

## **Genealogy, Ideology, and Counter-Terrorism: Writing wars on terrorism from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush Jr<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

*The construction of any kind of sustained political violence, including large-scale counter-terrorism campaigns, requires a powerful political discourse capable of enlisting widespread consent and subduing dissent. This paper examines the key features and characteristics of the discourse of George W. Bush Jr's second 'war on terrorism', in large measure by comparing it to the first 'war on terrorism' inaugurated by Ronald Reagan. I argue that the genealogical roots of Bush Jr's counter-terrorism policies can be found in the discursive constructions at the heart of Reagan's approach, and that both discourses are based on a similar ideological foundation and make the same appeals to formative American political narratives. The paper also argues that the Bush Jr. and Reagan 'wars on terrorism' have functioned in similar ways to structure overall foreign policy formation, write American identity, reflexively construct external threats, and discipline internal and external opponents. Finally, the paper argues that the war on terrorism discourse has a number of highly damaging political, practical and ethical-normative consequences.*

**Keywords:** *Language, Narrative, Discourse, Identity, Politics, Power, Counter-terrorism, War on Terrorism*

### **Introduction**

The American-led 'war on terrorism' enacted following the September 11, 2001 attacks is one of the most important international developments since the fall of the Berlin Wall. This massive counter-terrorism campaign has a great many important dimensions – military, intelligence, diplomatic, geo-political, legal, and economic, among others – which continue to receive a great deal of attention in the academic literature (see for example, Bacevich 2004; Boggs 2003; Booth and Dunne 2002; Callinicos 2003; Cole 2003; Hiro 2002; Mahajan 2003; Malik 2003; Rogers 2004; Scheuer 2005 – among others). Missing from many of these analyses is an appreciation of the discursive dimension of counter-terrorism; all projects of political violence, including counter-terrorism campaigns, require significant levels of social and political consent – which in turn necessitates a carefully constructed public

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communications strategy by policy officials. There is a relatively small but rapidly growing body of research on the language and discourses of terrorism and counter-terrorism (see Collins and Glover 2002; Croft 2006; Jackson 2005a; Jenkins 2003; Leeman 1991; Murphy 2003; Silberstein 2002; Zulaika and Douglass 1996). Unfortunately, with one notable exception (Winkler 2006), there are very few studies which compare the discursive dimensions of counter-terrorism between different American administrations. The purpose of this paper is to explore the genealogical roots and ideological foundations of the public discourse of the current 'war on terrorism', in large part by comparing it to the first 'war on terrorism' inaugurated during the Reagan era.

The methodological approach I have taken in this study falls broadly under the mantle of critical discourse analysis (see Chilton 2004; Jorgenson and Phillips 2002). This approach is at once both a technique for analysing specific texts or speech acts, and a way of understanding the relationship between discourse and social and political phenomena. Discourses are related sets of ideas employing a distinct arrangement of vocabularies, rules, symbols, labels, assumptions, narratives, and various forms of social action, which in turn dictate what it is possible to say and not possible to say about a certain subject, what counts as normal, what is seen as commonsense, and what is accepted as legitimate 'knowledge'. In the public policy context, discourses establish the parameters, possibilities, and interests of policy formulation. Importantly, discourses do not emerge from a vacuum; rather, they draw upon existing discourses and narratives which then shape them in important ways. This process is particularly noticeable in the case of political discourses. Policy elites draw heavily upon, and structure their language around, existing cultural-political narratives so that they will resonate with the wider community and engender political support. In large part, the key purpose of this paper is to identify the earlier narratives, vocabularies, symbols, and labels from the Reagan era that influence and structure the discourse of the present 'war on terrorism'.

The primary texts I examined for this research included more than 150 speeches, interviews, and other forms of public address given by senior members of the Reagan and Bush Jr administrations. These texts were a representative sample of several thousand official texts on the subject of terrorism and counter-terrorism for these two administrations. I examined each text for evidence of the broad ideological bases of the rhetorical claims made by the speaker, the existing cultural-political narratives they tapped into, and the ways in which the language they employed functioned to structure the meanings, logic, and potential policy responses to the events they described. I also attempted to uncover how the nature and

characteristics of the discourse functioned more broadly in the wider political and cultural spheres.

The overall argument I wish to make in this paper is fairly simple: the genealogical origins of the post-September 11, 2001 'war on terrorism' rests firmly in the discursive construction of counter-terrorism during the Reagan administration. That is, the Bush administration did not invent a whole new language and set of narratives to explain and legitimize its 'war against terrorism'; rather, it followed the structure and logic of the preceding Reagan-initiated 'war on terrorism'. Moreover, the discourses of both administrations functioned in similar ways to structure overall foreign policy formation, write American identity, reflexively construct external threats, and discipline internal and external opponents. Finally, in the conclusion, I argue that the discourse of the 'war on terrorism' is now embedded in American political and cultural life, and that this hegemonic discursive structure has a number of highly damaging political, practical and ethical-normative consequences.

### **Writing Wars on Terrorism: Ronald W. Reagan and George W. Bush Jr**

An examination of the Reagan administration's language of counter-terrorism demonstrates unequivocally that the current 'war on terrorism' is genealogically rooted in this earlier period of American counter-terrorism policy. There is an extraordinary level of replication and mimicry of the central themes and narratives in every important dimension of the overall discourse. Both administrations discursively constructed the terrorist challenge and the counter-terrorism response in largely identical ways, despite the vastly different contexts in which they operated and the nature of the security threat each faced. This strongly suggests that the first 'war on terrorism' was crucial for establishing the vocabulary and parameters of the subsequent second 'war on terrorism' discourse, a finding confirmed by other recent studies (see Winkler 2006).

Given the sheer size and complexity of the terrorism discourse – senior officials in each administration gave literally thousands of speeches and interviews on the subject – the following discussion is merely illustrative of the primary narratives and discursive constructions in the overall discourse. A more in-depth treatment can be found elsewhere (Jackson 2005a). Broadly, four main ideological themes or narratives are prominent in the counter-terrorism discourse of both administrations: the terrorism-as-war narrative; the terrorist threat narrative; the good Americans-evil terrorist narrative; and the 'good war' on terrorism narrative. I consider each narrative in turn. In the texts of official speeches quoted below, some words have been emphasized to indicate the basis of claims and analyses.

*The Terrorism-as-War Narrative*

One of the most significant characteristics of the public language of counter-terrorism in both the Reagan and Bush Jr administrations is that terrorist attacks against US interests have consistently been described as 'acts of war' rather than as criminal acts. This not only differs markedly from other states like the United Kingdom and Spain, where a war-based language of counter-terrorism is entirely absent, but it also has important political consequences. The Reagan administration introduced the 'terrorism-as-war' narrative into American counter-terrorism discourse when it began to describe high profile instances of anti-American terrorism pointedly as 'acts of war'. This represented something of a departure in counter-terrorism discourse, as previously acts of terrorism had most often been described simply as hijacking, hostage taking, assassination, bombings, killings, and the like (Zulaika and Douglass 1996). Speaking about the kidnapping of American citizens in Lebanon for example, Reagan declared that, 'Their acts of terror constitute a *declaration of war* on civilized society' (Reagan, 26 January, 1987); earlier he had stated that America 'would not tolerate what amounts to *acts of war* against the American people' (Reagan, 22 April, 1986).<sup>2</sup> In another speech, Reagan suggested that so-called 'terrorist states' – nations that sponsor terrorism – are 'now engaged in *acts of war* against the Government and people of the United States' (Reagan, 8 July, 1985). Secretary George Shultz echoed this formulation when he said that terrorism is 'not just criminal activity but *an unbridled form of warfare*' and that 'terrorism is being used by our adversaries as *a modern tool of warfare*' (Shultz, 25 October, 1984). Virtually every description of terrorism in the official speeches of the Reagan administration follows this same rhetorical pattern.

