Kosovo bombings. This was not the first time President Clinton's personal character had been called into question. In addition, President Clinton had little or no foreign policy experience when he was first elected President. And, not only was Clinton not a

decorated veteran as President Bush had been before him, Clinton had expressed anti-war sentiments and the question of whether he had been a draft-dodger had been raised during his initial campaign for office. However, while Clinton lacked credibility and could not necessarily use his personal character to persuade Congress and the American people of the necessity to participate in the Kosovo bombings, he was still the President of the United States. He made the case that Kosovo was a crisis situation and that America needed to rally around its President. Personal character turned out to not be as important as the character of the office of the presidency. Clinton was able to use the character of the office of the President to support his rhetoric and he did so effectively.

President George W. Bush, like Clinton, did not have a sparkling resume of personal achievement when 9/11 occurred, less than one year into his presidency. Bush did not have a foreign policy background, nor had he served in a number of high-level positions like his father. Like Clinton, there was a whiff of controversy about his personal life, including allegations of excessive drinking, and about his military service. Bush's tour with the National Guard had been a significant campaign issue. However, as was the case with Clinton, personal character turned out to be unimportant, although for a different reason. While George W. Bush did indeed use the character of the office of the presidency to support his call to war in the aftermath of 9/11, his appeal to the emotions of members of Congress and all Americans was probably much more significant. Bush did not have to work to define the situation as a crisis. Most Americans felt some or all of following emotions: sadness, anger, vulnerability, or fear after 9/11. It was those emotions that Bush was able to speak to in his call to attack Al-

Qaeda in Afghanistan. Because of the magnitude of the event to which he was responding, President Bush's personal character mattered little. Members of Congress and Americans were ready to rally around the President and go to war in the fall of 2001. The decision to expand the war on terrorism into Iraq in 2003 was more controversial, but Bush was again able to effectively identify and appeal to the emotions of Americans to gain support for military intervention.

In addition, President George W. Bush had a certain amount of character imputed to him from his family name. He was associated with this father at times. The elder Bush, though only serving one term as President, had had what many consider a "successful" Presidency, especially when viewed eight to ten years later. Even the elder Bush's critics would probably agree that Bush had successfully utilized the military in the Gulf War. George W. Bush capitalized on the successes attributed to his father to establish his own character.

President Barack Obama had come into office with a reputation for a strong personal character, or, at least no major blemishes on his personal character. He was in his second term as President in August 2013 when President Assad used poison gas in Syria. However, like Clinton and George W. Bush before him, Obama had no significant experience in foreign relations prior to taking office. He had no military record, stellar or otherwise. In fact, Obama had campaigned and been elected in part for his position of ending America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, President Obama could not rely on character imputed from his personal experience in foreign relations or military matters prior to being elected.

In addition, Obama had a problem relying on the character imputed by the office of the Presidency as a basis for his rhetoric when attempting to persuade Congress and the American people to support a military response to Assad's use of poison gas in Syria. Most of President Obama's first term in office had been characterized by continuous battles with Congress over domestic issues, including health care and the economy. Obama did not have a better record in international issues, with many questions being asked about Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's knowledge and actions in relation to Benghazi. To be fair, with Americans so war weary after more than a decade of war by August of 2013, even if President Obama had enjoyed character imputed by significant experience and a stellar military record, and even if President Obama had retained the character of the office based on his time as President, neither form of character was probably enough to overcome most Americans' disinterest in returning to war.

- ii. Logical arguments could be important, but appeal to emotional elements was critical.

Aristotle's model posited that a speaker was more persuasive when presenting an argument in which facts could be proved. Logic was an important factor in the model. All four post-Cold War presidents considered herein used logical arguments in their rhetoric when calling Americans to war. However, upon careful consideration of the logical arguments presented, the facts and logical arguments presented were often combined with or dependent upon connecting with the emotions of the members of the audience in order to be effective.

For instance, George H.W. Bush in his address announcing the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait outlined American interests in demanding that Iraq withdraw and sending troops to protect Saudi Arabia, but only after characterizing the invasion in terms that were meant to appeal to the emotions of Americans. When Bush stated that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a situation in which Americans were “called upon to define who we are and what we believe,”<sup>2</sup> he was essentially making a moral argument that contained both elements of logic and emotion. At the risk of oversimplifying, it appeared that Bush was asking Americans to remember that they were “good” people who did the “right” thing, and in this situation, the “right” thing to do was to assist Kuwait and Saudi Arabia against the “bad” Iraqis. The argument was logical and simple, but it also appealed to the emotions of Americans. Even if Americans did not always do the “right” thing, Bush recognized that Americans wanted to feel like they were doing the “right” thing.

