

ISSA Proceedings 2006 - The Argumentative Framework Of Imperial Righteousness: The War Discourse Of George W. Bush



On May 25, 2006, U.S. President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair held a joint press conference in Washington, D.C. In response to a reporter's question whether either leader thought he had made any mistakes during the War on Terror, Bush said that his "tough talk" might have "sent the wrong signal to people."

He noted that his use of phrases such as "bring it on" and "wanted, dead or alive" could have been "misinterpreted" in "certain parts of the world" (Bush, May 25, 2006). Bush's statement seemed to signal a new, more nuanced phase of rhetoric in the War on Terror. Yet with the exception of Bush's contrition on May 25, his rhetoric concerning the War on Terror during the first half of 2006 has supported a grand strategy that seeks to foster American empire. As the War on Terror continues in its fifth year, Bush's rhetoric has had to shift from the crisis response rhetoric he employed immediately after September 11th to a rhetoric that we call imperial righteousness. The rhetoric of imperial righteousness validates the American prerogative to utilize military power in the cause of right. This rhetoric features four themes: democracy and freedom, national security, the nature of the enemy, and American morality.

While American foreign policy objectives such as the quest to extend and maintain the American empire may remain stable, such objectives cannot be achieved without a grand strategy. A grand strategy "tells a nation's leaders what goals they should aim for and how best they can use their military power to attain those goals" (Art as cited in Brower, 2004, p. vii). Rhetoric is essential for the execution of a grand strategy and the rhetoric of imperial righteousness is a critical component of the Bush administration's grand strategy for the War on Terror. This paper will discuss the nature of American empire, examine the construct of a grand strategy, and describe the four rhetorical themes of imperial righteousness.

Bacevich argues that the drive toward empire is the controlling and unifying force underlying American foreign policy across every administration of the 20th and early 21st centuries. Spokespersons and critics of a presidential administration often argue that the administration is implementing new (either bold or misguided) foreign policy. Bacevich, however, argues, "Those who chart America's course do so with a clearly defined purpose in mind. That purpose is to preserve and, where feasible and conducive to U.S. interests, to expand an American imperium" (2002, p. 3) Historian William Appleman Williams called U.S. foreign policy "Open Door imperialism," naming it for Secretary of State John Hay's Open Door Notes in 1899 and 1900 (Bacevich, 2002, pp. 25-26). Contemporary American foreign policy continues in the Open Door tradition of seeking to expand and strengthen economic markets as well as monitoring traditional military and security issues.

The rhetorical nature of American empire rests on several premises. These include Americans' belief in the unique capacity and responsibility the U.S. has "not simply to discern but to direct history" (Bacevich, 2002, p. 33), the assumption of American good will and reluctance to become entangled, and faith in the military power of the U.S. These premises are also expressed within the framework of grand strategy.

Hart offers an explanation of the concept of grand strategy by positing that the role of a grand strategy is to "coordinate and direct all of the resources of a nation or a band of nations towards the attainment of the political object of the war" (as cited in Brower, 2004, p. viii). This implementation would employ the military machine but additionally rely on the economic power, diplomacy, and national will with a vision that encompasses a "farsighted regard to the state of the peace that will follow" (Hart as cited in Brower, 2004, p. viii). Hart defines grand strategy as the complete utilization of the implements a nation has at its disposal to wage war militarily and rhetorically. The balance of the two is important so that the destructive power of force that might produce a backlash in public opinion is buffered by the rhetorical strategies that justify a nation's use of power in the international arena.

Richards believes that a grand strategy should indeed include action that produces positive effects on morale and public/world opinion (n.d.). Boyd suggested four functions of a "sensible" grand strategy that should guide nations in their formulation of a grand strategy (as cited in Richards, n.d.). First, the grand strategy should support the national goal, and indeed Gaddis concurs when

he argues that *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* published almost a year after September 11th was evidence of a crisis begetting a “grand strategy of transformation”, in this case signaling the most sweeping shift in U.S. grand strategy since 1947 (as cited in Hentz, 2004, p. 7). Second, Boyd believes a grand strategy should bolster a nation’s resolve while diffusing the adversary’s resolve and attracting the uncommitted. Third, it should end the conflict on favorable terms, and fourth, sow the seeds to prevent future conflict.

