



5-14-2013

"Terrorism" in the Age of Obama: The Rhetorical Evolution of President Obama's Discourse on the War on "Terror"

Kelly Long

Follow this and additional works at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj

 Part of the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Long, Kelly. (2013). "Terrorism" in the Age of Obama: The Rhetorical Evolution of President Obama's Discourse on the War on "Terror". In *BSU Honors Program Theses and Projects*. Item 10. Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/10
Copyright © 2013 Kelly Long

<Terrorism> in the Age of Obama:
The Rhetorical Evolution of President Obama's Discourse on the War on <Terror>

Kelly P. Long

Submitted in Partial Completion of the Requirements for
Commonwealth Honors in Communications Studies

Bridgewater State University

May 14, 2013

Dr. Jason Edwards, Thesis Director
Dr. Maria Hegbloom, Committee Member
Dr. Jessica Birthisel, Committee Member

<Terrorism> in the Age of Obama:

The Rhetorical Evolution of President Obama's Discourse on the War on <Terror>

Since September 11th, 2001, the word <terrorism> has helped to shape and been shaped by the culture of the American people who have come into contact with this concept on a daily basis. The use of <terrorism> and its companion the War on <Terror> carried with it certain ideological baggage that has served as a prism in which the American people have viewed United States' foreign affairs over the past decade. The fight against <terrorism> offered a pre-text for the U.S. to engage in two different wars, administered a policy of hunting and killing <terrorists> across the globe, constructed policies that limited civil liberties, and articulated a vision of America's new role will be during the 21st century.

<Terrorism> is an example of what rhetorical scholars call an ideograph, which is a high order abstraction found in everyday language used in political discourse which warrants the use of military, legislative, or financial power, excuses behavior and belief that might otherwise be considered eccentric or anti-social, and guides behavior, principles, and positions. An ideograph is also transcendent in nature – “having as much power and influence over the ruler as it has on the ruled” (McGee, 1980). In order for the call to collective commitment to be successful, the individual using the ideograph is equally as invested in its definition as the general public who chooses to align its ideologies with it.

Scholars within the field of rhetorical studies have used ideographs to explore a number of different subjects, trying to ascertain the ideological baggage, which serves as intellectual support for specific ideas and policies. More specifically, ideographs have been used by rhetorical scholars to examine how American presidents use them in U.S. foreign policy discourse. Carol Winkler (2006) explored how <terrorism> had been used by presidents since

World War II. Winkler concluded that in the post-World War Era, two distinct and separate ideologies had formed in the ways that Democratic and Republican presidents used <terrorism> differently. Democrats understand the issue of combating <terrorism> in the context of the justice system: <terrorism> is a criminal act that should be dealt with through means of police enforcement and punishable by judicial trial, sentencing, and punishment. Republicans construct <terrorism> in terms of a stark Manichean logic. In its role as world leader, the United States must prosecute <terrorism> to ensure its survival not only because it is a part of the larger battle of good versus evil, but also to reinforce the global order America has helped to construct over the past seventy-five years. President George W. Bush extended this Republican use of <terrorism> by using it to usher in a greater unilateral foreign policy when compared to previous administrations, while uniting the nation and the world against a common ideological enemy. Facing this foe would mean two of the longest and most expensive conflicts in U.S. history.

When President Obama entered office he inherited this rhetorical ideograph. Under President Bush, however, American foreign policy and global reputation had been badly damaged by the increase in unilateralism and its overall War on <Terror>. Despite this, President Obama pledged during the 2008 presidential campaign to continue America's fight against <terrorism>. This study attempts to answer the question: How did President Obama use <terrorism> in putting forth his foreign policy agenda? To answer this question, I begin by providing a theoretical overview of presidential rhetoric and ideographs. Then, I examine the first two years of President Obama's foreign policy rhetoric to determine how <terrorism> was employed by the administration. I take each year on its own merits because each year came with different exigent challenges. I end with some conclusions regarding President Obama and

ideographs and the implications of his <terrorist> rhetoric in shaping his foreign policy agenda, along with some suggestions for future research

Literature Review: Presidential Rhetoric and Ideographs

The president is the most important political actor in America's political system. Denton and Woodward (1990) noted the presidency is "an office, a role, a persona, constructing a position of power, myth, legend, and persuasion. Everything a president does or says has implications and communicates something.' Every act, word, or phrase becomes calculated and measured for a response" (pp. 199-200). No political topic is left untouched by a modern president, particularly as it relates to American foreign policy and effects our global reputation. In foreign affairs, the president's power is at its apex, partly because of his constitutional mandate to lead. According to Article II of the Constitution, the president is the "commander and chief" of the armed forces, which offers him a natural leadership position within international relations. Moreover, he is the primary agent that negotiates treaties with other nations, as well as appoints all ambassadors and members of America's foreign policy staff, which allows him to have the foremost information and resources available to deal with U.S. foreign policy (see Ambrose, 1991-92; McCrisken, 2003; Schonberg, 2003).

One of the key resources for any president is his use of language. Neustadt (1990) asserted one of the true powers of the presidency is to persuade, even in a fragmented, mediated environment that we have today. Tulis (1987) argued the presidency has become a rhetorical institution. Presidents use rhetoric to rally support for principles, positions, and policies. The president's rhetorical power is matched by no one within the political arena. For Tulis, this power "is not only a form of communication, but it is a way of constituting the people to whom it is addressed by furnishing them with the very equipment they need to assess its use—metaphors,

categories, concepts of political discourse” (pp. 203). Presidential rhetoric offers audiences with “equipment” to understand the political landscape around them.

This equipment for understanding the political landscape is even more prominent in U.S. foreign affairs because it is through rhetoric that presidents demonstrate leadership, shape public perceptions about issues, and instruct audiences about places, issues, and situations (see Bostdorff, 1994; Campbell & Jamieson, 2008; Stuckey, 2004). Most Americans have little to no understanding of the issues and threats the United States faces in the international arena. Presidential rhetoric can offer a sense of order for a world that appears disorderly. Thus, rhetoric becomes a primary instrument for presidential foreign policy. One of the ways in which president convey that sense of order, inform the public, and help Americans understand foreign affairs is by using the rhetorical application of ideographs.

Ideographs are high-order abstracts, which are often terms, phrases, and images central to political ideology. According to McGee (1980) an ideograph is “an ordinary language term found in political discourse...representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal that warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief that might otherwise be seen as eccentric or anti-social, and also guides behavior and belief” (pp. 15). In other words, ideographs have different functions and meanings for different demographic groups – racial, regional, religious, financial, gender, or generation – at different times in history across contexts. Those functions and meanings hold unique symbolic qualities that summarize prevailing attitudes and characteristics of a particular community. For example, <equality> is an ideograph that may hold different meanings for different groups over time and space. In 1896, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) ruled in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* that separate spaces were equal in terms of resources and quality of schooling (Hasian & Condit, 1996).