Bush further characterized Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in terms to which he believed Americans could relate: subtle and sometimes not so subtle references to history. In calling the attack and occupation of Kuwait a “brutal act of aggression” and later a “blitzkrieg,” Bush evoked brutal acts of aggression from the past, most importantly Hitler’s brutal act of aggression in attacking and occupying a number of countries in Europe during World War II. Bush later used the word “appeasement” in noting that appeasement does not work and he called Saddam Hussein an “aggressive dictator.” These rhetorical references to history not only helped form a logical argument for military intervention - - appeasement of an aggressive dictator did work as a strategy in the 1930s, so it will not work now - - but they recalled emotions that many Americans

shared about World War II, a “good” war in which America was strong and was victorious in defeating a brutal dictator.

Bush utilized these same themes throughout his Gulf War rhetoric, but also added an argument that American military involvement in the Gulf was part of a bigger plan. The Gulf War was not going to be “another Vietnam” because Americans had defined objectives, first, in protecting Saudi Arabia, and second, in pushing Iraqis out of Kuwait. The Gulf War was also part of Bush’s “new world order.” Bush had a plan for a world governed by the rule of law, and with America taking a leading role. This type of argument had elements of logic - - only by standing up to aggressive dictators like Saddam Hussein can we have the rule of law in the world - - but it also appealed to the emotions of most Americans. President Bush gambled that most Americans not only wanted a peaceful world governed by the rule of law, but also wanted America to regain its status as a world leader. The Cold War was over. The Soviet Union was breaking apart. It was time for the United States to re-assert its status as the number one nation in the world.

President Clinton likewise blurred the line between logical arguments and arguments meant to appeal to emotion. Clinton presented two major themes to his advocacy of American involvement in the Kosovo bombings: one, the avoidance of the situation in Serbia and Kosovo escalating into a broader regional conflict, and two, a humanitarian necessity to intervene in order to prevent further loss of life. The themes were connected and both used elements of logic and elements meant to appeal to emotion.

Like Bush before him, Clinton used references to history to aid his argument. Many believed that an assassination in Sarajevo had been a catalyst in the events that escalated and ultimately led to World War I. The logical argument was that the United States had to act in order to avoid the Kosovo conflict occurring in Eastern Europe from escalating into another world war, as had occurred with World War I. However, there was also an emotional element. Though perhaps vague with the details, most Americans understood and believed that World War I had been successful. America had done the “right” thing then and had stood with the victors in 1918. Most Americans wanted to do the right thing again.

Clinton’s perhaps more overt argument meant to appeal to emotion was his humanitarian argument for American involvement in Kosovo. By participating in the Kosovo bombings, Americans were protecting “innocent” people from being killed. Again, Clinton turned to history in his rhetoric. When Clinton described “innocent people taken from their homes, forced to kneel in the dirt, and sprayed with bullets,” he was evoking the horrors of Nazi warfare in World War II.<sup>3</sup> Clinton also called it a “moral imperative” that America intervene in Kosovo.<sup>4</sup> By participating in the Kosovo bombings, Clinton argued, America was not only making a moral choice, but was playing a similar role it had played successfully in World War II, the role of protector. Americans could feel good about participating in the bombings.

Like his father and President Clinton before him, President Bush also mixed the logical elements of his rhetoric with appeals to emotion. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, George W. Bush made a logical argument for sending American troops to Afghanistan, but because emotions were running so high, the logical elements to the

argument were almost superfluous. Americans were scared, sad and angry after 9/11. Revenge seemed a reasonable objective under the circumstances, if only to prevent a future attack. It was enough to remind Americans of the “courage” and “endurance” and “decency” of other Americans in response to 9/11 to make an argument that the “patriotic” and “right” thing to do was to give Afghanistan a brief period in which to produce the terrorists responsible for the attack, and failing that, to send troops into Afghanistan. Bush was careful to include the military, members of Congress and “regular” Americans in his address to show how unified America was unified in its objective.