Boyd does not clearly specify how the functions of the grand strategy are to be achieved; however, he does suggest a three-part approach that should be useful in the attainment of a grand strategy: a nation must address itself, it should discuss its adversaries, and it should evaluate the uncommitted and potential adversaries. The rhetorical dimensions of this construct are carried out in a multi-dimensional process. Our position in this paper is that the rhetoric of imperial righteousness is a means to achieve the goals of empire as part of the grand strategy of transformation formulated after September 11th.

Initially, Boyd suggests that when a country articulates the functions of a grand strategy it should give respect to itself by living up to its ideal, emphasizing its cultural traditions and experiences. We argue that the concepts of democracy and morality, as parts of imperial righteousness, allow Bush to simultaneously advance global democracy and espouse the virtues of America and the American character. Here the rhetoric is imperial in its philosophical and political hegemony and in its sometimes pompous displays of bravura, as well as righteous in its careful reflections of the nature of humanity and the American people.

Second, a country’s leader should address its adversaries. Boyd believes that a nation should publicize the adversary’s harsh statements and threats to highlight that the nation’s survival is at risk. A nation should also critique the political agenda to show that it is not “in accord with any social value based either on the value and dignity of the individual or on the security and well being of society as a whole” (Boyd as cited in Richards, n.d.) We argue that this is precisely what the rhetoric of imperial righteousness achieves in the descriptions of the enemy and security. Here the rhetoric is imperial because it utilizes power and elevates the nation to a socially responsible guardian. It is righteous from a good-versus-evil dimension as well as on a Christian altruistic level.

We will examine four themes of imperial righteousness: democracy and freedom, national security, the nature of the enemy, and American morality.

The first theme of imperial righteousness concerns the twin concepts of democracy and freedom. Gaddis observed:

President Bush has insisted that the world will not be safe from terrorists until the Middle East is safe for democracy. It should be clear by now that he is serious about this claim; it is neither rhetorical nor a cloak for hidden motives. Democratization, however, is a long-term objective. (2005)

As America plows on with the conflict in the Middle East it is still not clear if the planting of democracy in Iraq will sprout a government that fully embraces democratic principles. However, the American empire, under direction of President George W. Bush, continues to spread the cause of democracy abroad and entrench it as a fundamental tenant of the American imperium.

The democracy theme is closely tied to the concepts of freedom and security and Bush replays those messages frequently to audiences. The theme of democracy argues that the United States embraces its democratic ideologies and seeks to promote that democratic agenda worldwide. In the 2006 State of the Union Address Bush came out quickly with the admonition that “We will choose to act confidently on pursuing the enemies of freedom” (January 31, 2006). He explained that freedom is continually threatened and that “Abroad, our nation is committed to an historic long-term goal – we seek the end of tyranny in our world” (Bush, January 31, 2006). He reasserted this concept in a radio address marking the formation of a national unity government in Iraq. Bush said, “By helping the Iraqi people build their democracy, America will deal the terrorists a crippling blow and establish a beacon of liberty in the Middle East – and that will make our Nation and the world more secure” (April 29, 2006). The confluence and interplay of the emotional connotations of duty, freedom, liberty, and security are the basic workings of Bush’s symphonic ode to democracy and essential in creating the rhetoric of imperial righteousness with the democratic melody played in counterpoint to tyranny and freedom juxtaposed against terrorism and dictatorships. Bush said,

Dictatorships shelter terrorists, and feed resentment and radicalism, and seek weapons of mass destruction. Democracies replace resentment with hope, respect the rights of their citizens and their neighbors, and join in the fight against terror. Every step toward freedom in the world makes our country safer – so we will act boldly in freedom’s cause. (January 31, 2006)

And again, to be sure the message was heard, Bush repeated, “We love our

freedom, and we will fight to keep it" (January 31, 2006).