Although the term separate but <equal> was coined from Plessy vs. Ferguson, the reality was that African-American children had far less access to <equal> educational opportunities and codified segregation as a legal means to separate the races and disempower African-Americans. In 1954, SCOTUS reversed the separate but <equal> doctrine in Brown vs. the Board of Education. The Court argued the only possible way to achieve the goal of <equality> was to fully integrate public school systems. <Equality> as defined in Brown vs. Board of Education was the first means in the larger movement to desegregate public institutions within the United States. The ideograph of <equality> demonstrates how ideographs can provide different understandings of political precepts over time, while also offering intellectual support for specific policies and ideologies that can fundamentally alter a political culture.

Ideographs can be analyzed in either a synchronic or diachronic fashion. Synchronic analysis is analogous to a snapshot or “vertical” approach because the rhetorical critic is attempting to capture how that specific instance of an ideograph is being used at a singular point in time and its potential immediate effects. For example, Amernic and Craig (2004) explored Southwest Airlines (SWA) letter to shareholders following the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. Their analysis produced “an example, in the extreme case of...cultural ideographs being appropriated to serve corporate ends” (pp. 327). Specifically, Amernic and Craig asserted SWA utilized the <Let’s Roll> allegory of Todd Beamer of United Airlines’ Flight 93 to imply that “SWA is an American (in the same manner as Todd Beamer) with ‘iron character’, ‘unquenchable spirit’, and ‘inspiring altruism’” (pp. 332). In other words, <Let’s Roll> symbolized the character of Southwest Airlines in that moment and time.

Analyzing ideographs diachronically works by sampling how a specific ideograph is used over a range of time, assessing its potential evolution within contemporary culture (e.g. the

<equality> example from earlier). For instance, Towner (2010) examined the apologia rhetoric of the top selling country music group the Dixie Chicks. In 2004, the Dixie Chicks caused a media firestorm by criticizing President Bush concerning his prosecution of the War on Terror. Towner analyzed how the Dixie Chicks used the ideograph <patriotic>. He concluded that over time the use of <patriotic> by the Dixie Chicks came to mean multiple ideas including the “exercise of <free speech>, <patriotic> as questioning/dialogue, <patriotic> as a voice of dissent, and <patriotic> as love for America” (pp. 302). While their use of the ideograph <patriotic> divorced the band from their hardcore country fans, it introduced them to larger American and global publics, skyrocketing them to greater success than before.

Scholars have used ideographs to study a number of rhetorical artifacts. For example, one such focus has been on the ideographic power of images acting as symbols which hold the same weight as the ideographs used to describe the visuals. Although the artifacts that this study will be reviewing are strictly textual, seeing another method of demonstration is useful in broadening the interpretive understanding for creative analysis. This perspective also emphasizes the overall goal of the ideographic image in a snapshot format, almost literally, which prioritizes the ends over means, hoping that the image is effective immediately and lastingly. Mark P. Moore (1996) analyzes how “opposing synecdochic constructions of the cigarette, as a threat to life by the anti-smoking groups and as a threat to liberty by the tobacco industry” (pp. 47) take on a life of their own and assume the role and characteristics of an ideograph. This topic came out of the argument that both sides of this coin toss are built upon social and personal narrative as well as scientific experimentation and data collection in ways that maintain and provoke controversy while recasting the cigarette in the role of a threatening force to both <life> and <liberty>, somehow simultaneously. Edwards and Winkler (1997) explore how the manipulation

of the famous Iwo Jima image in editorial cartoons serves an ideographic function by means of transformation of meaning. By altering the flag, soldiers, terrain, and background of the original photograph and substituting, eliminating, or adding elements concerning the issue at hand, the intended message of the picture adjusts in content, clarity, and impact. “Images used strategically in the public sphere reflect not only beliefs, attitudes, and values of their creators, but those of the society at large” (pp. 289). Another notion that the article proposes which requires further research is the distinction between and melding of icon and ideograph, and the relationship between their uses and audiences (pp. 304). The main difference that sets images apart from speech, however, is that discourse is a process that is articulated over time, facing constant critical analysis, interpretation, and debate which is a slower method of ideographic construction.

Another important area of ideographic analysis considers social justice issues can either make or break the progress and determine the success or failure of a movement. It is critical that the group responsible for the birth of the ideological opposition to the status quo utilizes each opportunity to the best of its rhetorical abilities to justify the course of action it is planning or taking, warrant the means to reach that goal, and hopefully sway attitudes towards its cause in a sympathetic direction. For example, during the New York City Young Lords’ Church Offensive of July 26th, 1969, the community of young Puerto Ricans was faced with a challenge of stating their plight, conveying their perspective with a sense of urgency, and excusing their behaviors in order to come out as social justice heroes rather than a group of rebel anarchists (Enck-Wazner, 2012). By illustrating that the local church was not serving the community even in their time of need, it implied necessity and righteousness in the takeover of the church, an incident which lives on, for the site is still called “The People’s Church” as the Young Lords renamed it during its time as their community center (Enck-Wazner, 2012). However, sometimes, creating a

common identity is all that is necessary to generate feelings of empowerment throughout a community with shared background, as was the case in the Chicano people's movement, during which the merger of Mexican and American ideology was discovering itself, and it was able to call the people to unite under a common banner of terms including <Chicano>, <La Raza>, and <Aztlán> (Delgado, 1995, 450).

Ultimately, ideographs have proven to be an effective means of examining a number of different rhetorical subjects. Pertinent to this study is how political leaders have used ideographs to advance their causes. For example, Althouse and Kuypers (2009) asserted John Pym, a member of the English House of Parliament during the reign of King Charles I, was able to enact legislation that would restrict the powers of both the royal throne and the church's influence over Parliament. His appropriation of the ideographs <law>, <religion>, <justice>, and <Parliamentary Privilege> led the way to reviving democracy in the House of Commons. These ideas would later prove influential in underwriting Anglo-American liberalism that would emerge in the American colonies over one hundred years later.

Fast forward three hundred years later to contemporary England where British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher used the ideograph <terrorism> as a key factor in casting the situation within Northern Ireland as an <epic tragedy>. The juxtaposition of these ideographs allowed her to finagle an excuse to her censorship of the media coverage over her campaign against Irish Republican Army (IRA) terrorists, while also created the symbolic groundwork to allow severe restrictions be put upon other civil liberties (Parry-Giles, 1995). By providing a state of necessity, she was able to get the public to accept her actions, even get them to ideologically align themselves with her prosecution of Britain's terror fight against the IRA in

the 1980s, demonstrating their collective commitment in a situation where normally her policies would have been viewed as dictatorial and tyrannical.