The logical elements to Bush’s rhetoric in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 were “almost superfluous,” but not completely superfluous. In fact, President Bush was able to use the strong emotions connected to the 9/11 attack to gain support for a broader plan to combat terrorism. Bush importantly defined the terrorist attack by Al-Qaeda as an “act of war,” which allowed him to formulate a war-plan to respond. In his September 20, 2001, address Bush laid out his plan, defining the enemy, laying out conditions to be met, and threatening a response if those conditions were not met.

Like his father and Clinton before him, Bush utilized historical references. Note that all three paid particular attention to World War II references. World War II remained, and perhaps remains today, the “good” war, fought against an undisputed enemy and fought successfully. The younger Bush described Al-Qaeda as “heirs” to the “murderous ideologies” of the twentieth century and said Al-Qaeda members followed the path of “fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism.”<sup>5</sup> This type of rhetoric contained elements of logic - - America must stop Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda

before they become as powerful as Hitler and Nazis - - but, again, also evoked strong emotions shared by most Americans about World War II. Americans felt good about World War II. They could feel good about a military response to Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. Bush called the war on terrorism a “fight for freedom.”<sup>6</sup> All Americans could feel good about joining a fight for freedom.

President Bush’s advocacy for the expansion of the war on terrorism in March of 2003 by sending troops into Iraq required more logical elements as the emotions of 9/11 had calmed a bit in the intervening eighteen months. Bush made three arguments: first that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction; second, that Iraq, if left unchecked, could link with “terrorist allies” and attack the United States; and, third, that by intervening militarily in Iraq, the United States could help bring peace and stability to the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> These were appeals to logic, but also contained elements of emotion.

For instance, when Americans considered the term “weapons of mass destruction,” there was an element of fear. It made sense to find and destroy weapons of mass destruction from a logical viewpoint, but also especially from an emotional perspective. Americans did not want another 9/11. Likewise, though Iraq had not directly attacked the United States yet, there was uncertainty about whether Iraq would link with groups like Al-Qaeda to carry out attacks on the United States. Preventing future attacks and protecting America was both a logical argument and an emotional argument. American pride was also at stake. American pride had taken a serious blow with the 9/11 attacks. The opportunity to bring peace and stability to the Middle East would allow America to re-assert itself as the pre-eminent world power.

President Barack Obama made similar appeals to both logic and emotion when he advocated for a military response to Assad's use of poison gas in August of 2013. The primary difference, however, was that Obama was not successful. He was unable to define the situation as enough of a crisis to merit a strong military response. Like the preceding post-Cold War presidents, Obama mixed his logical arguments with appeals to emotion. However, unlike his predecessors in the Oval Office in the post-Cold War world, Obama either did not believe as strongly in the position for which he was advocating or realized that, politically, it was just not going to work, or both. Ultimately, Obama realized Americans were just too tired of war to care enough about Assad to respond militarily.

Obama attempted to make an argument for a military response that was similar to the argument made by President Clinton. First, there was a humanitarian argument. Assad has used poisonous gas in the "worst chemical weapons attack in the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>8</sup> Because use of chemical weapons and particularly poisonous gas were (and are) thought to such heinous acts, President Obama felt that he could appeal to the emotions of members of Congress and the American people. Like previous post-Cold War Presidents, Obama asked Americans to respond to this "assault on human dignity" by making the moral choice to do the right thing. However, Americans were war weary after more than a decade of fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. A moral choice to send troops or respond militarily in far off Syria would be a lot easier if Americans perceived a direct threat.

President Obama tried, almost half-heartedly, to make the case that Assad's use of poisonous gas represented a direct threat to the United States, but ultimately failed.

Obama spoke about the potential for escalation of violence. He spoke about Syria's actions endangering America's "friends" on Syria's borders. He spoke about the potential for chemical weapons to fall into the hands of terrorists. In the end, it was not enough. Americans had had enough. Members of Congress, correctly reading the polls, warned Obama not to bring the issue to a vote in Congress. Obama backed down, first broaching the issue of a potential diplomatic resolution while maintaining a threat of military intervention, and then later more broadly embracing a diplomatic course of action.

Interestingly, Obama used fewer references to World War II than other post-Cold War Presidents. It could be that, initially, Obama thought a comparison of Assad's use of poisonous gas on his people to Milosevic's assault on his own people would be enough to stir the emotions of Americans and win support for the use of military force. However, that comparison alone proved to be not enough. Following more than a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the American people needed a shared experience stronger and more meaningful than Kosovo to evoke the emotion needed to support the use of military force.