In order to fulfill the imperial nature of this rhetoric Bush needs to prove the desire of others to seek freedom and the importance and duty involved in achieving the advancements that have been made in this international quest. He did so by saying that "Raising up a democracy requires rule of law, and protection of minorities, and strong, accountable institutions that last longer than a single vote" (Bush, January 31, 2006). Additionally, Bush conceded "Democracies in the Middle East will not look like our own, because they will reflect the traditions of their own citizens" but he insisted, "liberty is the future of every nation in the Middle East, because liberty is the right and hope of all humanity" (January 31, 2006). Bush restated this position at Kansas State saying, "I'm not saying to any country, you must have a democracy that looks like America. I am saying, free your people" (January 23, 2006). Additionally, Bush's belief that freedom is a right given to everyone by a higher power guides the action that he takes in international arenas. He confessed:

Part of my decision-making process is my firm belief in the natural rights of men and women; my belief that deep in everybody's soul is the desire to live free. I believe there's an Almighty, and I believe the Almighty's great gift to each man and woman in this world is the desire to be free. This isn't America's gift to the world, it is a universal gift to the world, and people want to be free. (Bush, January 23, 2006)

At the joint news conference with Blair in May, Bush said that "Because I believe that freedom will yield the peace. I also believe freedom is universal. I don't believe freedom is...a concept only for America or Great Britain; it's a universal concept" (May 25, 2006). There is no hidden rationale in this theory. If freedom is universal then the US is justified in promoting freedom in countries where they perceive freedom to be lacking - a simple warrant for the advocacy of American political hegemony and empire justified via imperial righteousness. The rhetoric advocates empire in the cause of what is right. Success in the conflict can only be achieved by securing liberty and democracy in other countries to stifle terrorist tendencies and therefore make America more secure.

Bush defined success as: . . . a country where the terrorists and Saddamists can no longer threaten the democracy, and where Iraqi security forces can provide for the security of their people, and where Iraq is not a safe haven from which the terrorists - al Qaeda and its affiliates - can plot attacks against America. (January

23, 2006)

This self-serving altruism is designed to sell the imperial ideology by evoking the emotional themes implied within universal rights. Indeed, Bush does not attempt to defend the inherent philosophical constructs of democracy as a preferred political form, but instead side-steps the issue by diametrically positioning democracy with the enemy's philosophy that itself remains semi-defined. In almost condescending terms Bush said:

We got to step back and ask why. Why would they [al Qaeda et. al.] want to stop democracy? And the answer, because democracy stands for the exact opposite of their vision. Liberty is not their credo. And they understand a defeat to their ideology by the establishment of a free Iraq will be a devastating blow for their vision. (January 23, 2006)

The rhetoric of imperial righteousness does attempt to rationalize the benefit of democracy. For instance, Bush argued, "Democracy is the exact opposite of what they believe. They believe they can impose their will. They believe there's no freedom of religion. They believe there's no women's rights. They have a dark vision of the world" (May 25, 2006). Bush has set up an us-versus-them mentality where the adversary is generalized and is frequently referred to merely as "they."

Freedom is held up to fairly lofty standards in the rhetoric of imperial righteousness. It becomes the warrior that will defeat the enemy so vividly portrayed in the discourse. The overlap of democracy with a delineation of enemy, along with a history lesson, is used to demonstrate the conflicting ideologies. Bush said:

In the Middle East, freedom is once again contending with an ideology that seeks to sow anger and hatred and despair. And like fascism and communism before, the hateful ideologies that use terror will be defeated. Freedom will prevail in Iraq; freedom will prevail in the Middle East; and as the hope of freedom spreads to nations that have not know it, these countries will become allies in the cause of peace. (March 20, 2006)

Furthermore, the promotion of democracy is manifested and showcased by the holding of elections. Bush observed that in Iraq: In three different elections, millions of Iraqis turned out to the polls and cast their ballots. Because of their courage, the Iraqis now have a government of their choosing, elected under the most modern and democratic constitution in the Arab world. (May 25, 2006)

Bush concluded that, "the political track has been a vital part of having a country that can govern itself and defend itself" (May 25, 2006).