The <terrorism> ideograph, as noted earlier, has also been a fundamental topic in presidential rhetoric. Winkler (2006) examined how American presidents since World War II have used this pejorative term in U.S. public discourse, and found that Democrats and Republicans used it differently, which helped serve and frame their overall foreign policy principles and specific foreign policy decisions. Valenzano (2006) extended Winkler's findings by focusing on how President George W. Bush juxtaposed the ideographs of <terror> and <freedom>. He found that although Bush probably did not intend to parallel the two terms, he did manage to rally the nation against a common, universal enemy via his ambiguous use of the term <freedom> and manipulate the definition of <terror> to include "the threat of action, not just action itself" (pp. 161). Understanding how presidents use the ideograph of <terrorism> can provide insight into the specific policies they will enact in U.S. foreign affairs and how that might impact America's role and reputation in the world. This is because their actions must continue the ideological current circuiting through their rhetoric, else the call for collective commitment will be unsuccessful.

From these various studies we can draw some important conclusions. First, analyzing ideographs can be an important aspect of creating and understanding a particular vocabulary of a specific organization, social movement, and/or political party. Understanding these ideographs can offer the ability to determine specific motives, precepts, and policies rhetors may attempt to provide. Second, for the purpose of this study, analyzing ideographs within presidential rhetoric, particularly <terrorism>, can assist us as United States citizens in understanding what, why, and how power is attained, maintained, and exercised across different contexts and circumstances. In

the following section, I extend the work of Winkler (2006) and Valenzano (2006) by examining how President Obama has used the ideograph <terrorism> within his first two years in office.

Methodology

In order to conduct an analysis of how President Obama used the ideograph <terrorism>, I conducted a textual analysis of various speeches made by President Obama during his first term, specifically his first two years in office. I was able to locate these speeches from the American Presidency Project database run by the University of Southern California. It is a database that has every single public pronouncement of American presidents since the founding of the Republic. Initially, I conducted a term search for the word “terrorism” within the database. That led to hundreds of different public documents using the term. I then narrowed my data set even further by eliminating public pronouncements that were not speeches and only mentioned <terrorism> in passing. I focused my analysis only on speeches that were dedicated to the specific discussion of <terrorism> and U.S. foreign policy, save for President Obama’s State of the Union Address. I included the State of the Union because it is arguably the most important policy speech a president will offer during any given year (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008). After narrowing my search, I was left with over more than speeches to analyze. From there, I began to read and take extensive notes, realizing that the most suitable approach to this subject would be a diachronic evaluation, assessing common patterns and dominant themes arising over time. This finally culminated to the development of several undeniably independent yet unmistakably interwoven themes that work together to highlight certain attributes of each other and enhance their importance. In the discussion that follows, I do not use passages from each speech, but the textual fragments cited are representative samples of President Obama’s use of <terrorism>.

President Obama's First Year of <Terrorism>

As President Obama entered office in January 2009, he faced some of the most complex set of challenges possible for a modern president. Eight years of the Bush administration had left America's global reputation in tatters. Bush administration policies such as withdrawal from the Kyoto Accords, the International Criminal Court, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty with Russia, the creation of the Guantanamo Bay prison, the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, the rumors of forced rendition and enhanced interrogation tactics on international <terrorists>, and the ongoing struggles with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan directly harmed U.S. foreign affairs (Bacevich, 2009; Hodgson, 2009; Mason, 2009). Bush's foreign policy made the United States look like a lone cowboy who was out to tame the wild, wild west of international affairs (Hoffmann, 2011; West and Carey, 2006). In turn, this foreign policy agenda was viewed by many as hubristic, dictatorial, and dangerous for world peace (Bacevich, 2009; Mason, 2009). For example, the Pew Global Attitudes Survey found that only three countries—India, Tanzania, and Nigeria—out of 24 surveyed had confidence in the United States to lead on global issues (Pew Global Attitudes, 2008). President Bush left office with global public opinion of the United States at an all time low (Mason, 2009). With the ongoing economic meltdown in the United States and America's reputation in tatters, President Obama faced an incredible burden as he attempted to reestablish America's role in the world.

Moreover, the United States had lost its focus fighting <terrorism>. During the 2008 presidential campaign, then Senator Obama consistently accused the Bush administration of pursuing the above policies, not only to the detriment of America's reputation, but to the disservice of its fight against global <terrorism>. As president, President Obama pledged he would be much more focused in his foreign policy, restore America's reputation, and take the

fight directly to the <terrorists>. As he entered office, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan still raged, and the new president inherited an ideological responsibility to transition the public understanding of <terrorism> as Bush defined it to his own adaptation, comprehension, and execution of the term in his own rhetoric.

<Terrorism> as Threat to <Democratic Values>

The newly inaugurated President Barack Obama was faced with the task of transitioning from the rhetoric of the previous commander and chief. The Bush Administration had fashioned a foreign policy based strongly on the main premise that <terrorism> was a threat to <freedom> (Valenzano, 2006). President Obama maintained the ideologies expressed in his campaigns as Senator, becoming slightly more specific in the operations of the <terrorism> ideograph, establishing the <rule of law> as the foundation of all our other <democratic values>. This becomes a struggle of who can be more of what the other is not – <terrorists> for example, due to their lack of genuine political and militaristic alliances, cast themselves as the deviants because they so entirely reject the social norm. It would appear that their motivation is simply for the sake of defying the majority, which in the grand scheme of things, is a rebellion against authority and the desire to not be seen as inferior or lacking. Their status in society is only as important and influential as the property they destroy and the victims whose lives they take and the survivors who are forever changed by the trauma.

For President Obama, <terrorist> groups are lawless organizations that do not operate under a constitution, in which anarchy reigns and chaos is king, as he declares during his remarks at Central Intelligence Agency three months after being elected:

I understand it's hard when you are asked to protect the American people against people who have no scruples and would willingly and gladly kill innocents. Al

Qaeda is not constrained by a constitution. Many of our adversaries are not constrained by a belief in <freedom> of speech or representation in court or <rule of law> (2009e).

The juxtaposition of <freedom>, reminiscent of the Bush Administration's rhetorical opposition to <terrorism>, however in this case specifically referring to the First Amendment, and the concept of the <rule of law> illustrated President Obama's shift in discourse by means of implication, a notion that arises frequently throughout his foreign policy rhetoric. By aligning his predecessor's conservative-informed ideology of <terrorism> as a threat to <freedom> with his own interpretation of <rule of law>, he melded the two ideologies of the Republican and Democratic parties.

President Obama emphasized that our collective sense of American identity, regardless of political affiliation, was built upon our <democratic values>, such as the <freedom of speech>, specifically our unique understanding of the <rule of law>. President Obama (2009g) emphasized in his remarks to the Group of Eight that, "The main goal of <terrorists> is not only to spread fear and sow the seeds of instability, but also to undermine the basic values of our societies." His usage of the term "fear" as a weapon used by <terrorists> to accomplish their goals is highly reminiscent of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's inaugural address: "we have nothing to fear but fear itself." President Obama believed that the best offense is a good defense, and that by preserving and maintaining the <rule of law>, we were able to effectively combat <terrorism> by foiling it. President Obama explains that this is why <terrorists'> motives fail, because, "when nations and peoples allow themselves to be defined by their differences, the gulf between them widens" (2009d). Otherwise, the United States would fall into a similar state of lawlessness, madness, and turmoil. This sense of a collective self stems from the <democratic

values> which our Declaration of Independence is based on: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

In order to demonstrate a necessity for engaging in combat with enemy <terrorist> forces, President Obama also framed their strikes against the United States as personal rather than political by invoking the image of 9/11 repeatedly surrounding the eight year anniversary. In his address to the nation from the U.S. military academy at West Point regarding the status of the war in Afghanistan, President Obama (2009k) echoed the resolve of the Bush Administration:

We did not ask for this fight. On September 11th, 2001, nineteen men hijacked four airplanes and used them to murder nearly 3,000 people. They struck at our military and economic nerve centers. They took the lives of innocent men, women, and children without any regard to their faith or race or station. Were it not for the heroic actions of passengers onboard one of these flights, they could have also struck at one of the great symbols of our democracy in Washington and killed many more.

