

[The United States] must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and [the U.S.'s] allies and friends. [The country's] response must take full advantage of strengthened alliances, the establishment of new partnerships with former adversaries, innovation in the use of military forces, modern technologies, including the development of an effective missile defense system, and increased emphasis on intelligence collection and analysis (Walker).

These statements emphasize the employment of wartime tactics in the best interest of national security. Preemption, the public defense policy of the United States during the Bush Administration, advises a nation to forestall any potential attacks from challenging the safety of the country and its domestic tranquility (Walker). Preemptive strategies include the use of diplomatic relations with other countries, expanding the armed forces, and investing in new technologies in the interest of national security; this approach results from "public anxiety from the use of weapons of mass destruction" (Walker).

Proponents of the phrase 'war on terror' favor war styled approaches to national and international defense policies. Furthermore, they approve of the way in which this rhetoric presents the political ideology of the previous administration, as well as its effects on protecting the country from further terrorist threats. Those who believe in the utilization of the Bush Administration's rhetoric make valid arguments supporting the phrase 'war on terror'. Joe Queenan argues that Obama's separation from Bush's rhetoric "is a self-emasculating action that plunges us into an Orwellian world where words

have no emotional connection with the horrors they purport to describe”. By not associating these conflicts with countries and terrorist organizations alike with a war, the stance of the global terrorism danger appears to have been downgraded to a “manageable threat” (Rieff). Strong rhetoric allowed for other nations “to recognize the expansive reach of America’s strategic interests as a global power” (Walker).

These assertions create compelling cases for the use of phrases such as “the global war on terror”. Rieff’s statement coincides with the principles of U.S. exceptionalism, described by Rosemary Foot as “a willingness to go it alone on a variety of issues, along with apparent immunity to the pressures and criticisms of others; an assumption that its national values are moral and proper, not just expedient”. Exceptionalism applies to the Bush Administration in the case of the global war on terror in that one of the nation’s primary missions regarding their military interactions with the Middle East was the desire to spread democracy all over the world. Exceptionalism holds a place throughout United States history; from Quincy Adams and Jackson to Wilson and FDR, exceptionalism has been incorporated into public policy during many times of crisis (Foot). As the nation remains alert and cautious of potential threats, it demonstrates the country’s acknowledgement of the gravity of the situation at hand (Foot).

Utilizing the term “war on terror” implies that the issue of terrorism must be handled quickly and carefully; without the use of the word “war”, Rieff says that the impending threat of terrorist attacks has been demoted in terms of importance. If the shift in rhetoric entails a shift in focus on defense issues, then proponents of the term “war on terror” are correct in advocating the use of the

phrase. After the September 11th terror attacks, the United States must maintain a stringent defense policy in order to prevent such attacks in the future. By reducing the severity of the language used when discussing these conflicts, the nation portrays a more relaxed stance regarding terrorism, which in turns sends a message of apathy to terrorist networks such as al-Qaeda.

Americans expressed restless opposition to the continuing occupation of the Middle East. Upon the election of President Barack Obama, the country faced several changes in wartime policy, as well as in rhetoric. In "Obama Finds His Inner Fury", Sheldon Alberts discusses the rhetoric used by the current administration concerning issues such as the war. Alberts reports a shift in the use of phrases "war on terror" and "terrorism" from earlier in the president's term into his second year. Obama has acted urgently to break precedents set by the previous administration; both shutting down Guantanamo Bay and ending callous interrogation tactics used by officials to question possible terrorists (Pleming).