The second theme of imperial righteousness concerns national security - the nature of the threat and the scope of the activities necessary to defend against the threat. Bush first must articulate the threat. In one instance, he highlighted the threat by placing it in the context of an American narrative that emphasized peace and security from outside attacks. He observed, "We never felt there would be another attack like Pearl Harbor on our lands. And yet September the 11th changed all that" (Bush, April 6, 2006). Because this historical narrative has been violently interrupted, Bush warned, "When we see a threat, we have got to take the threat seriously before it comes to hurt us" (April 6, 2006). The threat to security that the September 11th attacks represent offers a lesson in how vulnerable Americans are. Bush observed, "The first lesson is that oceans can no longer protect us" (March 22, 2006).

The terrorist network spreads throughout the world, and thus necessitates a broad spectrum of security measures internationally and domestically. Bush is careful to address both fronts of engagement. Speaking in North Carolina, he said, "We must defeat the enemy overseas so we don't have to face them here again" (Bush, April 6, 2006). He later described a two-pronged strategy for this international effort, enumerating that Americans would, "one, hunt down the enemy and bring them to justice, and take threats seriously; and two, spread freedom" (Bush, April 10, 2006). The need to spread freedom to other countries, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, in the interest of protecting U.S. security gives Bush a rhetorical basis for supporting a variety of U.S. efforts. This is consistent with Bacevich's observation that, during the 20th century, "the architects of U.S. policy expanded the scope of concerns falling under the rubric of security" (2002, p. 121). Bush characterized the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan by arguing, "The decision to liberate Afghanistan was based first and foremost on the need to enforce the doctrine that I thought was necessary to protect the American people" (April 6, 2006). Bush also defended the continued U.S. engagement in Iraq by saying, "By defeating the terrorists in Iraq, we will bring greater security to our own country" (March 18, 2006). As he noted, "In the long run, the best way to defeat this enemy and to ensure the security of our own citizens is to spread the hope of freedom across the broader Middle East" (Bush, March 20, 2006). The U.S. effort to conduct foreign and military relations in order to protect U.S.

security must also include non-military strategies, according to Bush. In his State of the Union speech, he said, "To overcome dangers in our world, we must also take the offensive by encouraging economic progress, and fighting disease, and spreading hope in hopeless lands" (Bush, January 31, 2006). Bush observed that the "global war on terror is fought on more fronts than just the military front" (April 6, 2006). He therefore recommended gathering and sharing intelligence and taking steps necessary to "cut off [the terrorists'] money" (Bush, April 6, 2006).

The effort to defend U.S. security must also take place in the U.S., according to Bush. In his State of the Union he advised, "Our country must also remain on the offensive against terrorism here at home" (Bush, January 31, 2006). Bush later defended his domestic surveillance program, saying, "I'm not going to apologize for what I did on the terrorist surveillance program" (April 6, 2006).

The third theme of imperial righteousness is the nature of the enemy. One of Bush's rhetorical challenges since September 11th has been to create and personify an enemy. Edelman noted that political enemies can "give the political spectacle its power to arouse passions, fears, and hopes" in audiences (1988, p. 66). The rhetorical creation of an enemy in a war situation helps motivate the people who fight the war because the enemy represents a dangerous force that must be defeated. The definition of the enemy also helps determine the purpose, strategy, and outcome of the war. We fight because the enemy threatens our values, we will use whatever strategies are most damaging to the enemy, and we know when the war is over because the enemy has been vanquished. The terrorist as enemy is not an individual who can be easily personified and therefore does not serve these rhetorical purposes suitably. Furthermore, the terrorist enemy resists traditional identification by office, political party, or even nationality. In addition, in his rhetoric Bush has tried not to conflate terrorism with Islam, so he must spend time in his rhetoric making careful distinctions rather than solely calling for action.