By striking at the heart of American ideals, invoked by the image of the White House being “one of the great symbols of our democracy in Washington”, the lone <terrorist> and the organization they represent strike at American identity, which is the foundation of our sense of <exceptionalism> - we have a reputation to protect. This sense of a collective self stems from the fact that we are all Americans, and therefore all could have been any of the innocent victims of <terrorist> violence for our <democratic values>, which our Declaration of Independence is based on: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, which all contribute to the formation of our collective identity.

President Obama also illustrated his reasoning that by spreading fear and sowing the seeds of instability (2009g), the <terrorist(s)> would have undermined our basic societal values and that by doing that, they would shake the foundation of our nation. This is a self-sustaining, dependent relationship between the two variables – it is implied that any decaying of American <democratic values> would allow the balance to tip in favor of the <terrorists> and they would achieve victory. This idea of combating fear as a method of weakening the <terrorist> opposition was simple and effective for the reason that it gave power and confidence back to the people – rather than being helpless victims, the people of the United States are elevated to a status of heroism that was implicitly comparable to the “heroic actions of passengers on board” Flight 93 (2009g), now remembered as United 93. By implicitly juxtaposing the <rule of law> against <terrorism>, President Obama hinted that one of the direct results from letting the <terrorists> “win” would be injustice and anarchy, a process of spiraling out of control and the crumbling of society as we know it. It puts a stopper in the plan to spread fear and sow the seeds of instability, and, therefore, the basic values of our society are not in jeopardy. This is why President Obama isolated the <rule of law> within his speeches rather than grouping it in a general matter with the rest of our <democratic values> – its existence is critical in order for the others to be available, let alone successful, hence the heaviness of its implicated presence throughout his rhetoric.

Gravitating from the realm of abstracts and into the world of the concrete, President Obama presented the notion that the physical acts of <terror> committed were the means in order to achieve the end – a thriving culture of fear and panic, with free citizens imprisoned at the mercy of these wicked <terrorists>. President Obama (2009e) stated before the CIA that, “I believe that our Nation is stronger and more secure when we deploy the full measure of both our power and the power of our values, including the <rule of law>.” He juxtaposed the power of

foreign policy, implicitly militaristically speaking, with the power of our values which soldiers fight to defend, therefore justifying the expenditure of troops overseas to fight the common enemy: <terrorism>. The reality, severity, and ceaselessness of the <terrorist> threat against the United States affirmed the importance of our symbolic status in the world as a super power. The “American dream” is a beacon of light and hope for freedom and prosperity in the modern world; through intimidation, destruction, and murder, <terrorists> wish to extinguish that. By encouraging the nation to rally around the core values of the American way of life, this further makes bullet-proof the ideas that strengthen feelings of patriotism that ultimately foils the <terrorist> plot.

President Obama illustrated that the <rule of law> is the foundation upon which our <democratic values> are built, hence why he so specifically isolated the former in his foreign policy rhetoric. However, he spent a good deal of time emphasizing that, “...the most effective response to their criminal strategy remains the promotion of democracy, human rights, <the rule of law> and equitable social conditions” (2009g). President Obama had thrust the focus not on the opposition, but on the American “team” working together under the banner of the American dream. Collective commitment, therefore, becomes more than a response to <terrorism> - it becomes a method for combating it. Before the National Defense University, he calls upon the people of the United States to uphold their legacy and “continue in the field, where American civilians can advance opportunity, enhance governance and the <rule of law>, and attack the causes of war around the world” (2009c). This reintroduces George W. Bush’s breakdown of “if you’re not with us, you’re for <terrorism>”, which implies heavily that if we are not a part of a solution in helping to undermine <terrorist> plans by exercising our rights and civil liberties and forever elevating our standard of living, we are a part of the problem – we are assisting as co-

conspirators in the destruction of American ideology, which President Obama implicitly connected as sabotaging the fundamental <rule of law> and consequently all of our <democratic values>, which would lead to the division and ultimate downfall of the United States.

Implicitly, President Obama presented to us a notion of invincibility: “I believe we will defeat our enemies,” he explains to the CIA, “because we’re on the better side of history” (2009e). The tyrants, dictators, and radical zealots of the past inevitably failed because of a lack of structure and the pursuit of unrealistic or unachievable goals. If the <terrorist> agenda were to ever be fulfilled, the organization would implode upon itself, for their identity stems only from their opposition and determination to destroy the American identity, and their sense of self can only be as strong as ours is. <Terrorists>, although clever and cunning in the planning and execution of their horrible deeds, do not have an over-arching goal to be achieved, let alone one that is realistically achievable. This is because, as President Obama implies, the rhetoric of <terrorist> organizations would not have such strong values underlining their causes without the United States and other free nations of the world as a point of comparison; meanwhile, American <democratic values> carry with them centuries of idealistic ideological baggage to utilize to our advantage as historical reference points.

By developing an ideological justification for the current conflicts that the United States was involved with at the time, President Obama remedied much of the damage done by the Bush Administration. Simultaneously, he was improving the nation’s image of self as well as its global reputation. The continuation of the wars led many citizens and peoples of the world to ask why we remained involved in matters that seemed not to concern us directly, and few were satisfied by the “all for one and one for all” interpretation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s [NATO] Article 5 set forth by former President Bush. Rather, when President Obama delivered

the weighted phrase during his remarks in Prague in the spring of his first year (2009d): “An attack on one is an attack on all. That is a promise for our time and for all time”, it appears to imply that he is foreshadowing what could happen if the United States were to fail in the <War on Terror>. He strongly suggested, although not directly stated, that if the other free nations of the world do not come to our aid when we are under assault by enemy <terrorists>, that the United States would be damaged to the point of not being able to assist any subsequent targets of <terrorist> actions, and the rest of the free world would fall as a result of the formidable domino effect.