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, the Bush Jr administration articulated a very similar discursive construction, although with a slight variation in its chronological evolution. In the immediate aftermath, Bush Jr described them as 'deliberate and deadly *terrorist acts*' and 'despicable *acts of terror*' (Bush Jr, 11 September, 2001). Significantly, there was at first no mention of 'war'. However, in a discursive sleight of hand, the attacks were then rhetorically reborn in subsequent days as an 'act of *war*'. Bush Jr asserted that '*war has been waged* against us,' (Bush Jr, 14 September, 2001), and 'the wreckage of New York City' was 'the first *battle of war*' (Bush Jr, 15 September, 2001). Directly related to this, the victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks were reclaimed in a powerful discursive act as 'combat casualties' rather than 'terrorist victims'. Donald Rumsfeld achieved this by announcing that the members of the armed forces killed in the attack on the Pentagon would be given war medals:

They were *acts of war, military strikes* against the United States of America. As such, those Department of Defense employees who were injured or killed were *not just victims of terror*. They were *combat casualties* [...] [T]he members of the armed forces that were killed or injured in the September 11th attack on the Pentagon and on the World Trade Center towers will receive the Purple Heart. As you know, the Purple Heart is given to *those killed or wounded in combat* (Rumsfeld, 27 September, 2001).

This was a powerful symbolic act that remade the terrorist attacks as fully 'war' and the victims as 'casualties of war'. This discursive construction directly echoed Reagan's use of the term 'prisoners of war' to describe the American hostages in Lebanon in the 1980s (Wills 2003, 3).

These discursive renderings of terrorist actions as 'war' by Reagan and Bush Jr had two main consequences. First, it placed terrorism within a broader set of culturally embedded narratives surrounding America's historical experiences of war. This furnished officials with a range of powerful rhetorical resources and ensured that the administration's interpretation of the events would resonate deeply in a society raised on myths surrounding the 'war of independence', the 'greatest generation', winning the cold war, military heroes, and the like. Second, discursively reconstructing terrorist attacks as 'acts of war' functioned to justify a military-based rather than a criminal justice response, and conferred on the state all the extensive powers reserved for wartime; in effect, the public language worked to thoroughly normalize a military response for society – a 'war on terrorism' – and to transform the administration into a 'war presidency.' Interestingly, both administrations described terrorism as 'acts of war' regardless of the actual scale of the attack: Reagan's description referred to the kidnapping of a handful of Americans in Lebanon, while Bush Jr's identical language referred to a series of devastating attacks that killed 3,000 people. This illustrates how important language is to the construction of policy programmes, and how political actors, far from simply expressing rational and objective policy analysis, are actually engaged in a continuous and highly contentious process of cultural-political meaning construction.

#### *The Terrorism Threat Narrative*

Every counter-terrorism campaign since the time of Reagan has been characterized by a ubiquitous narrative of threat and danger in which the problem of terrorist violence is affirmed as urgent, dramatic, and without precedent. Reagan argued that 'In recent years, a very worrisome and alarming *new kind of terrorism* has developed' (Reagan, 26 April, 1984). Interestingly, every American administration since the mid-1960s has described the terrorist threat as 'new' and 'unprecedented' (Winkler 2006). This is neither accidental nor incidental;

the invocation of an exceptional threat confers powers on the state unavailable at other times. In addition to its construction as a 'new' threat, the Reagan administration rhetorically constructed terrorism as being of truly staggering proportions. In a speech to Congress for example, the president asserted that: 'The training and support of terrorist groups and activities by a number of countries has reached *alarming proportions*. In addition, the number of states now using terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy is both *increasing and highly disturbing*'; it 'has thus become a matter of *grave concern to national security*.' He went on to state that terrorism posed a '*growing threat* to our way of life', it had become 'a *frightening challenge* to the tranquility and political stability of our friends and allies', it was a '*growing source of danger* to us, our friends, and our allies', and was 'a *severe challenge* to America's foreign policy.' Even more than this, he concluded that terrorism posed an apocalyptic threat to 'all mankind' (Reagan, 26 April, 1984). Reagan also spoke frequently of the 'the *deadly menace* of international terror' (Reagan, 26 October, 1985) which posed a 'pervasive and insidious *threat to all free peoples*' (Reagan, 19 October, 1984). More than this, terrorism was described as 'a *unique threat* to free peoples,' 'a *threat to all of us*,' and 'an attack upon the world' (Reagan, 7 May, 1986).

Secretary Shultz directly amplified Reagan's language. He stated: 'The stakes in our war against terrorism therefore, are high,' largely because of 'the damage that terrorism threatens to wreak on our modern civilization.' He went on to add: 'The magnitude of the threat posed by terrorism is so great that we cannot afford to confront it with half-hearted and poorly organized measures,' and 'We cannot begin to address this *monumental challenge* to decent, civilized society until we clear our heads of the confusion about terrorism.' He ended his speech by arguing that 'We *should* be alarmed' as terrorism is 'a *threat to Western moral values*' (Shultz, 25 October, 1984). Inadvertently perhaps, Shultz reveals the purpose and function of this highly inflated language: the public should be alarmed and afraid, as terrorism threatens their way of life, their civilization, their moral values, their peace and tranquillity, and all people everywhere. By implication, any measure the government deems necessary in such an extreme emergency appears as reasonable, prudent, and commonsensical. Unchallenged by the media, this language established the parameters of subsequent counter-terrorism discourse (Winkler 2006), despite the reality that international terrorism killed less than a dozen Americans per year throughout the 1980s (Zulaika and Douglass 1996).

The discursive construction of the threat of terrorism in the Bush Jr administration, unsurprising in the light of the WTC attacks, employed a hyperbolic language of threat that directly echoed Reagan's earlier formulations. According to the administration, terrorism

posed not just a threat of sudden violent death to individual citizens, but a ‘threat to civilization’, a ‘threat to the very essence of what you do’ (Powell, 26 October, 2001), a ‘threat to *our way of life*’ (Bush Jr, 20 September, 2001), and a threat to ‘the peace of the world’ (Bush Jr, 29 January, 2002). The cold war notion of a ‘threat to our way of life’ vastly inflates the purported danger: instead of a tiny group of dissidents with resources that do not even begin to rival that of the smallest states, it implies that today’s terrorists are as powerful as the Soviet empire was once thought to be with all of its military resources. In addition, administration officials suggest that the threat of terrorism, like the threat of Soviet nuclear weaponry, is supremely catastrophic:

The attack on our country forced us to come to grips with the possibility that the next time terrorists strike, they may well... direct chemical agents or diseases at our population, or attempt to detonate a nuclear weapon in one of our cities. [...] [*N*]o *rational person can doubt* that terrorists would use such weapons of mass murder the moment they are able to do so. [...] [*W*]e are dealing with terrorists... who are willing to sacrifice their own lives in order to *kill millions* of others (Cheney, 9 April, 2003).