Bush has therefore had to work diligently to identify an enemy who can arouse strong emotions and give the War on Terror a clear focus. In his 2006 speeches he has used some of the more predictable descriptors of an enemy. The United States' enemy in the War on Terror is "brutal", "savage", "cold-blooded", and "relentless". Bush describes them as "thugs," "assassins," and "killers." While these labels establish that the enemy should be feared, they still do not describe exactly who the enemy is and how the enemy can be distinguished from friends or

allies.

In his recent rhetoric Bush has introduced a signifier to define the enemy in the War on Terror: ideology. Bush told an audience at Kansas State University, "It's very important for the students here to understand that there is an enemy which has an ideology and they're driven by an ideology. They make decisions based upon their view of the world . . ." (January 23, 2006). In West Virginia, he said he viewed the enemy "as people that believe in something; they have an ideological base" (Bush, March 22, 2006). At his press conference with Blair, Bush said about the enemy, "They have a point of view. They have a philosophy. And they want to impose that philosophy on the rest of the world" (May 25, 2006). In his remarks, Bush has variously described this ideology as "dark," "totalitarian," and "the opposite of our view of the world." But he places as much emphasis on the existence of this ideology as he does on what the specific beliefs of this ideology are. This achieves a rhetorical goal: "ideology" serves as an umbrella term that denotes institutional forces such as the Taliban as well as amorphous entities like terrorists or insurgents. By stressing that ideology unites these different parties, this rhetoric also calls forth the idea of a network. Just as an ideology is a system of ideas, so are the enemies in the war on terror a network of people who work methodically to destroy other systems of belief and governance.

This means that people must be on guard against the enemy even if the terrorists or their work is not visible. As Bush noted at Johns Hopkins University: Some view the [September 11th] attack as kind of an isolated incident. I don't. I view it as a part of a strategy by a totalitarian, ideologically based group of people who've announced their intentions to spread that ideology and to attack us again. (April 10, 2006)

The belief that the terrorist network is out there means that Bush must and can discern threats even when things appear calm. Bush argued that past foreign policy was reactionary and did not acknowledge festering problems. According to Bush, this outlook "provided a fertile ground for a totalitarian group of folks to spread their poisonous philosophy and recruit" (April 6, 2006).

The terrorists' membership in a network also suggests strategies used by the terrorists and those who fight them. One of the reasons the terrorists are dangerous is that they utilize their own network to infiltrate and weaken other networks. Bush observed that the members of al Qaeda "plot and plan . . . from the far reaches of the world. They're good at communications. They're good at deception. They're good at propaganda. And they're about to strike again" (April

6, 2006). The terrorists engage in their conflict by weakening networks such as cities or local governments. Discussing the city of Tal Afar, Bush noted that the terrorists “exploited a weak economy” and “skillfully used propaganda to foment hostility toward the coalition and the new Iraqi government” (March 20, 2006). Of the attack on the Golden Mosque, Bush noted, “By attacking one of Shia Islam’s holiest sites, they hoped to incite violence that would drive Iraqis apart . . .” (March 20, 2006). Terrorists understand and exploit human systems to advance their agenda.

In order to make these attacks, terrorists rely on their own networks to hide them. As Bush noted, “this kind of terrorist network that is ideologically bound needs safe haven. They need a place to hide. They need a symbiotic relationship with governments that will enable them to plot, plan and attack” (April 6, 2006). Those who oppose the terrorists must try to sever this network or, at the very least, not facilitate its work. Bush reminded an audience in January, “If you harbor a terrorist, you’re equally as guilty as the terrorists who commit murder” (January 23, 2006). By defining the enemy in terms of a network, Bush can rhetorically commit other countries to either supporting or fighting this network. While it is important to understand how terrorists use ideology to achieve their ends, it is also important for the president to construct an argument as to what motivates these terrorists. In Bush’s case it is simple: the terrorists’ ideology runs counter to “freedom” and “democracy.” “Why would they want to stop democracy?” Bush asked. He answered, “because democracy stands for the exact opposite of their vision. Liberty is not their credo. And they understand a defeat to their ideology by the establishment of a free Iraq will be a devastating blow for their vision.” (Bush, January 23, 2006). To put it simply, according to Bush, the terrorists “can’t stand freedom” (March 22, 2006).