President Obama’s structuring of the <rule of law> as the foundation upon which our <democratic values> are built is important because it reemphasizes their ideological importance in our lives – they are so integral and practically inherent to the American way of life that we cannot imagine our existence any differently, hence our desperation to preserve them. This also establishes these ideographs as secret weapons in our ideological arsenal – by keeping them intact, we will achieve victory by simply being who we are. The idea of collective commitment was most prominent at this point, because President Obama had to persuade his global audience and international critics to subscribe to the ideologies of the <rule of law> and <democratic values> that he had set forth. The intimidating task of bridging the gap between Republicans and Democrats on the domestic front presented a difficult challenge in and of itself, not to mention concurrently calling the rest of the free world to arms and advising them to be ready and alert and to stand together in case of a <terrorist> incident.

<Terrorism> as Necessity for Collective Commitment

In the previous section, it was noted that President Obama discussed <terrorism> through a rhetorical lens of borrowing ideas from both Democratic and Republican presidents, including

his predecessor President Bush. For President Obama, the primary means to combat <terrorism> was with the emphasis on the <rule of law>. Another important theme in President Obama's ideographic construction of <terrorism> during his first year in office was his emphasis that <terrorism> required the world to work together in a collective commitment or it could not only wreak havoc within the United States, but across the globe. It was alluded to in some of the passages highlighted in the previous section, but it became an important point that President Obama emphasized in various parts of his discourse. For example, speaking before the Turkish Grand National Assembly, President Obama (2009e) asserted: the choices we make in the coming years will determine whether the future will be shaped by fear or by freedom, by poverty or by prosperity, by strife or by a just, secure, and lasting peace"? For President Obama, like his predecessor, there were stark choices that must be made in the world. Would the world be shaped "by fear or by freedom, by poverty or by prosperity, by strife or by a just, secure, and lasting peace." Similar to Bush, there was no middle ground. The world, including Turkey and the rest of the Islamic world, must choose what side they would be on. Yet by putting things in such stark terms no irrational political actor would choose "poverty," "fear" or "strife." Thus, there was only one choice and that choice required the assistance of other nations if it were to be spread and prosper across the globe. It required a collective commitment to turn our back on these forces, which <terrorists> desire to sow.

This collective commitment was needed to combat "an unprecedented set of challenges" facing the global community today: "an economic crisis that knows no borders, extremism that leads to the killing of innocent men and women and children...the proliferation of the world's deadliest weapons, and the persistence of tragic conflict" (Obama, 2009e). The comparison of extremism, which is often used to modify or describe <terrorists> (see also Obama 2009c,

2009h, 2009i, 2009k) alongside the global recession shed light on the fact that, potentially, this force of fear and chaos has the capacity to paralyze an economy with the havoc that it wreaks in addition to the loss of human life which gives way to the inevitable, overwhelming sense of fatalistic despair that accompanies such “tragic conflicts.” By contrast these items can be combatted by the global community joining together to curtail “extremism” (e.g. <terrorism>).

President Obama’s necessity for collective commitment is rooted in the belief that you are only as strong as the alliances you form and that there is safety in numbers: ultimately, in order to achieve victory as unscathed as possible, the free nations of the world have no other choice than to band together to fight this common adversary:

Now, understand, this matters to people everywhere. One nuclear weapon exploded in one city – be it New York or Moscow, Islamabad or Mumbai, Tokyo or Tel Aviv, Paris or Prague – could kill hundreds of thousands of people. And no matter where it happens, there is no end to what the consequences might be for our global safety, our security, our society, our economy, to our ultimate survival.

(2009d)

By listing a diverse array of nations, President Obama described every single demographic on earth and implicitly indicated that there would be no one on the planet who will be unaffected by the fall out of this worst-case-scenario. For President Obama, this scenario of nuclear <terrorism> was universal. In describing what the world could look like if <terrorist> groups like Al-Qaeda could get their hands on a nuclear device he hoped to rally the people of the free world not simply against <terrorism>, but under a single unified banner – there was safety in numbers, and there was wisdom in the phrase “united we stand, divided we fall”, which was President Obama’s fear should he not achieve success in leading the free world through these

dark and troubling times. Not to mention, if he were successfully able to persuade NATO to act alongside – or at least approve – of his desired or selected course of action, President Obama would have successfully justified, or at least excused, the United States occupation of the Middle East in the eyes of the global audience.

However, before President Obama can make any great strides with his foreign policy abroad, it first must face the most excruciating crucible – cooperating and often compromising with one of the most partisan House systems the country has seen in its short life of two hundred years. During his final major domestic public address of his first year given at the U.S. West Point Military Academy in New York, President Obama (2009k) confronted the issue head on: “Years of debate over Iraq and <terrorism> have left our unity on national security issues in tatters and created a highly polarized and partisan backdrop for this effort.” The repeating connotative image of the tatters of a once unified collective plays several key roles in this statement, first and foremost being the actual graphic violence implicated by and associated with the word, a form of violence that we only associate with the “violent extremism practiced by Al Qaeda” (2009k). Secondly, President Obama made the implicit comparison of the members of the House to these radicals, by insinuating that the rhetoric put forth by both parties regarding the handling of the War on <Terror> was equally as hateful, misdirected, and destructive as the threatening and taunting messages of ill will sent out by <terrorists>. President Obama continued in the speech to describe that “within America, there’s long been a tension between those who describe themselves as realists or idealists, a tension that suggests a stark choice between the narrow pursuit of interests of an endless campaign to impose our values around the world” (2009k). Here, he ironically highlighted the nature of language and the power of experience’s influence over human kind’s perceptive abilities: our backgrounds educate and inform our

opinions, which will personalize and bias our understanding of the world(s) which we are a part of. President Obama exemplified how anyone could have been portrayed as a scapegoat for the current condition of the tumultuous House by simply phrasing a few things slightly differently to demonstrate how significant an impact words have on our comprehension of actions – words convey intent, which is what makes the contrariety of “one man’s <terrorist> is another man’s freedom fighter” ring so true. Last but not least, and possibly most importantly, this serves as a wakeup call for the citizens and the politicians of the United States. Ultimately, if we as a nation, as a societal collective, could not rally behind a common cause that we engaged in ideological warfare over, then how were the rest of the free nations of the world supposed to support us in our endeavors to eradicate <terrorism>?

In an attempt to avoid answering this question the hard way, President Obama, rather than catering to each side individually, forged a middle ground between the two dominant political discourses. Since President Obama belongs to the Democratic party, there is a slight preference that is hinted at within his rhetoric even as he moved forward with a progressive, hybridized understanding of the ideograph, as is evident in his breakdown to the G8 (2009g): “all acts of <terrorism> - by whomever committed – are criminal, inhumane and unjustifiable, regardless of motivation, especially when they indiscriminately target and injure civilians.” Civilians hold the least amount of guilt regarding foreign affairs because they are most distant from the physical combat of warfare and only indirectly responsible for the legislative decisions made by elected officials – they are not the soldiers fighting the wars, nor are they the politicians signing the orders and declarations sending the soldiers out to fight these wars overseas. The largest role they play is on the home front in exercising their right to vote and their right to free speech by electing these officials into positions of administrative authority. Because they were

perceived by the public as the most innocent, it is the most horrific when <terrorists> commit crimes that designate blameless civilians as nameless targets. President Obama utilized the atrocious and almost unfathomable nature of these crimes to illustrate these <terrorists> as the embodiment of evil – by pushing the limits of the criminal justice model, President Obama was able to cross into the realm of morality. Much like their heinous actions are nearly impossible to describe, it is practically equally as difficult to define in modern, realistic terms the Manichean constructs of good and evil. President Obama relied on the fluid transitions back and forth between the two ideologies as he made an attempt to close the pre-existing gap that still divided them at this early point in his term.