In other words, not only are Americans threatened by terrorists eager to kill millions, but this is a rational and reasonable fear to have; it is in fact, commonsensical. Americans should be very afraid of terrorists: ‘If they had the capability to *kill millions* of innocent civilians, do any of us believe they would hesitate to do so?’ (Wolfowitz, 4 October, 2001).

Bush Jr administration officials then went to great lengths to explain how the blood-thirsty terrorists are also highly sophisticated, cunning, and extremely dangerous. As John Ashcroft expressed it: ‘The highly coordinated attacks of September 11 make it clear that terrorism is the activity of *expertly organized, highly coordinated and well financed* organizations and networks’ (Ashcroft, 24 September, 2001). Moreover, this is not a tiny and isolated group of dissidents, but ‘there are *thousands of these terrorists* in more than 60 countries’ and they ‘hide in countries around the world to plot evil and destruction’ (Bush Jr, 20 September, 2001); or, like the story line of a popular novel: ‘Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world *like ticking time bombs*, set to go off without warning’ (Bush Jr, 29 January, 2002). In other speeches, officials deliberately inflated the numbers of the terrorists to ‘*tens of thousands*’ of killers spread throughout the world in a vast terror network.

Interestingly, both Reagan and Bush Jr conflated the threat of terrorism with certain hostile states that were also the focus of American foreign policy; this was a highly politicized but perfectly understandable discursive move. For example, referring specifically to the

phenomenon of ‘international terrorism’ (itself an appellation that vastly extends and amplifies the geographical threat of terrorism), Reagan argued that ‘*State-sponsored terrorism has increased dramatically in the last few years*’ (Reagan, 27 January, 1987), and ‘In recent years, there’s been a *steady and escalating* pattern of terrorist acts against the United States and our allies’ (Reagan, 8 July, 1985). He went on to argue that ‘Government-sponsored terrorism, in particular, cannot continue without *gravely threatening the social fabric of all free societies*’ (Reagan, 23 April, 1986). Importantly, the Reagan administration’s continued reference to ‘international terrorism’ and ‘state-sponsored terrorism’ constructs a terrifying vision of terrorism that is both vast and backed by the power of so-called ‘rogue’ or ‘outlaw’ states; this is crucial to both amplifying the danger and to conflating terrorists and enemy states. Conflating terrorism with certain states allows a ‘war’ on terrorism to be re-targeted at countries which are the focus of American interest – and which are much easier to attack than clandestine groups operating in the shadows and across borders. Related to this, Reagan and his senior officials referred frequently to ‘this network of terrorist states’, and a ‘confederation of criminal governments’ allied with terrorist groups in ‘the terrorist network’ (Reagan, 8 July, 1985). This added a note of conspiracy to a vision of dark agents of terror operating across the globe; the ubiquitous phrase, ‘the terrorist network’, echoed the title of Claire Sterling’s notorious and deeply alarmist book about the Soviet Union as the puppet masters of global terrorism (Sterling 1981). Her deeply flawed treatise was highly praised by Reagan, Alexander Haig, William Casey, and other senior Administration officials (Zulaika and Douglass 1996, 14; Herman 1982, 49-62).

Similarly, in the second ‘war on terrorism’ the threat of terrorism was from a very early stage reflexively conflated with the threat of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ and the ‘rogue states’ who might hand them on to terrorists. According to the official discourse, rogue states are apparently eager to assist terrorists in killing millions of Americans, just as the sponsors of ‘international terrorism’ were want to do in the 1980s. As Bush stated in his now infamous ‘axis of evil’ speech,

States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking *weapons of mass destruction*, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. *They could provide these arms to terrorists*, giving them the means to match their hatred (Bush Jr, 29 January, 2002).

This is actually an ingenious discursive sleight of hand which allows America to re-target its military from a war against a tiny group of individual dissidents scattered across the globe (an unglamorous and ultimately unwinnable war), to territorially-defined entities. Dick

Cheney explained it to his colleagues thus: 'To the extent we define our task broadly, including those who support terrorism, then *we get at states*. And *it's easier* to find them than it is to find bin Laden' (Quoted in Kampfner 2003, 156). Perhaps more importantly, it also allows for the simultaneous pursuit of geo-strategic objectives in crucial regions such as the Middle East, Central Asia, and Central America under the banner of the 'war on terrorism' (see Boggs 2003; Callinicos 2003; Mahajan 2003).

As measured by polling data, both the Reagan and Bush Jr administrations were highly successful in creating widespread public fear of terrorism and moral panics (see Zulaika and Douglass 1996, 6; Jackson 2005a, 162-3). Again, this shows that public political discourse is rarely an accurate reflection of reality: the same language of threat characterized two completely different threat environments – neither of which was (or is) particularly serious in comparison to other pressing issues like small arms proliferation, which kills half a million people per year, or global warming and global poverty which threatens millions more. More importantly, there are a great many tangible and intangible political benefits to be gained by promoting a 'politics of fear' (see Jackson forthcoming).

First, as David Campbell has eloquently shown, discourses of danger and foreign threat have been integral to constituting and disciplining American identity as practiced through its foreign policy (Campbell 1998). Collectivities, especially those as disparate and diverse as the modern state, can frequently only maintain unity through a common perception of external threat or danger. Historically, the American government has relied on discourses of threat and danger on numerous occasions – most often at times of social and political upheaval. Previous politically-generated public 'scares' include: the 'red scares' of the native Americans who threatened the spread of peaceful civilization along the Western frontier and the workers' unrest at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution; the 'brown scare' of fascism during World War II; the threat to the American 'way of life' during the cold war; the threat of 'rogue states' like Libya, Panama, Iran, North Korea, and Iraq; and the threats posed by the drug trade, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and now of course, the 'green scare' of 'Islamic terrorism'. These discourses of danger are scripted by political leaders for the purposes of maintaining inside/outside, self/other boundaries – they write American identity – and for enforcing unity on an unruly and potentially (dis)United States.

There are other more mundane political functions for constructing fear and moral panic, such as: provoking and allaying anxiety to maintain social quiescence; de-legitimizing expressions of dissent; elevating the status of security actors; diverting scarce resources into ideologically driven political projects; and distracting the public from more complex and

pressing social ills (see Edelman 1964; Glassner 1999; Hariman 2003; Jackson forthcoming). Related to this, stressing the unprecedented quality of the terrorist violence functions to legitimize unprecedented government measures; a 'new' kind of terrorism obviously necessitates a 'new' kind of counter-terrorism and the approbation of new kinds of legal and material resources.

This is not to say that terrorism poses no real threat; the dangers can plainly be seen in the aftermath of terrorist attacks in New York, Bali, Casablanca, Madrid, London, and elsewhere. Rather, it is to point out that dangers are those facets of social life *interpreted* as threats (in one sense, dangers do not exist objectively, independent of perception), and what is interpreted as posing a threat may not always correspond to the realities of the actual risk of harm. It is also to note that defining the threats facing a society is never an objective process, but is rather a highly charged and politicized process of 'reality' construction through the deployment of language. Illegal narcotics, for example, pose far less of a risk than the abuse of legal drugs, but a 'war on drugs' functions to make it otherwise. Similarly, the current 'war on terrorism' is a multi-billion dollar exercise to protect the United States from a danger that, excluding the September 11, 2001 attacks, has killed less Americans per year over the past three decades than bee stings and lightning strikes. Even in 2001, America's worst year of terrorist deaths, the casualties from terrorism were still vastly outnumbered by deaths from auto-related accidents, gun crimes, alcohol and tobacco-related illnesses, suicides, and a large number of diseases like influenza, cancer, and heart disease.