Among the network of terrorists who share this ideology, Bush also spoke specifically of two people who cut more traditional figures as enemies: Saddam Hussein and Abu Musab al Zarqawi. As described by Bush, both of them participate in the terrorist ideology and network. Both of them are also easy to personify in frightening terms. It is worth mentioning, however, that he has not dwelled on the enemy figure of Osama bin Laden, other than naming him as a correspondent of al Zarqawi.

American morality is the final component of the rhetoric of imperial righteousness. The religious nature of the rhetoric is undeniable as it postures a

Christian ethic as right, both morally and politically. But the rhetoric also suggests that we look to what is good and socially responsible as an obligation of empire. Bush provided a generalization of this morality in a speech at Kansas State University noting that his optimism about the future is tied to the American ethic testifying that "I'm optimistic about our future, and the reason I am is because I believe so strongly in what America stands for: liberty and freedom and human rights, and the human dignity of every single person" (January 23, 2006).

One factor that demonstrates the moral fabric of the American cloak is its resolve in the cause of right. In the 2006 State of the Union Bush bluntly asserted, "The United States will not retreat from the world, and we will never surrender" (January 31, 2006). In March Bush reiterated this theme by stating, "The United States will not abandon Iraq... We will leave Iraq, but when we do, it will be from a position of strength, not weakness. Americans have never retreated in the face of thugs and assassins, and we will not begin now" (March 20, 2006). In terms of the vigilance of this resolve he continued by marking the obligation that the U.S. shoulders as a formidable superpower. He said, "Once again, we accept the call of history to deliver the oppressed and move this world toward peace. We remain on the offensive against terror networks" (Bush, January 31, 2006). As if to conjure the victory and make it appear, the mantra of victory is repeated. Bush said, "I am confident in our plan for victory, I am confident in the skill and spirit of our military. Fellow citizens, we're in this fight to win, and we are winning" (January 31, 2006). And at Kansas State University he said, "Look, this enemy cannot beat us. They cannot defeat us militarily. There's no chance" (Bush, January 23, 2006). Resolve is also used as a personal reference to Bush's own convictions. When the United Nations passed a resolution telling Saddam to "disarm, disclose, or face serious consequences," Bush remarked that "I'm the kind of fellow, when I - when we say something I mean it, like I told you before. And I meant it" (January 23, 2006).

The one element of morality that is evoked is the depiction of the soldier as hero and as the embodiment of the social responsibility that creates in America a sense of sacrifice and service. Bush frequently praises the armed forces for these sacrifices they make and "showing a sense of duty stronger than fear" (January 31, 2006). He believes that the heartening and inspiring sacrifices were worth it and that they are necessary, and also that there "will be more tough fighting ahead in Iraq and more days of sacrifice and struggle" (Bush, April 29, 2006).

Taking a cue from past State of the Union Addresses Bush read a letter from Marine Staff Sergeant Dan Clay who was killed in Fallujah. Sergeant Clay wrote: I know what honor is.... It has been an honor to protect and serve all of you. I faced death with the secure knowledge that you would not have to.... Never falter! Don't hesitate to honor and support those of us who have the honor of protecting that which is worth protecting." (Bush, January 31, 2006)

On the third anniversary of the beginning of the "Liberation of Iraq" Bush noted that "And it's a time to reflect. And this morning our reflections were upon the sacrifices of the men and women who wear our uniform. Ours is an amazing nation where thousands volunteer to serve our country" (March 19, 2006). One of the more moving tributes to the soldiers is from Bush's speech in Cleveland where he read a letter written by Mayor Najim of Tal Afar who called the American troops "lion-hearts" and spoke of a "friendship sealed in blood and sacrifice" (March 20, 2006). The letter continued:

To the families of those who have given their holy blood for our land, we all bow to you in reverence and to the souls of your loved ones. Their sacrifice was not in vain. They are not dead, but alive, and their souls are hovering around us every second of every minute. They will not be forgotten for giving their precious lives. They have sacrificed that which is most valuable. We see them in the smile of every child, and in every flower growing in this land. Let America, their families, and the world be proud of their sacrifice for humanity and life. (Bush, March 20, 2006)

This expression of gratitude lifted the American soldier to the status of liberator and guardian.