- iii. The use of Presidential rhetoric as a call to war continues to evolve, but the emphasis will be on the ability of the speaker to appeal to the emotions of the audience.

The use of rhetoric by United States presidents as a call to war in the post-Cold War world continues to evolve. This thesis began with President Barack Obama, in a September 2014 speech, calling Islamic State terrorists a "network of death" that must

by “destroyed.”<sup>9</sup> While Obama made a logical argument, use of phrases such as “network of death” demonstrate that appeal to emotion remained paramount. Several months later, as this is being written in March 2015, the Islamic State terrorists continue to pose a threat as the United States and other countries work to determine how best to combat them. It is a fair assumption that President Obama is considering how best to communicate his plans to Congress and the American people, and, if he determines that additional United States military action is required, how best to inspire Congress and Americans to support that action. Obama will make appeals to logic, but, more importantly, appeals to emotion. Presidential rhetoric will be an important factor again in the call to war for President Obama, and will continue to be an important factor for future Presidents.

## Conclusion: notes

1. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, translated by W. Rhys Roberts, Book 1, Part 2, accessed at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.1.i.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.
2. President George H.W. Bush, *Address on Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait* (August 8, 1990), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5529>, accessed April 17, 2015.
3. President William Clinton, *Statement on Kosovo* (March 24, 1999), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3932>, accessed April 18, 2015.
4. Id.
5. President George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, September 20, 2001, The Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address\\_001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address_001.asp), accessed April 18, 2015.
6. Id.
7. President George W. Bush, *Message to Saddam*, March 17, 2003, <http://presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.17.03.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.
8. President Barack Obama, *Statement by the President on Syria*, August 31, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria>, accessed April 18, 2015.
9. President Barack Obama: *Address to the United Nations*, September 24, 2014. <http://www.politico.com>, accessed April 17, 2015.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## Books

Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, translated by W. Rhys Roberts, Book 1, Part 2, accessed at: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.1.i.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Baker, James A., and Hamilton, Lee H. *The Iraq Study Group Report*. New York: Vintage Books, 2006.

Brewer, Susan A. *Why America Fights*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Brune, Lester H. *The United States and Post-Cold War Interventions: Bush and Clinton in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia, 1992-1998*. Claremont: Regina Books, 1998.

Brunk, Gregory C., Secrest, Donald, and Tamashiro, Howard. *Understanding Attitudes About War, Modeling Moral Judgments*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996.

Crockatt, Richard. *America Embattled: September 11, Anti-Americanism and the Global Order*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Demasio, Antonio R. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, (New York, Penguin Group, 1994).

Edwards III, George C. *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Greene, John Robert. *The Presidency of George Bush*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000.

Halberstam, David. *War in a Time of Peace*, New York: Scribner, 2001.

Kiewe, Amos, ed. *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1994.

Klinker, Philip A., and Jones, Charles O. *Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Context*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996.

Kuypers, Jim A. *Presidential Crisis Rhetoric and the Press in the Post-Cold War World*. Westport: Praeger, 1997.

Neustadt, Richard E. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: The Free Press, 1990.

Nuechterlein, Donald E. *America Recommitted: A Superpower Assesses Its Role in a Turbulent World*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001.

Tiefer, Charles. *The Semi-Sovereign Presidency*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994.

Whitford, Andrew B., and Yates, Jeff. *Presidential Rhetoric and the Public Agenda, Constructing the War on Drugs*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

### Articles

Ben-Porath, Eran N. "Rhetoric of Atrocities: The Place of Horrific Human Rights Abuses in Presidential Persuasion Efforts." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 37, no. 2 (June 2007): 181-202.

Emrich, Cynthia G., Brower, Holly H., Feldman, Jack M., Garland, Howard. "Images in Words: Presidential Rhetoric, Charisma, and Greatness." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 46, no. 3 (Sep. 2001): 527-557.

Hart, Roderick P., Jarvis, Sharon E., Lim, Elvin T. "The American People in Crisis: A Content Analysis." *Political Psychology*, 23, no. 3, Special Issue: 9/11 and Its Aftermath: Perspectives from Political Psychology (Sep. 2002): 417-437.