#### *The Evil Terrorists-Good Americans Narrative*

Notions of identity and national character – 'them' and 'us', 'friend' and 'enemy', 'good guys' and 'bad guys' – are ubiquitous during times of war. Moreover, it is common for public expressions of identity to appeal to pre-existing cultural narratives and myths. This is a deliberate ploy to both fix the meanings of events and ensure that the message will resonate with the wider society.

Both the Reagan and Bush Jr 'wars on terrorism' drew on a number of larger meta-narratives already deeply embedded in American political discourse and culture, most notably, the historic struggle of 'civilization' against 'barbarism.' This meta-narrative actually has a long genealogy in international relations (see Salter 2002), articulated recently in Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis and the new imperialism debate. In both popular culture and the official counter-terrorism discourse, terrorists function as 'the new barbarians', the epitome of savagery in the Western psyche (Zulaika and Douglass 1996,

156). Linguistically, this trope is achieved first of all through the natural functioning of the binary structure of language itself: employing the concept ‘civilization’ instinctively brings to mind the opposite concept, ‘barbarism’. Actually, in its textual usage in political and social conversation, the civilization-barbarism dichotomy has several layers of meaning. On one level it evokes images of menacing nomadic armies attempting to conquer Christian Europe. In the context of terrorism, it implies that ‘the behavior of these new “barbarians” is uncontrollably guided by the same cruel instincts that motivated some of the most infamous “barbarians” of past centuries, including Attila the Hun and the Mongol leader Genghis Khan’ (Llorente 2002, 41, 45). On another level, the civilization narrative is, for Americans at least, embedded in its foundational myths: ‘The myth represents American history as an Indian war, in which white Christian civilization is opposed by a “savage” racial enemy: an enemy whose hostility to civilization is part of its nature or fundamental character, an enemy who is not just opposed to our interests but to “civilization itself”’ (Slotkin, quoted in Sardar and Davies 2002, 190-91). In Freudian terms, we might say that the barbarians are representative of the id force: libidinous, irrational, violent, and dangerous. And on another related level, the civilized Western world is contrasted with the violent and barbaric Eastern world. According to Edward Said, it is a function of the way that our identity has been constructed; the Western person exists largely as a contrast with the ‘Oriental’ Other (Said 1978).

The Reagan administration made frequent reference to the civilization meta-narrative. Reagan stated that terrorism constituted ‘a declaration of war on *civilized* society’ and that America joined ‘with *civilized* countries in condemnation of terrorist outrages’ (Reagan, 26 January, 1987). In another speech, Reagan stated that ‘Arab nations themselves have been forced to endure *savage* terrorist attacks from this minority. We hope and pray the Arab world will join us to eliminate *this scourge of civilization*’ (Reagan, 23 April, 1986). Of course, the savage nature of the terrorists is visible in ‘their *cruelty*, the *viciousness* of their tactics’ (Reagan, 8 July, 1985), and their ‘*bestial* nature’ (Reagan, quoted in Wills 2003, 63). George Shultz was even more explicit. He argued that terrorists commit ‘acts of *brutality*’ upon ‘*civilized* society’, they ‘are *depraved* opponents of *civilization* itself’, and ‘terrorism represents a *return to barbarism* in the modern age’ (Shultz, 25 October, 1984). Such a formulation not only removes terrorists from the human community – they are quintessential ‘the enemies of all mankind’ (Reagan, 8 July, 1985) – but it also functions to de-politicize their motivations while simultaneously re-writing their actions as the expression of primitive savagery. Implicit within this formulation is the notion that rational political dialogue is impossible with terrorists; savages require control and suppression, not accommodation.

The second 'war on terrorism' followed an almost identical rhetorical path to Reagan's initial construction of terrorist identity. For example, the WTC attacks were immediately written as being symbolic of the eternal struggle between the forces of 'barbarism' and 'civilization'. The attacks of '9-11', as administration officials constructed them, drew 'a bright line of demarcation between *the civil and the savage*' (Ashcroft, 24 September, 2001), between civilized people and the terrorists that 'live on the *hunted margins of mankind*' (Bush Jr, 20 October, 2001), and between terrorism's values and the 'values that separate us from *animals* – compassion, tolerance, mercy' (Baker Jr, 23 September, 2001). This language was deliberately employed to mark a clear boundary between the self and the 'other'; at the same time, it functioned to essentialize the 'other' as belonging to the realm of nature rather than civilization.

Another meta-narrative frequently invoked in counter-terrorism discourse is the Manichean struggle between good and evil, a sub-plot of the civilization-barbarism narrative; official rhetoric invariably constructs terrorists as being motivated by 'evil' rather than any genuine political grievance or ideology. In the first 'war on terrorism', Reagan frequently referred to 'the *evil* scourge of terrorism' (Reagan, 17 October, 1985), and stated that 'terrorism is the preferred weapon of weak and *evil* men' such as the '*evil* man... Colonel Qadhafi' (Reagan, 15 April, 1986). He argued that the world needed to 'stamp out this ugly, *vicious evil* of terrorism' (Reagan, quoted in Wills 2003, 133). Importantly, Reagan's designation of the 'evil' of terrorism was both a deliberate rhetorical link to his notorious description of the Soviet Union as 'an *evil* empire' that was 'the focus of *evil* in the modern world', and a reflection of his fundamentalist Christian world-view. In the same evil empire speech, Reagan stated: 'There is *sin and evil* in the world, and we're enjoined by Scripture and the Lord Jesus Christ to oppose it with all our might' (Reagan, 8 March, 1983). In other words, in the discursively constructed world of ultimate good versus evil and *The Terror Network* controlled by the Soviet puppet-masters, 'evil terrorists' and the 'evil empire' were one and the same.

Bush Jr's ubiquitous use of the rhetorical trope of 'good and evil' directly echoed Reagan's initial formulation. Deeply embedded in American rhetorical traditions and religious life, this language functioned to essentialize the terrorists as satanic and morally corrupt. On the day of the WTC attacks, Bush stated that 'Today, our nation saw *evil*, the very worst of human nature' (Bush Jr, 11 September, 2001); in subsequent texts, he frequently referred to terrorists as 'the evil ones', and 'evildoers'. These are theological terms, deployed largely for a Southern conservative audience, but also appealing to popular entertainment understandings of 'good guys' and 'bad guys.' In this agent/act ratio, the character of the

terrorists precedes their actions: the terrorists did what they did because it is in their nature to do so – they murdered because that is what evil, demonic terrorists do (see Murphy 2003, 616).

Another rhetorical theme common to both ‘wars on terrorism’ is the purported linkage between international terrorism and international communism. This is made explicit throughout Reagan’s foreign policy speeches, and is taken up again by Bush Jr following September 11. For example, in describing his administration’s policy towards Latin America, Reagan stated that the two issues, ‘the march of freedom, especially in Central America, and the fight against terrorism – are directly related.’ This is because of ‘the strong ties of the Sandinistas to the international terror network’, and ‘the fact that the Sandinistas have been training, supporting, and directing, as well as sheltering terrorists’ (Reagan, 22 April, 1986). In another speech, he spelled out the implications of this link: ‘If the *Sandinistas* are allowed to consolidate their hold on Nicaragua, we’ll have a permanent staging ground for *terrorism*. A home away from home for Qadhafi, Arafat, and the Ayatollah – just 3 hours by air from the U.S. border’ (Reagan, 5 March, 1986). Similarly, in justifying the invasion of Grenada, Reagan referred to the close links between terrorism and communism. During the invasion, American troops found a warehouse:

This warehouse contained weapons and ammunition stacked almost to the ceiling, enough to supply *thousands of terrorists*. Grenada, we were told, was a friendly island paradise for tourism. Well, it wasn’t. It was a Soviet-Cuban colony, being readied as a major military *bastion to export terror* and undermine democracy. We got there just in time. [...] The events in *Lebanon and Grenada*, though oceans apart, are closely related. Not only has *Moscow* assisted and encouraged the violence in both countries, but it provides direct support through a network of surrogates and *terrorists* (Reagan, 27 October, 1983).