American leadership is another trait of the morality rhetoric found in imperial righteousness. Bush explained the value of our leadership by explaining that the "only alternative to American leadership is a dramatically more dangerous and anxious world. Yet we also choose to lead because it is a privilege to serve the values that gave us birth" (January 31, 2006). In the conclusion of the State of the Union Address he again discussed leadership as an American obligation. He said that America "has been called to leadership in a period of consequence. We've entered a great ideological conflict we did nothing to invite" (Bush, January 31, 2006). Bush then linked this leadership with the courage necessary to fulfill the mission thrust upon the United States. In the press conference with Blair, Bush again noted the socially responsible nature of America's courage. He closed the

State of the Union by reiterating the prediction of victory in the name of freedom, saying, "We will lead freedom's advance. And so we move forward - optimistic about our country, faithful to its cause, and confident of the victories to come" (Bush, January 31, 2006).

Bush also describes Americans as compassionate people who believe that every life counts and who want to make the world a better place. Bush believes that this belief system will contribute to world peace. Bush argued that the American philosophy, "that every person matters, that there are such things as human dignity and the basic freedoms that we feel, that becomes a huge catalyst for change for the better" (January 23, 2006).

Personally Bush's morality is guided by a strong sense of faith. When asked what sustained him he replied, "I would summarize it: faith, family, friends. I am sustained mightily by the fact that millions of citizens - pray for me. I guess it's just called faith" (Bush, January 23, 2006). Bush added that he believed in what he was doing and that he thought he was right. In the press conference with Blair, Bush said, "I strongly believe we did and are doing the right thing" in dealing with Saddam Hussein (May 25, 2006). A couple of moments later he reemphasized this by saying that "The decision to remove Saddam Hussein was right" (Bush, May 25, 2006).

Humility should also be a part of the American morality and while the saber rattling and boasting and threatening rhetoric may have its place, there is also a time to admit when plans went awry. Bush has never liked apology but when asked what regrets he had about the Iraqi situation he replied:

Saying, "Bring it on"; kind of tough talk, you know, that sent the wrong message to people. I learned some lessons about expressing myself maybe in a little more sophisticated manner, you know. "Wanted, dead or alive"; that kind of talk. I think in certain parts of the world it was misinterpreted. And so I learned from that. (May 25, 2006)

He continued, "And, you know, I think the biggest mistake that's happened so far, at least from our country's involvement in Iraq, is Abu Ghraib. We've been paying for that for a long time" (Bush, May 25, 2006).

In defining the rhetoric of imperial righteousness, three implications become apparent. First, the Bush administration uses the rhetoric of imperial righteousness to justify their policies to American and international audiences and to garner support for these policies. Second, the rhetoric of imperial

righteousness serves as a counterpoint to the terrorists' rhetoric that seeks to vilify American actions. The Bush administration uses this rhetoric to define America as an innocent and ethical party in world politics. While these implications are true of any administration's war rhetoric, there is a third implication that derives from the arguments used in the rhetoric of imperial righteousness. The use of universal terms such as freedom and democracy is a rhetorical device for unifying support for the administration's actions while defusing criticism. The premise that supports the use of these terms is the assumption that if one is against the war one must be against freedom and democracy. While some audience members support this premise, this rhetoric has a polarizing effect on both the American and international audiences. Others resent being placed rhetorically in the category of being against universal concepts such as freedom and democracy because they object to the war. The rhetoric of imperial righteousness thus helps explain the sharp division among Americans and the international community in support for the Bush administration's War on Terror.

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