Hasian, Jr., Marouf. "Dangerous Supplements, Inventive Dissent, and Military Critiques of the Bush Administration's Unitary Executive Theories." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 37, no. 4, Shadows of Democracy in Presidential Rhetoric (Dec. 2007): 693-716.

Ivie, Robert L. "Shadows of Democracy in Presidential Rhetoric: An Introduction to the Special Issue." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 37, no. 4, Shadows of Democracy in Presidential Rhetoric (Dec. 2007): 577-579.

Ivie, Robert L., Giner, Oscar. "Hunting the Devil: Democracy's Rhetorical Impulse to War." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 37, no. 4, Shadows of Democracy in Presidential Rhetoric (Dec. 2007): 580-598.

Kellner, Douglas. "Bushspeak and the Politics of Lying: Presidential Rhetoric in the "War on Terror."" *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 37, no. 4, Shadows of Democracy in Presidential Rhetoric (Dec. 2007): 622-645.

Northcutt, Susan Stoudinger. "An Analysis of Bush's War Speech." *International Social Science Review*, 67, no. 3 (Summer 1992): 123-129.

Pollack, Mark A. "The Battle for the Past: George Bush and the Gulf Crisis." In Amos Kiewe, ed. *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric*, Praeger Publishers, 1994: 205-19.

Stuckey, Mary E., Ritter, Joshua, R. "George Bush, <Human Rights>, and American Democracy." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 37, no. 4, Shadows of Democracy in Presidential Rhetoric (Dec. 2007): 646-666.

Widmaier, Wesley W. "Constructing Foreign Policy Crises: Interpretive Leadership in the Cold War and War on Terrorism." *International Studies Quarterly*, 51, no. 4 (Dec. 2007): 779-794.

Windt, Jr., Theodore Otto. "Presidential Rhetoric: Definition of a Field of Study." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 16, no. 1, The Media and the Presidency, (Winter 1986): 102-116.

Zarefsky, David. "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 34, no. 3, The Public Presidency, (Sep. 2004): 607-619.

Zarefsky, David. "George W. Bush Discovers Rhetoric: September 20, 2001 and the U.S. Response to Terrorism." In Hyde, Michael J, ed. *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, South Carolina University Press, 2004: 136-55.

#### Other

Ball, James, "Obama issues Syria a 'red line' warning on chemical weapons," August 20, 2012, *The Washington Post*, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-issues-syria-red-line-warning-on-chemical-weapons/2012/08/20/ba5d26ec-eaf7-11e1-b811-09036bcb182b\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-issues-syria-red-line-warning-on-chemical-weapons/2012/08/20/ba5d26ec-eaf7-11e1-b811-09036bcb182b_story.html), accessed April 19, 2015.

*Barack Obama, American President: A Reference Resource*, <http://millercenter.org/president/obama/essays/biography>, accessed April 19, 2015

"Bengazi Timeline," *FactCheck.org*, updated May 2, 2014, <http://www.factcheck.org/2012/10/benghazi-timeline/>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Bill Clinton, *Letter to Colonel Eugene Holmes*, December 3, 1969, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/clinton/etc/draftletter.com>, accessed April 18, 2015.

*Bill Clinton, American President: A Reference Resource*, <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/essays/biography/9>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Bill Clinton, *Letter to Colonel Eugene Holmes*, December 3, 1969, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/clinton/etc/draftletter.com>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Clinton on Flowers, 60 Minutes interview, January 26, 1992, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwXE52e9JFg>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Cohen, Tom, "How much say will Congress have on Syrian chemical weapons response?" August, 29, 2013, *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/29/politics/obama-congress-syria/>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, "Authorization For Use of Military Force in Response to the 9/11 Attacks (P.L. 1007-40): Legislative History," prepared by Richard F. Grimmett, last updated January 16, 2007, accessible at [www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22357.pdf](http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22357.pdf), accessed April 18, 2015.

Daalder, Ivo H. "Decision to Intervene: How the War in Bosnia Ended," *Brookings*, (December 1998), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/1998/12/balkans-daalder>, accessed April 18, 2015.

DeYoung, Karen, "Obama's decision to turn to Congress on Syria decision triggers debate," September 4, 2013, *The Washington Post*, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-decision-to-turn-to-congress-on-syria-decision-is-fodder-for-debate/2013/09/04/e59aace6-14ca-11e3-a100-66fa8fd9a50c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-decision-to-turn-to-congress-on-syria-decision-is-fodder-for-debate/2013/09/04/e59aace6-14ca-11e3-a100-66fa8fd9a50c_story.html), accessed April 19, 2015.