In other words, the ‘war against terrorism’ is an integral part of the war against communism.

Interestingly, the cold war meta-narrative itself was later employed by the Bush Jr administration to frame the post-September 11 struggle against terrorism. As Paul Wolfowitz stated in prepared testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee:

The American people breathed a sigh of relief when *the Cold War* ended a decade ago. [...] And there was a temptation to believe that this favorable circumstance was a permanent condition. On September 11th, America learned that it was not. [...] This threat is as great as any we faced during *the Cold War* (Wolfowitz, 4 October, 2001).

In this speech, Wolfowitz first links the terrorist attacks to the cold war in an opaque and indirect way. He draws a chronological line from the end of the cold war to the WTC attacks, thereby placing them in a single narrative structure. In addition, simply by mentioning the two events in such close proximity an association between them is formed. Next, Wolfowitz directly and explicitly compares the two conflicts, stating that they are different on one level, but the same on another – they are ‘just as dangerous’ as each other. Extraordinarily, he goes on to explicitly state that the attacks and the cold war pose a comparable level of threat: the threat posed by terrorism is equal to the threat of global nuclear annihilation at the height of the cold war. Moreover, just as the barbarism narrative suggests that terrorists are cruel, treacherous, and vicious, so the cold war framework paints them as totalitarians and soulless ideologues seeking to impose their ‘way of life’ on subject populations. As Bush spelled it out: ‘In this way *our struggle is similar to the Cold War*. Now, as then, our enemies are totalitarians, holding a creed of power with no place for human dignity’ (Bush Jr, 1 June, 2002). Here, in a direct echo of Reagan, Bush is saying that terrorists and communists are essentially the same kind of enemy and the ‘war on terrorism’ is just like the cold war. In one sense, Bush is re-deploying the old cold war argument in which the enemy is seeking to overthrow the American ‘way of life.’ In a discursive sense, ‘*terrorism* now occupies the place and function that *fascism* held in World War II and that *communism* held within the discourse of the cold war’ (Singh 2003, 173, original emphasis).

Another crucial element in the construction of the terrorist identity lay in the depiction of terrorists as basically inhuman and non-human. In this regard, terrorism was frequently described employing medical metaphors. For example, Reagan frequently referred to the ‘the *scourge* of terrorism’ (Reagan, 26 September, 1988), arguing that decent people must ‘unite to eradicate the *scourge of terror* from the modern world’ (Reagan, 15 April, 1986). In a hybrid formulation that combined the civilization narrative with a medical metaphor, Reagan described terrorism as both cancerous and infectious: ‘If we permit terrorism to succeed anywhere, it will *spread like a cancer*, eating away at civilized societies and spreading fear and chaos everywhere’ (Reagan, quoted in Wills 2003, 130). Shultz echoed this formulation when he stated that ‘Terrorism is a *contagious disease* that will inevitably spread if it goes untreated’ (Shultz, 25 October, 1984). The key functions of this vitriolic language of identity are to de-politicize, demonize, and de-humanize the terrorist enemy, and thereby normalize a policy of violent eradication. After all, the only way to effectively and sensibly deal with infectious disease or ‘evil’ is through physical and ritual purification.

The terrorist identity is similarly inscribed in the second ‘war on terrorism.’ Bush frequently spoke of the ‘*curse* of terrorism that is upon the face of the earth’ (Bush Jr, Powell, and

Ashcroft, 15 September, 2001), while Colin Powell, in a direct echo of Reagan, referred to 'the *scourge* of terrorism' (Powell, 26 October, 2001). This medical metaphor was restated even more explicitly by Rumsfeld: 'We share the belief that terrorism is a *cancer* on the human condition' (Rumsfeld, 7 October, 2001). Bush in turn, spoke of the danger to the body politic posed by 'terrorist *parasites* who threaten their countries and our own' (Bush Jr, 29 January, 2002). In this rhetorical construction, the terrorist was re-made as a dangerous organism that makes its host ill; they hide interiorly, drawing on the lifeblood of their unsuspecting hosts and spreading poison. This particular language is actually a precursor to the disciplinary idea of 'the enemy within'; terrorists are the new 'reds under the bed.' Of course, such 'an evil and *inhuman* group of men' (Baker Jr, 23 September, 2001), or these 'faceless enemies of human dignity' (Bush Jr, 21 May, 2003), are undeserving of our sympathy or protection. Moreover, with hoods on terrorist suspects actually become 'faceless.' While it would be wrong to treat an enemy soldier inhumanely, or torture a criminal suspect, the same cannot be said for a parasite or a cancer.

At the same time that terrorists were constructed as an evil and inhuman 'other', the language of counter-terrorism constructed Americans as possessing equally opposite (good) qualities. For example, Reagan frequently referred to 'the *will* of the American people, their *love* for freedom, and national *valor*' and claimed to 'speak for a *united* people.' Frequently, he ended his speeches with the words: 'We are Americans, We love our country, we love what she stands for, we will always defend her. We live for freedom' (Reagan, 22 April, 1986). In a similar vein, Reagan described the moral qualities of the American people: their 'well-known *likeability*, *patience*, and *generosity*'; 'we are an *easygoing* people, slow to wrath'; and Americans show 'no limits to their national *valor* nor their consuming *passion* to protect this nation's cherished tradition of freedom' (Reagan, 8 July, 1985). He went on to suggest that 'by nature we prefer to solve problems *peacefully*' (Reagan, 23 April, 1986). Furthermore, in regards to the necessity for a firm response to terrorism, 'the American people are of *one mind* on this issue' (Reagan, 22 September, 1986).

Bush Jr's second 'war on terrorism' closely followed Reagan's scripting of American identity. The first major discursive inscription of the American character comes early on at the Prayer and Remembrance Day service on September 14, 2001, just three days after the attacks. At this symbolically charged and constitutive pageant, Bush stated:

In this trial, we have been reminded, and the world has seen, that our fellow Americans are *generous* and *kind*, *resourceful* and *brave*. We see *our national character* in rescuers working past exhaustion; in long lines of blood donors; in

thousands of citizens who have asked to work and serve in any way possible. And we have seen *our national character* in eloquent acts of *sacrifice*. [...] In these acts, and in many others, Americans showed a deep *commitment* to one another, and an abiding *love* for our country. Today, we feel what Franklin Roosevelt called the warm *courage* of national *unity*. This is a *unity* of every faith, and every background (Bush Jr, 14 September, 2001).

Bush is here constructing a new world of clearly demarcated characters: where terrorists are cruel, 'the American people' are generous and kind; where terrorists are hateful, Americans are loving; where terrorists are cowardly, Americans are brave and heroic; and where terrorists hide and run, Americans are united. This highlighting and amplification is necessary to inscribe the essential qualities of insiders and outsiders, and plays through a movie-based mode of the simple opposites of 'good guys and bad guys.'