Despite the possibilities of success through the operation of emotional rhetoric, the incorporation of the phrase "war on terror" has harmful effects on public policy, as well as international relations, particularly with the Islamic world. Former Governor of Arkansas Michael Huckabee asserted, "The Bush administration has never adequately explained the theology and ideology behind Islamic terrorism or convinced us of its ruthless fanaticism. The first rule of war is 'know your enemy,' and most Americans do not know theirs". The Bush Administration often mentioned the "threat of Islamic fundamentalist-driven terrorism" (Feldmann). In various speeches given by public officials, as well as in

the numerous news reports filed by journalists, the enemy often appears to be Islamic ideologists. Huckabee further states that U.S. foreign policy under George W. Bush failed to explain the concepts of Islamic jihadism or radicalism to the American public. The targeted enemy in this global war shifts from terrorism in general to Islamic radicalism; however, if Americans do not understand this minority sect of Muslims, then they will be unfamiliar with the alleged adversary in this conflict. The vagueness of these terms also implies that the federal government lacks an understanding of these radical Islamic ideologies, and possibly Islam as a whole.

The Obama Administration's decision to alter the rhetoric of the previous presidency is ultimately more favorable. Bush incorporated "a strategy [that] was all about winning the war of ideas" (Apuzzo). Obama, however, represents a shift in the approach to international relations with Middle Eastern countries. Through the utilization of secular rhetoric, the Obama Administration has improved both diplomatic alliances with the Muslim world, as well as American public opinion of Islam in general. In "After 'the War on Terror'", Jack Miles describes the shift in rhetoric the Obama Administration has taken in describing Middle Eastern affairs. He suggests that the phrase "the war on terror" finds itself to be interpreted as "the war on Islam". Miles further alludes that this shift in rhetoric, as well as the strategies adapted by the new administration will be beneficial in ameliorating relations between America and the Middle East.

Indeed, the impact of this rhetoric shift has already been noticed in both areas of public opinion and diplomatic alliances. As reported by Apuzzo in *The Christian Science Monitor*:

Many international Muslim leaders have cheered the new tone, not just for its symbolism but because it makes it politically easier for them to cooperate with the U.S. "It's also a clear indication of President Obama's substantial understanding of the intricacies of Muslim politics," Jordanian lawmaker Hamada Faraaneh said. On Wednesday, Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh applauded indications that the Obama administration would keep religious rhetoric out of the U.S. security strategy.

"It is a good message of assurance, and differs from the former American administration's position on this matter which showed no real understanding of Islamic countries," al-Dabbagh said. "This decision by Obama will help to reform the image Muslims have of America." Public opinion polls have shown consistent improvement in sentiment toward the U.S. within the Muslim world, though the viewpoints are still overwhelmingly negative.

This transition from alluding Islam to terrorism has generated positive effects in international affairs and domestic policy overall.

The current administration seeks to identify terrorist attacks as malicious crimes, not acts of warfare, unlike what previous policies dictated. The use of the war metaphor is quite common in today's society whether addressing drugs, obesity, or the financial crisis (Tannen). When we employ such a metaphor in government, the word frames our perspective, actions, and policies (Foot). As much as the term provides a sense of urgency in resolving issues in national defense, it also forms associations "with the negligence of human rights" (Foot).

With the phrase “war on terror”, the United States attempts to earn justification for the battles in Iraq and Afghanistan in the name of national protection. While the common defense is not a principle to be discarded, the justification of hurting innocent civilians in the name of the United States is deficient public policy. It falls short in acknowledging the discord in ideas between America and the Middle East, all while losing focus of the country’s goal to evade future terrorist attacks from groups such as al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. Simons cites the former president’s policies leading up to the war as melodramatic narrative because of the phrases and terms utilized in informing the American people about it. By overzealously encompassing war within public policy, the crisis in effect lost much of its appeal to both the world and the American people (Simons).

In order to reconcile each point of view, one could suggest utilizing more peaceful language when discussing relations with Middle Eastern, Islamic countries. This, however, is not meant to advise leniency when confronting terrorist organizations. The use of stringent rhetoric should be directed towards specific terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, both dangerous factions that are prominently associated with the Middle East. By further focusing radical Islam to these particular organizations, the United States can maintain amiable relationships with Muslim countries, while taking an active stance on terrorist activity.

In conclusion, war rhetoric depicts the compelling ways in which mere words can shape a situation. Strong language can ameliorate or exacerbate

various scenarios. In short, an old piece of folk wisdom stands tried and true –

“it’s not what you say, it’s how you say it”.

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