Dugan, Andrew, "U.S. Support for Action in Syria Is Low vs. Past Conflicts," September 6, 2013, *Gallup*, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/164282/support-syria-action-lower-past-conflicts.aspx>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Federal Election results, 1988, <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/scores.html#1988>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Federal Elections 2008: Election Results for the U.S. President, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives, November 4, 2008, <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2008/federalections2008.shtml>, accessed April 19, 2015

Federal Elections 2012: Election Results for the U.S. President, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives, November 6, 2012, <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/federalections2012.shtml>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Fisher, Max, "9 Questions about Syria you were too embarrassed to ask," August 29, 2013, *The Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/08/29/9-questions-about-syria-you-were-too-embarrassed-to-ask>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Gearan, Anne, O'Keefe, Ed and Branigin, William, "Senate committee approves resolution authorizing U.S. strike on Syria," September 4, 2013, *The Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/officials-press-lawmakers-to>

approve-syria-strike-obama-invokes-congresss-credibility/2013/09/04/4c93a858-155c-11e3-804b-d3a1a3a18f2c\_story.html, accessed April 19, 2015.

*George W. Bush, American President: A Reference Resource*, <http://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/essays/biography>, accessed April 18, 2015.

H.J.Res.114 - Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002, 107<sup>th</sup> Congress (2001-2002), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-joint-resolution/114>, accessed April 18, 2015.

“Hillary Clinton testifies before House committee on Benghazi – live,” *The Guardian*, updated January 23, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/23/clinton-testifies-congress-benghazi-live>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Holland, Keating, “Poll: Americans continue to support NATO strikes, but skepticism over success growing,” April 1, 1999, *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/04/01/poll/>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Holland, Keating, “Poll: Americans view Kosovo peace as a U.S. victory,” June 7, 1999, *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/06/07/poll/>, accessed April 18, 2015.

John Boehner, Press Release, “Boehner Seeks Answers from President Obama on Syria,” August 28, 2013, <http://www.speaker.gov/press-release/boehner-seeks-answers-president-obama-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Kim, Julie, Report for Congress, *Kosovo and the 106 Congress*, updated January 18, 2001, <http://congressionalresearch.com/RL30729/document.php?study=kosovo+and+the+106th+congress>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Kull, Steven and Ramsay, Clay, “Public Seeks Sense of Purpose In US Bosnia Policy: Approval for airstrikes rose when need was explained,” February 18, 1994, *The Christian Science Monitor*, <http://www.policyattitudes.org/bosnia3.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Lilleston, Randy, “After shaky start, Bush gains public approval,” 2003, *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/bush.100/stories/overview.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. <http://www.merriam-webster.com>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Newport, Frank, “Support for U.S. Kosovo Involvement Drops,” May 16, 1999, *Gallup New Service*, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/3826/support-us-kosovo-involvement-drops.aspx>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Official General Election Results for United States President, Federal Election Commission, November 2, 2004, [www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/2004pres.pdf](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/2004pres.pdf) and [www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/tables.pdf](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2004/tables.pdf), accessed April 18, 2015.

Power, Samantha “Never Again: The World’s Most Unfulfilled Promise,” *Frontline*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/karadzic/genocide/neveragain.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.

President Barack Obama, *Statement by the President on Syria*, August 31, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria>, accessed April 18, 2015.

President Barack Obama, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria*, September 10, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015.

President Barack Obama, *Remarks By the President To The United Nations General Assembly*, September 24, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address>, accessed April 19, 2015.

President Barack Obama: weekly address: *Pursuing a Diplomatic Solution in Syria*, September 14, 2013; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/14/weekly-address-pursuing-diplomatic-solution-syria>, accessed April 19, 2015  
United States Constitution, <https://www.usconstitution.net/const.pdf>, accessed April 17, 2015.

President Barack Obama: *Address to the United Nations*, September 24, 2014. <http://www.politico.com>, accessed April 17, 2015.

President George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, September 20, 2001, The Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address\\_001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/address_001.asp), accessed April 18, 2015.

President George H.W. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the End of the Gulf War* (March 6, 1991), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches-3430>, accessed April 17, 2015.