Related to this, both the Reagan and Bush Jr administrations frequently drew upon the 'innocent Americans' narrative in their counter-terrorism rhetoric. The construction of American casualties of terrorism or war as 'innocent' is a long-running feature of American political discourse: during the Reagan administration for example, the soldiers killed in the 1983 marine barracks bombing in Lebanon were recorded in official State Department records as 'innocent civilians' (see Livingston 1994). This is reflective of what Richard Hughes calls a 'cult of innocence' in American political discourse (Hughes 2003, 154). In this foundational myth, America emerges as an innocent child among nations, untainted by the finite dimensions of human history. As Reagan expressed it, 'The calendar can't measure America because we were meant to be an endless experiment in freedom, with no limit to our reaches, no boundaries to what we can do, no end point to our hopes' (Reagan, quoted in Hughes 2003, 155-6). Rooted in a rejection of history then – 'History is bunk', as the folk hero Henry Ford put it – American political discourse (and its counter-terrorism discourse in particular) has always sought to portray its motives as being free from self-interest or the *realpolitik* of foreign policy. In this sense, America genuinely believes itself to be 'innocent' of anything but pure motives and noble aspirations. By definition then, all victims of terrorism are 'innocent'; and through the natural functioning of language binaries, all terrorists are 'guilty'.

Officials in both administrations also made frequent reference to the ubiquitous hero narrative of American popular culture. Shultz for example, stated: 'I would like to salute the unsung *heroes* of the struggle against terrorism. These *heroes* are the intelligence analysts' (Shultz, 12 February, 1988). This construction placed the 'war on terrorism' in the mode of a

popular movie, and reinforced the identity of 'good' Americans fighting 'cowardly' terrorists in an epic struggle of good versus evil. In the end, constructing American identity in this manner works discursively to enforce discipline, suppress dissent, and circumvent criticism; if Americans are inherently 'good', their counter-terrorism wars are by definition 'good wars.' Similar to Reagan, Bush Jr's discourse also draws heavily on a 'hero' narrative modelled on popular entertainment scripts, where every story has a cast of heroes and villains. Rumsfeld, in a memorial service for the Pentagon victims, describes these all-American heroes:

We remember them as *heroes*. [...] 'He was a *hero* long before the eleventh of September,' said a friend of one of those we have lost – 'a *hero* every single day, a *hero* to his family, to his friends and to his professional peers.' [...] About him and those who served with him, his wife said: 'It's not just when a plane hits their building. They are *heroes* every day.' '*Heroes* every day.' We are here to affirm that (Rumsfeld, 11 October, 2001).

In one sense, this could be seen simply national therapy – a way of giving meaning and respect to the lives lost. However, in its ideological and discursive function, it is also the inscription of the heroic Americans who are the opposite of the cowardly terrorists; it is the rendering of America's soldiers who are risking their lives to fight for the Homeland, freedom, and the safety of decent folk.

The narratives of identity invoked in the name of counter-terrorism have three main functions. First, they facilitate and enable the violence of the war on terrorism itself. That is, destroying the human face of the terrorist, removing all traces of their personality and shared humanity, is essential to constructing the massive counter-violence of a 'war on terrorism.' After all, it would be far more difficult to bomb, torture, or hold in prison camps 'enemy combatants' who were seen as husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, and friends. There is in fact, an increasingly large literature detailing how dehumanization and demonisation by public officials is essential in constructing projects of political violence, and for enlisting popular support for violence against a politically-defined 'other' (see for example, Jackson 2004; Kaufman 2001; Wilmer 2002). The two 'wars on terrorism' are perfect examples of such processes at work. At the same time, the scripting of Americans as the opposite of terrorists and essentially 'good' is a means of reassurance: whatever Americans do is moral and right, because it is their nature to be good – even if on the face of it, the victims of October 7, 2001 and March 19, 2003 look strikingly similar to the victims of September 11, 2001.

Second, the language of identity sets the limits and parameters of actual counter-terrorism policy; it makes a whole range of options seem nonsensical while normalizing coercive-based strategies. The language of the 'evil terrorist' and the 'cancer of terrorism' in particular, functions to de-contextualize and de-historicize the actions of terrorists, emptying them of any political content, while simultaneously de-humanizing them. As a consequence, policies of negotiation or dialogue, or even social and political reform, are ruled out: there can be no reasoning or compromising with evil, no dialogue with parasites.

Third, the deployment of these narratives functions to inscribe national identity and maintain unity. David Campbell's influential thesis is that the realm of foreign policy, and particularly foreign adversaries, is enormously significant for 'writing' the nation's identity (Campbell 1998). He argues that foreign policy is critical for maintaining internal/external boundaries, and war (as a special form of foreign policy) plays a central role in maintaining the domains of inside/outside, foreign/domestic, self/other. Both Reagan and Bush Jr make appeals that attempt to unify the community and amplify its virtues; national character rather than national deliberation determine its actions. More than just identity maintenance then, the discourse of self and other in the rhetoric of counter-terrorism co-constitutes the political; it permits the state as practice. More recently, Carol Winkler has shown how the terrorism label, after decades of use by successive administrations and wide cultural usage, functions as a negative ideograph in American culture (Winkler 2006). That is, just as terms of popular political discourse like 'freedom', 'democracy', and 'human rights' function as positive markers of American culture, the term 'terrorism' functions negatively to brand unacceptable behaviour and define what America is *not*. In a sense, the enemy terrorist acts as the 'enabling other' of the citizenry – its negative justification (Weber 2002, 452).

#### *The 'Good War' on Terrorism Narrative*

Wars require a great deal of social and political consensus. Virtually every war that America has fought in the modern era has been justified and legitimized through appeals to the 'good war' narrative (see Lawler 2002). The two 'wars on terrorism' are no different, and both Reagan and Bush Jr scripted their wars specifically to fit within existing cultural-political narratives and just war doctrines. For example, Reagan legitimized the first 'war on terrorism' as justified and legal self-defense, stating that 'these terrorist states are now engaged in acts of war against the Government and people of the United States. And under *international law*, any state which is the victim of acts of war has *the right to defend itself* (Reagan, 8 July, 1985). This is the traditional means by which states assert their right to wage war – through an appeal to the rules and norms of international law; wars of aggression are by definition wrong, but wars of self-defense are fully justified. Shultz made

exactly the same claim: 'The terrorists are waging war against us. And we have *every right under international law* to defend ourselves. Part of that defense is to take the offense' (Shultz, 12 February, 1988). Interestingly, Shultz takes the argument a step further, suggesting that attacking other nations can be construed as part of a defensive posture. He goes on to assert a more profound moral right to militarily defend America against terrorism: 'There is no room for guilt or self-doubt about *our right to defend a way of life* that offers all nations hope for peace, progress, and human dignity' (Shultz, 25 October, 1984). There is an implicit recognition here that the wider international community may not accept such a broad legal argument for pre-emptive war, but nonetheless America has the right under Natural Law.

The discursive construction of counter-terrorism as legal and justified self-defense under notions of international law finds a direct echo in Bush Jr's second 'war on terrorism.' Under Secretary of State Marc Grossman, expressed it thus:

I believe that Security Council resolution 1368 that was passed on the 12th of September, offers all of the legal basis and requirement that we need, in addition to Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which is *the right of self-defense*. And we believe the United States was attacked on the 11th of September and that we have a *right of self-defense* in this regard (Grossman, 19 October, 2001).