By conjoining the morality of the Republican Party with the judicial perspective of the Democratic Party, President Obama was able to appeal to both, which he accomplished rhetorically by interweaving the two viewpoints. The basis of morality is religion, and the basis of justice is criminality, which are close enough in definition that President Obama (2009l, see also 2009b and 2009g) was able to wield them almost synonymously:

Evil does exist in the world. A nonviolent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince Al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism; it is a recognition of history, the imperfections of man, and the limits of reason.

Here, President Obama wove Republican and Democratic visions of <terrorism> as moral and criminal conflict simultaneously. He not only demonstrated their differences but highlighted their commonalities, which allowed for either side of the political debate to align their views with this statement without admitting the defeat of subscribing to the ideology of the “other” – they were

not forced to sacrifice their integrity within their own party in order to answer the call to collective commitment. Here is where President Obama held true on his campaign promises of the previous year to develop a new rhetorical framework for handling matters of foreign policy – he subversively made the compromise for the two parties through his speeches so they are reconciled without being forced to concede to a perspective from which they feel politically separated or ideologically detached.

<Terrorist> transgressions, whether matters of morality or legality, were implicitly rendered crimes against humanity by association: it is the American belief that civil rights are essentially human rights, and therefore we have all the more responsibility to defend them for ourselves so that all may hope to one day enjoy the same simple liberties and little freedoms. President Obama (2009i) declared that, “if human rights are not protected, peace is a hollow promise”, which implies that as long as <terrorists> are able to scheme and execute plans to undermine our <rule of law> and <democratic values>, then this struggle is never ending and so are the wars it breeds. This idea of employing the <rule of law> and <democratic values> as working towards a goal of bringing about world peace contributed to a sense of American exceptionalism, which is one of the few ideologies that both the Republican and Democratic parties can get on board with without much debate or argument. President Obama takes advantage of this likeness and capitalizes on it repeatedly in his speeches. By selecting words that are almost synonyms to describe the actions of the <terrorist> enemy, President Obama is able to appeal to both Republican and Democratic parties within the same few lines of text, as he does in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in Oslo, Norway (2009i): “Adhering to the law of love has always been the core struggle of human nature. For we are fallible; we make mistakes and fall victim to the temptations of pride and power, and, sometimes, evil. Even those of us with

the best intentions will at times fail to right the wrongs before us.” By speaking of the law, he is appealing to the Democrats as well as being nostalgic of the tension created by the proximate juxtaposition of the <rule of law> and <terrorism> as previously explained. When he begins to speak of love, his word choice elevates to a more abstract level, the case in point here being the key term “evil”, in order to satisfy his Republican audience. Last but not least, he leaves the issue of right versus wrong neutral in order to demonstrate the fact that Republicans and Democrats are on the same side fighting against the same foe.

The end result of unifying the capital was a feeling that our <democratic values> have triumphed and re-amplified our sense of American exceptionalism a phenomenon socially and academically recognized in the postmodern era, which is the belief held by Americans that our historic reputation precedes us and that we are of greater influence and consequence simply because of our citizenship and legacy of overcoming adversity. Much like the life cycle of any living organism, the country itself has experienced major milestones that allow it to grow and mature and nurture its own world view based upon them. There is a certain inherent type of high-order responsibility bestowed unto the nation as a result of this sensation. Some view this as a form of false authority, of vanity and self-absorption, yet President Obama (2009c) qualified that “...pragmatism must serve a common purpose, a higher purpose. That’s the legacy that we inherit. And that, in the end, is how government of the people, and by the people, and for the people, will endure in our time.” The implication of recanting the final lines of Lincoln’s historic Gettysburg Address was significant because of its relevance a century and a half later – now, instead of this government of, by, and for the people implicitly combatting racism on Civil War battle fields, the government of, by, and for the people is combatting xenophobic <terrorists> in the desert wastelands of the Middle East. Once again, President Obama provided motivation for

the Republicans and the Democrats to work together towards a common goal: eradicating <terrorism> in the modern world. He invokes history, appeals to patriotism, and projects the focus upon protecting the greater good of the people that the House is supposed to represent, serve, and ultimately, protect.

President Obama started off strong by identifying several solid ideographs with which to contrast and ultimately combat <terrorism>, being the <rule of law> and <democratic values>. By selecting such universal discourses, he was able to rally collective commitment both domestically and abroad. President Obama did this in the House by melding the Republican rhetoric of his predecessor, an opinion educated on the premise of <terrorism> as a violation of moral codes and ethics with the ideology of his own Democratic party, an interpretation informed by the understanding of <terrorists> as violators of legal codes and subject to criminal consequence. By remedying the American reputation that was dragged through the mud shortly following George W. Bush's invocation of Article 5, President Obama was able to provide sufficient need for collective commitment in order to advance his foreign policy agenda towards "a more focused effort to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat" (2009d) <terrorism>. As President Obama moved into his second year of office, he was continuing the transition from the rhetoric of the Bush Administration, getting more comfortable with his responsibilities and capabilities as leader of the free world, and preparing the world for an unpredictable future where <nuclear terrorism> is the most significant threat to the <rule of law>, <democratic values>, the free world, and life as we know it.

President Obama's Second Year of <Terrorism>

By his second year in office, President Barack Obama had already grown more comfortable in his role as Commander and Chief. With plans in motion to withdraw from Iraq and refocus the missions of combat in Afghanistan, he was facing harsher criticisms than ever from the new media and a now majority-Republican House that gave way to the rise of the Tea Party Movement. With intensifying scrutiny of his handlings within domestic affairs, the intimidating nuclear initiative was demanding an exorbitant amount of rhetorical attention and energy from the president.

Several significant shifts began to occur within President Obama's speeches as he continued to cultivate his <terrorist> themes. Firstly, he started to navigate away from a foreign policy rhetoric that was so strongly centered on <terrorism>. He uses the word <terrorism> noticeably less frequently – he substitutes the ideograph for more defined terminology, such as Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and violent extremists. However, besides the substitution of the term, the tone and context within the speeches where he utilizes these other iconic descriptors remains vastly unchanged – if anything, his intensity grows even more scathing as the nuclear threat becomes more apparent and real over the course of the twelve months.