President George H.W. Bush, *Address on Iraq’s Invasion of Kuwait* (August 8, 1990), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5529>, accessed April 17, 2015.

President George H.W. Bush, *Address to the Nation on the Invasion of Iraq* (January 16, 1991) <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3428>, accessed April 17, 2015.

President George H.W. Bush, *State of the Union Address* (January 29, 1991), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-3429>, accessed April 17, 2015.

President George H.W. Bush, *Address on the End of the Gulf War* (February 27, 1991), <http://millercenter.org/president/bush/speeches/speech-5530>, accessed April 17, 2015.

President George H.W. Bush, *Letter to Congressional Leaders on the Persian Gulf Crisis*, January 8, 1991, [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=2599&year=1991&month=01](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2599&year=1991&month=01), accessed April 18, 2015.

President George W. Bush, *Message to Saddam*, March 17, 2003, <http://presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.17.03.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.

President George W. Bush, *The Iraqi Threat*, October 7, 2002, <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/10.7.02.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Presidential Job Approval Center, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/presidential-approval-center.aspx#>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Presidential Job Approval Center, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113980/Gallup-Daily-Obama-Job-Approval.aspx>, accessed April 19, 2015

President William Clinton, *Address on the Kosovo Agreement* (June 10, 1999), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3933>, accessed April 18, 2015.

President William Clinton, *Address on Bosnia* (November 27, 1995), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3929>, accessed April 18, 2015.

President William Clinton, *Statement on Kosovo* (March 24, 1999), <http://millercenter.org/president/clinton/speeches/speech-3932>, accessed April 18, 2015.

“Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes,” September 3, 2013, *Pew Research Center*, <http://www.people-press.org/2013/09/03/public-opinion-runs-against-syrian-airstrikes/>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Purdum, Todd S., Clinton Vetoes Lifting Bosnia Arms Embargo, August 12, 1995, *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/12/world/clinton-vetoes-lifting-bosnia-arms-embargo.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Rogin, Josh, “Kerry: Syria ‘pretty close’ to civil war,” January 26, 2012, *The Washington Post*, A17, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.libproxy.unh.edu/hottopics/lnacademic>, accessed April 19, 2015.

Senate Concurrent Resolution 21 (106<sup>th</sup>): Kosovo Resolution, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/106/sconres21#overview>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Steinhauser, Paul, and Helton, John, "CNN poll: Public against Syria strike resolution," September 9, 2013, *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/09/politics/syria-poll-main/>, accessed April 19, 2015.

"Syria: The story of the conflict," March 12, 2015, *BBC*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>, accessed April 19, 2015.

The George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, George W. Bush, *Early Life and Career*, <http://www.georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu/en/The-President-and-Family/George-W-Bush.aspx>, accessed April 18, 2015.

The American Presidency Project, *2000 Presidential Election*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=2000>, accessed April 18, 2015.

The Library of Congress, *U.S. Election Results: A Resource Guide*, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/elections/statistics.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Timeline of Operation Enduring Freedom, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/28/world/operation-enduring-freedom-fast-facts/>, accessed April 18, 2015.

Thomas, Shawna, "Obama draws 'red line' for Syria on chemical and biological weapons," August 20, 2008, [http://firstread.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2012/08/20/13379062-obama-draws-red-line-for-syria-on-chemical-and-biological-weapons](http://firstread.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/08/20/13379062-obama-draws-red-line-for-syria-on-chemical-and-biological-weapons), accessed April 19, 2015.

Traugott, Micheal, et al, "How Americans Responded: A Study of Public Reactions to 9/11/01," *Institute for Social Research*, The University of Michigan, [www.isr.umich.edu/cps/har/ps\\_article.pdf](http://www.isr.umich.edu/cps/har/ps_article.pdf), accessed April 18, 2015.

USA PATRIOT ACT, 2001, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c107:H.R.3162>, accessed April 18, 2015

U.S. Constitution on Line, *The Election of 2000*, <http://www.usconstitution.net/elec2000.html>, accessed April 18, 2015.

U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, Milestones, 1993-1998, *The War in Bosnia, 1992-1995*, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/bosnia>, accessed April 18, 2015.

“What They Said, Before and After the Attack in Libya,” September 9, 2012, *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/12/us/politics/libya-statements.html>, accessed April 19, 2015.