Rumsfeld repeats this construction by appealing to the universal right of every nation to self-defense: 'there is no question but that any nation on Earth has *the right of self-defense*. And we do' (Rumsfeld, 28 October, 2001). In other words, the second 'war on terrorism', like the first, is a 'just war' because it is legally sanctioned by the authority of international law (Hurrell 2002, 188). Importantly, as the Reagan administration did earlier, the Bush Jr administration enshrined its right to pre-emptive or 'anticipatory' self-defense (the so-called Bush Doctrine) in the *National Security Strategy* of September 2002. This doctrine was then used to justify the attack on Iraq in March 2003.

A second discursive strategy for constructing counter-terrorism as the pursuit of the quintessential 'good war' is to define its purpose as nothing less than the pursuit of justice. As Reagan expressed it, the purpose of forceful counter-terrorism strategies was 'to see that the perpetrators of terrorist acts are brought to *justice*' (Reagan, 26 April, 1984). Speaking about the bombings and kidnappings in Lebanon, Reagan argued that the terrorists 'who directed this atrocity must be dealt *justice*, and they will be' (Reagan, 27 October, 1983). Similarly, Shultz argued that 'We have to go on the offensive to disrupt terrorist operations, destroy their networks, and *bring them to justice*' (Shultz, 12 February, 1988). This notion of

counter-terrorism as a form of 'justice' simultaneously fits both the just war narrative of having a proper *casus belli* (where revenge would not be a legitimate cause, for example), and American narratives of more rough and ready frontier justice (where swift retribution is viewed as necessary to maintaining order).

The second 'war on terrorism' is constructed in an identical mode. In Bush Jr's most famous formulation of the purposes of counter-terrorism, he stated that: 'Whether we bring our enemies to *justice*, or bring *justice* to our enemies, *justice* will be done' (Bush Jr, 20 September, 2001). In the same speech, Bush injected a religious element to the counter-terrorism cause: 'Freedom and fear, *justice* and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that *God is not neutral between them*' (Ibid). In other words, God is on the side of 'justice'; America is bringing 'justice'; therefore, by definition, God is on America's side. In part, it is this assertion of universal values and divine calling that led the Bush administration to initially call the Afghan campaign 'Operation Infinite Justice'; more than simply a slip of the tongue as it was later claimed, it was the logical choice in the construction of a quintessential just war. On another level, framed in the language and symbolism of the American frontier (note the use of Wanted Dead or Alive posters and bounties, the 'Most Wanted Terrorists' featured on the popular television program *America's Most Wanted*, and Bush's cowboy boots), the campaign in Afghanistan to 'smoke them out of their holes' (Bush Jr, Powell, and Ashcroft, 15 September, 2001) also fits easily into America's rich mythology of redemptive frontier violence.

Another essential element in the construction of a good and just counter-terrorist war is to fix it as inherently achievable; despite the long historical record of governmental failure in counter-terrorism, a 'war on terrorism' must be presented as immanently winnable. The Reagan administration was always clear about the ultimate outcome of the struggle: 'Human liberty will prevail and civilization *will triumph* over this cowardly form of barbarism' (Reagan, 18 June, 1984). Similarly, Shultz affirmed that he was 'convinced that if the American people and our allies support our policy, *we will succeed*. Terrorism will ebb. And *humanity will be saved*' (Shultz, 12 February, 1988). The second 'war on terrorism' was constructed no less emphatically from the very first day: 'we stand together to *win the war* against terrorism' (Bush Jr, 11 September, 2001). Furthermore, in addressing the final outcome of the war, the grammatical form is always unequivocal: '*we will win this conflict* by the patient accumulation of successes' (Bush Jr, 7 October, 2001); 'We will fight for as long as it takes, and *we will prevail*' (Bush Jr, 24 November, 2001); 'And on the home front, terrorist violence must be prevented, and must be defeated. And *it will be*' (Bush Jr, 29 November, 2001). In fact, when asked about the length of the war – a direct reference to the chances of winning in a

reasonable period of time – Bush replied: ‘People often ask me, how long will this last? This particular battlefield will last as long as it takes to bring al Qaeda to justice. It may happen a month from now; it may take a year or two. But *we will prevail*’ (Bush Jr, 11 October, 2001). There is no question about the outcome, even if the timeframe is a little vague. In this case, the certainty of victory rhetorically overwhelms the uncertainty over the length of the campaign; the end result – triumph – is more important than the time it takes to get there.

A final element in the rhetorical construction of America’s good ‘wars on terrorism’ lies in the constant rhetorical links to America’s historic calling, or America’s ‘exceptionalism’, which in turn is based on the universal values that America embodies. As Reagan expressed it: ‘As a world power, the United States bears *global responsibilities* from which we must not shrink in the face of cowardly attempts at intimidation’ (Reagan, 19 October, 1984). For Reagan, America’s responsibilities are due in part to the fact that America is ‘a country that remains a *shining city on a hill*’ (Reagan, 8 July, 1985). On one level, this is another deeply religious metaphor, evoking the images of heaven, the New Jerusalem, and the shining light of Christian faith that should not remain hidden. Shultz reiterated these constructions when he argued that ‘We must not abandon... *our role in the world, or our responsibilities* as the champions of freedom and peace.’ He went on to boldly assert that ‘the United States has a *special responsibility*’ (Shultz, 25 October, 1984). Again, like Reagan, Shultz based his belief in America’s special responsibility on the fact that America possesses ‘a way of life that offers *all nations* hope for peace, progress, and human dignity’ (Ibid). In large part, this language taps into the deeply held (and deeply religious) American myths of manifest destiny, Nature’s Nation, the Chosen Nation, and ‘American exceptionalism’ (see Hughes 2003). These beliefs are embedded in American political life and are discursively reflected in the Great Seal of the United States; in this potent symbol, God’s eye looks down on the new order being built while the Latin inscription simply states: ‘*annuit coeptis*’ – ‘he (God) has favoured our undertaking.’

Reagan’s rhetorical construction of America’s counter-terrorism responsibilities are again replicated in the second ‘war on terrorism’, although in this case they are even more explicitly encumbered with a sense of divine calling. Like the ‘indispensable’ role of America in defeating nazism in World War II and communism in the cold war, Bush Jr’s ‘war on terrorism’ is painted as a moral obligation for the world’s remaining superpower which cannot be shirked. Bush Jr suggested that America had in fact, been given a specific responsibility by History to lead the campaign against the evil of terrorism: ‘[O]ur *responsibility to history* is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil. [...] [T]he commitment of our fathers is now *the calling of our time*’ (Bush Jr, 14 September, 2001). The theme of a

'responsibility to history' was extended by Cheney's formulation: 'The government of the United States has a *moral duty* to confront those threats, and to do whatever it takes to defeat them. And as the leading power, we have a *further responsibility* to help keep the peace of the world' (Cheney, 9 April, 2003). In this language, the responsibility to history has been transformed into a 'moral duty', which in part, flows from the natural responsibility placed on the world's leading power.