It must be mentioned that there are entire speeches where the word <terror> does not in any form appear even a single time, namely President Obama's remarks on the parliamentary elections in Iraq and his news conference with Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai (see 2010b and 2010d). The reason behind this was that by removing the word <terrorism> from public statements regarding Iraq and Afghanistan, the implication was that they people of these countries were not to be associated or confused with the enemy. It is suggested that the <terrorist> threat was also removed from the nation altogether since it was removed from the

rhetoric. In both of these cases, the President was directly responding to his critics who opposed his decision to leave from Iraq: because of the neutralization of the <terrorist> threat and the security measures Iraq had taken, it had proven that it was capable of sustaining itself without American military intervention and policing. This indirectly contributed to our own sense of safety. If Iraq were strong and self-sufficient enough so that we no longer had to dedicate resources to keeping out the <terrorist> threat, then the United States could relax and breathe a little easier working in a seemingly stronger partnership with the people of Iraq. By strengthening individual partnerships with key players in the fight against <terrorism>, specifically nations that were at the time or had previously been considered hot beds for potential <terrorist> activity, the notion of collective commitment as a means of combating <terrorism> gains more credibility.

By strengthening our partnerships with other countries, we strengthened our resolve against <terrorist> organizations. President Obama began to focus on a new theme in his second year which was birthed from his views of collective commitment, which was the adoption of a more proactive approach in dealing with the <terrorist> threat. The idea of “counter <terrorism>” embodied the thematic elements of the foreign policy rhetoric of his first year: protection of the <rule of law> and our <democratic values>, collective commitment on both national and global levels, hybridism, and, ultimately, American exceptionalism. The <terrorism> ideograph as we understand it had been forged by the Bush Administration as a reactionary measure to identify our adversary – President Obama redefined it by modeling <terrorism> in opposition to the <rule of law> and <democratic values>, and that the proactive preservation rather than reactive reinforcement was the most effective way to effectively neutralize the <terrorist> threat. He drew on the collective commitment invoked in Article 5 of NATO to rally the leaders of the world to

join forces in locating, securing, and monitoring nuclear weapons to prevent the worst from happening – a nuclear <terrorist> attack. This leadership role in the field of counter <terrorism> then feeds back into our sense of American exceptionalism. In this next chapter, I seek to understand how President Obama crafted his rhetoric to cater towards preservation of the <rule of law> and <democratic values> as a proactive means of combating <terrorism> and why this change in sophistication and specificity occurred, how it transformed the thematic notions of collective commitment and leadership responsibility, and what the implications of the rise of a nuclear threat as it underlined the importance of partnerships and cooperation among individual nations even more so.

From a Reactive to a Proactive Approach to the War on <Terror>

Much of the rhetoric put forth by President Obama in his first year in office was meant to remedy the wounds left behind by the Bush Administration, both at home and overseas. He understood that his best bet was to remain arbitrary and abstract in his discussion of <terrorism>, for to define something is to establish exclusions – by declaring what <terrorism> is in specific and concrete, one immediately denies the possibility of other instances and examples falling under that category. This is exactly the reason why at this point President Obama turned to concrete matters by specifically naming Al Qaeda and the Taliban frequently under the general umbrella term of <terrorism>. Not only did President Obama start naming names, he began to target areas of interest such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India that would allow for <terrorist> individuals and organizations to seek and create havens from which to run bases of operations: “Al Qaeda and its extremist allies continue to plot in the border regions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. And a growing Taliban insurgency could mean an even larger safe haven for Al Qaeda and its affiliates” (2010d). The implication President Obama was making was that

<terrorists> would be immobilized by their lack of a central hub of operations from which to plot and scheme – however, once they have one, the destructive force it could become is one that would have dire consequences for their long list of targets.

Within his second year, President Obama became much more concerned with international affairs, as obvious within his remarks regarding the Parliamentary elections in Iraq in March of 2010(d):

As expected, there were some incidents of violence as Al Qaeda in Iraq and other extremists tried to disrupt Iraq's progress by murdering innocent Iraqis who were exercising their democratic rights. But overall, the level of security and the prevention of destabilizing attacks speak to the growing capability and professionalism of Iraqi security forces, which took the lead in providing protection at the polls.

Note that President Obama does not mention the term <terrorism>, which is actually absent from this entire document. Rather, he refers mainly to Al Qaeda or violent extremists. By painting this image of known <terrorist> organizations killing innocents specifically because of their desire and right to vote, President Obama successfully establishes the cause and effect relationship: because of our democratic values, people are going to want to and will try to take our lives. The implication, therefore, is that to forfeit one means to give up the other as well, because without the structure of democracy there is nothing to keep the peace and maintain the existence of human rights. By juxtaposing the image of the Iraqi security forces as literally defending <democratic values> by implementing and enforcing the <rule of law> when these <terrorists> struck, he implied that it was these two ideologies that were securing not only our abstract understanding of the democratic way of life but quite literally our borders so that we would be

safe from the violent acts these radicals wish to commit. Essentially, by defending our rights we are protecting our lives. The context and imagery of the event that President Obama provided also alluded to the idea that if Al Qaeda and their “extremist” allies had the opportunity, they would very much like to enact the same violence upon United States voters exercising their rights.

In order to prevent this future from being realized by these evil-doers, President Obama implored that we must foil their plots while they remain abroad, specifically in the hot bed of the Middle East. At this point in his term, the last of military combat forces were withdrawing from Iraq. Some thought it was too little too late, and others too much too soon. If the United States remained, we risked appearing like we were turning into the criminal that we have been pursuing since September 11th, 2001, because “one man’s <terrorist> is another man’s freedom fighter.” If we left too soon, Iraq’s infrastructure would buckle under the pressures of a fresh democracy, and <terrorists> would capitalize on these early moments of weakness to destroy everything the U.S. had helped Iraq to build over the course of recent years: “Throughout our history, America has been willing to bear the burden of promoting liberty and human dignity overseas, understanding its links to our own liberty and security” (2010f). President Obama explicitly connected the fate of the Iraqi people with our own, which bonded us in a unique partnership of promoting democracy. Although this act is an act of self-preservation, the United States considers this an act of selflessness and sacrifice. On the second anniversary of the <terrorist> attacks in Mumbai, India, President Obama explained: “promoting shared prosperity, preserving peace and security, strengthening democratic governance and human rights, these are the responsibilities of leadership” (2010g). Rather than making combating <terrorism> a game of “every man for himself”, President Obama realized that such a juvenile approach would give the

<terrorists> an advantage – since Al Qaeda does not have a specific location to associate itself with, their network is universalized in terms of global connections, which would allow them to coordinate and individually target the lone, independent countries that were all standing next to each other, but effectively by themselves. This is the reason why President Obama focused so much of his second year rhetoric on forming partnerships with countries such as Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Iraq especially – the chain of alliances is only as strong as its weakest links, and the free world cannot afford for <terrorism> to break this chain.

The overall strength of this safeguard against <terrorism> was becoming increasingly more important during President Obama’s second year in the cultivation of the preventative measures taken to avoid nuclear proliferation amidst underground <terrorist> networks. During his remarks at the opening session of the Nuclear Security Summit, President Obama (2010c) explained:

Two decades after the end of the Cold War, we face a cruel irony of history: the risk of a nuclear confrontation between nations has gone down, but the risk of a nuclear attack has gone up...in short, it is increasingly clear that the danger of <nuclear terrorism> is one of the greatest threats to global security, to our collective security.