Bush Jr's 'war on terrorism' then, is not just a quest for justice or a national security issue; it is rather a moral responsibility, an obligation – a 'calling.' Bush Jr himself stated: 'The advance of freedom is more than an interest we pursue. It is a *calling* we follow' (Bush Jr, 21 May, 2003). Crucially, as one commentator notes, 'The word "calling", with its theological overtones as well as its Weberian connotations, attaches a redemptive cast to counterterrorism' (Troyer 2002). In fact, it could also be argued that the 'calling' of the 'good war on terrorism' is a direct outcome of the earlier discursive foundation laid by the circular ontology of the 'evil' discourse: '[B]ecause 'terrorists' are evil, America is good and virtuous; the "Axis of Evil" implicitly positions the US and its allies as the "Axis of Good". But this is not simply a binary opposition: the ontological element, the nature of American being, makes America *only* good and virtuous. It is a small step then to assume that you are chosen both by God and history' (Sardar and Davies 2002, 198, original emphasis). The official discourse therefore leaves no doubt that America is duty bound to once again save the world from evil.

In addition to a sense of historic calling, the second 'war on terrorism' also invested the counter-terrorism campaign with a sense of divine calling and divine sanction. The repeated (and often retracted) references to the counter-terrorist war as a 'crusade', which was for a short time called 'Infinite Justice', discursively renders it a religious war – even a holy war (Morris 2002, 152). The writing of a good (and holy) 'war on terrorism' actually began just a few days after the terrorist attacks, on September 14, 2001. This date was declared a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance by the President and a service of remembrance for the victims was held at the National Cathedral in Washington – a national symbolic site where government, religion, culture and the military coalesce (Silberstein 2002, 40). Here, in a powerful rhetorical turning point, the potent symbolism of the location and the ritualism of the service combined with the words of respected religious leaders and the President to construct a thoroughly religious conception of the coming counter-terrorist war. After the military's presentation of the colours, all of the religious dignitaries – Dean Baxter, Reverend Caldwell, Imam Dr Siddiqi, and the Reverend Dr Billy Graham – echoed Bush's language of 'evil' in their prayers for the nation.

When it was time for the President to speak, Bush Jr began by commemorating the victims and assuring the nation of God's continued favour. Then, at the crucial moment, he said, 'War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder' and as a consequence, America's 'responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and *rid the world of evil*'. In the context of the site of the speech (the National Cathedral), the occasion (A National Day of Prayer), and the military ritualism (the presentation of the colours), this was a powerful call to arms. It was a call to divinely sanctioned war – a crusade against evil. Bush Jr ended his address by invoking God's blessing on the nation and asking God to watch over and guide America in its task. He fortified the appeal by quoting directly from scripture:

On this national day of prayer and remembrance, we ask almighty God to watch over our nation, and grant us patience and resolve in all that is to come. [...] As we have been assured, neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, can separate us from God's love. May He bless the souls of the departed. May He comfort our own. And may He always guide our country. God bless America (Bush Jr, 14 September, 2001).

The discursive act of divine sanction for a kind of holy war against evil was then subtly reinforced by the singing of the final hymn, 'Battle Hymn of the Republic'. The opening stanza potently underlined Bush Jr's central message:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored,  
He hath loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword,  
His truth is marching on.

In a sense, Bush Jr was claiming the mantle of God's sword; America would march out to bring God's swift justice to the evildoers. Through the combination of language, religious symbolism and ritual, he appealed directly to the beliefs of millions of American evangelical Christians and imbued the second 'war on terrorism' with God's blessing and a divine sanction. Ironically, in doing so, Bush Jr reflectively mimicked the language of Osama bin Laden's initial call for holy war against the United States (see Lincoln 2003).

As before, the primary political purpose of this language is to build support for the campaign and circumvent opposition. By establishing the 'war on terrorism' as an essentially good and just war through its association with popular narratives of America's historic role in World War II for example, it makes any criticism of the war appear disloyal and immoral. A

secondary purpose of the discourse is to reaffirm American identity as ‘the exceptional nation’, or ‘God’s chosen nation’.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have attempted to sketch out the key narratives and ideological foundations of the Bush administration’s ‘war on terrorism’ through an exploration of its genealogy in the Reagan administration’s counter-terrorism approach. I have also endeavored to highlight the ways in which language and narrative functions ideologically in pursuit of a range of distinctly political goals. A more detailed analysis of the ‘war on terrorism’ discourse than has been presented here would also reveal that the discourse is notable for its highly gendered and patriarchal language and imagery (see Enloe 2002; Jackson 2005a; Tickner 2002), its hybridity and intertextuality (see Croft 2006; Jackson 2005a), its reflexivity in following long established interpretive dispositions (see Campbell 2002; Zulaika 2003), and its glaring gaps and silences regarding the history, context, and politics of America’s successive ‘wars on terrorism’ (see Jackson 2005a).

More importantly, however, a more detailed analysis would reveal how powerful the discourse of terrorism has become in American society (and across many other western societies), and how it is now the hegemonic ideological framework for American foreign policy. Evidence of the power of the discourse can be seen in the way in which the entire political establishment, including the opposition Democratic Party, has accepted the broader ideological framework of the ‘war on terrorism’ and employs exactly the same public language – even while it disputes some of the specific tactics adopted by the Bush administration (Jackson 2005a, 160-1; see also Leeman 1991). It can also be seen in poll data on public attitudes towards terrorism and counter-terrorism which replicate official rhetoric (Jackson 2005a, 162-4), and the way in which the administration repelled the challenge from the ‘no blood for oil’ discourse in the lead-up to the attack on Iraq in March 2003 (see Croft 2006).

Crucially, the power of the discourse can also be measured by the extent to which its language, assumptions, narratives, and ideological dispositions have now been institutionalized across the political establishment – in new government agencies and departments, legislation, operating procedures, strategies, programmes, action plans, reports, debates, and countless other bureaucratic and political processes; and the way the discourse has become embedded into the broader culture – through daily security measures in virtually all areas of life, news and entertainment, religious life, the academy, retail, and daily conversation. All of these texts and practices – all of this discourse – is now so

embedded in the cultural and political landscape that most people remain unaware of its significance and may no longer even notice its presence at the conscious level, which is the ultimate measure of its hegemonic power.

Unfortunately, the dominance of the terrorism discourse is not without consequence. From an ethical-normative perspective, events like the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, the practice of 'extraordinary rendition', the killings at Haditha, and the shooting of Charles des Meneses, demonstrate how narratives of evil, inhuman terrorists and terrorist threat can result in the normalization and wider social acceptance of systematic human rights abuse (see Jackson 2005b). Politically, it can be argued that the 'war on terrorism' discourse is proving to be damaging to the functioning of the democratic state, not least because the moral taxonomy of the good versus evil construction is extremely corrosive of democratic politics as it undermines the possibility of a loyal opposition (Aune 2003, 520). Finally, from a practical policy perspective, the core of the discourse relies on an approach to counter-terrorism that has historically proved to be of limited effectiveness, and through the privileging of some forms of knowledge over others, excludes other potentially more effective counter-terrorist strategies while simultaneously making the problem of terrorist violence even worse (see Rogers 2004). In particular, it seems obvious that the moral absolutism at the heart of the discourse induces a form of political amnesia about the importance of political dialogue, winning hearts and minds, and political reform as more effective counter-terrorism strategies, for example (Campbell 2002).

In the final analysis, if these and other dangers are to be avoided, scholars and citizens must first reclaim the right to question and debate the profound policy issues that lie at the heart of any 'war on terrorism', and must challenge the normative and ideological foundations of counter-terrorist violence. In large part, such an engagement with hegemonic power will only be possible when the deconstruction of the discursive straightjacket we are currently trapped within begins in earnest.

## Notes

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2. The full date of all speeches quoted in this article are provided in the in-text reference. The speeches of each politician are then ordered by chronologically in the bibliography.

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