Here, President Obama reflected on the striking and baffling differences between John F. Kennedy’s ordeal with Soviet Russia during the Cold War and his own struggle with opposing <terrorist> organizations like Al Qaeda. During the proliferation period, it was well understood that the United States and Soviet Russia would all but erase each other from the face of the planet were they to actually engage in nuclear warfare. Because of their domestic collective selves, they acted in their own self interests by refraining from engaging in the apocalyptic

battle. <Terrorists>, who have no home land or constitutional code of ethics, cannot be reasoned with – they destroy for the sake of destruction, as President Obama made clear when he said that, “<Terrorist> networks such as Al Qaeda have tried to acquire the material for a nuclear weapon, and if they ever succeeded, they would surely use it” (2010c). The only hope that the United States and the rest of the free world has is to keep nuclear material out of the hands of <terrorists>, or else it will not be a question of if they use the weapon(s) – it will be a matter of when and where and how long the world will feel the repercussions.

President Obama’s rhetorical strategy for handling situations of <terrorism> became more refined out of necessity. The language used to describe the turbulent, changing times must embody the harsh, cruel reality that there is a new danger: <nuclear terrorism>. President Obama was burdened with the task of developing a 21st century understanding of nuclear warfare combatting against an enemy that has no determined ideology besides the common hatred of the free, democratic nations of the world, and no country or constitution to which they are bound by any means. The unpredictable nature of such a lawless organization is what makes this foresight all the more dreadful. President Obama demonstrated implicitly that <terrorists> cannot be reasoned with. A group of people with no recognizable structure within their own network, as well as so many lone dissenters and extremists who agree with their skewed beliefs, have the potential for the most horrifying crimes against humanity – unwarranted, unprompted, totally unexpected, and completely random – “were they to do so, it would be a catastrophe for the world, causing an extraordinary loss of life and striking a major blow to global peace and stability” (2010c). Each successive counter <terrorist> move would be strictly defensive, because at that point nothing less than tragedy and devastation is inevitable – insurmountable casualties, incomprehensible fatalities, and billions of dollars in damage that would cripple any national and

the entire global economy irrevocably, and irreversible destruction of the peace of mind of the free peoples of the world.

The <terrorist> attacks of September 11th, 2001, were obscenely unprecedented. However, in years since, such as in Mumbai, India or during the parliamentary elections in Iraq, it has become the method of operations of <terrorist> organizations like Al Qaeda and the Taliban – it is what is expected of them. After years of hearing this ideograph used in media and political discourse, it had become exhausted of some of its original power to inspire fear and was now a part of the everyday American lexicon. President Obama reinvigorated the ideograph by modifying it. President Obama addressed the world saying that, “In short, it is increasingly clear that the danger of <nuclear terrorism> is one of the greatest threats to global security, to our collective security” (2010c). The <terrorist> threat had now escalated, however, as a result of the introduction of nuclear weaponry into the equation – it is the logical next step for them to wish to pursue. Thus, a new, highly sophisticated and extremely complex ideograph was born – <nuclear terrorism> is the new <terrorism>.

August 6th and 9th, 1945, made the United States the unquestioned leader in the handlings of nuclear weaponry and warfare tactics with the dropping of the first and only atomic bombs unleashed in battle efforts on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We continued this legacy with the proliferation that would lead to the Cold War of the 1960s. September 11th, 2001, projected the United States into a position of exemplary leadership – we would instruct the world on how to react and cope with the impacts of a <terrorist> attack and how to respond to those responsible for the devastation. This legacy would be continued by the War on <Terror>. President Obama’s ideology surrounding the threat of <nuclear terrorism> combines these two reputations and they reinforce each other, restoring confidence and repairing

the image of the United States, and ultimately contributing to a sense of American exceptionalism that acts as its own method of counter <terrorism>.

<Counterterrorism> as American Exceptionalism

It seems that President Obama all but abandons his previous rhetorical standings – the emphasis has been removed from <democratic values> domestically and focuses more on building democracy abroad, particularly in Iraq as the United States was withdrawing military forces from the country. President Obama implicitly admits the mistake of the Bush Administration: “It’s why I refocused the fight, bringing to a responsible end the war in Iraq, which had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks, and dramatically increasing our resources in the region where Al Qaeda is actually based, in Afghanistan and Pakistan” (2010a). Here, he directly addressed his critics who expressed concern that we should not have withdrawn from Iraq when we did, that our presence there was necessary to maintain the security of their nation from <terrorist> infiltration. Implicitly, President Obama admitted that invading Iraq may have been a mistake considering that the <terrorists> who had organized and enacted the attacks of September 11th had direct connections to Afghanistan – we should have been looking for them where the evidence suggested they were, in hot beds of political turmoil and civil war tensions, which also includes Pakistan. By phrasing this confession in such an ambiguous way, it absolves the current administration and removes the inaccurately labeled <terrorist> conflict from Iraq, lowering the threat level from a clear and present danger within its borders to that of a removed, foreign, would-be invader – a common enemy that the newly founded Iraqi democracy and the United States now share.

The reduction and ultimate withdrawal of combat soldiers from Iraq over the course of the year elevated the new Iraq into the same political sphere as the United States, implicitly

putting them on our side of the fight against <terrorism>. By portraying them as our likeness, it is no longer possible for America to see Iraqis as a <terrorist> threat because they are just as innocently victimized as we are. In the hopes of redemption from or, at least, justification for our occupation of the territory, President Obama (2010f) explained that, “A war to disarm a state became a fight against an insurgency. <Terrorism> and secretarian warfare threatened to tear Iraq apart.” President Obama crafted the image of Iraq as an ideal hot bed of <terrorist> activity – an impoverished nation suffering at the hands of an egotistical, tyrannical dictator for over two decades and plagued by civil war – to justify the weakness of paranoia as adequate grounds for invasion, although it was never confirmed that Iraq had the capability to produce let alone launch any sort of weapon of mass destruction. President Obama drew upon the fact that the United States executed Operation Iraqi Freedom with the best of intentions and was able to pardon our prolonged presence by demonstrating the heavy weight that is the burden of exceptional responsibility.

In his State of the Union address, President Obama (2010a) emphasized that presence of weakness within these trying times are seen as opportunities upon which <terrorists> may capitalize:

Instead of giving in to fear and cynicism, let’s renew the timeless American spirit of resolve and confidence and optimism. Instead of succumbing to partisanship and division, let’s summon the unity that this moment demands. Let’s work together, with a seriousness of purpose, to do what must be done to keep our country safe.

This sense of urgency and responsibility is characteristic of the United States’ self-prescribed exceptionalism. In the post-modern era, Americans have developed a sense of pride that we are

inherent leaders in the global arena based on our accomplishments throughout history that precede us, making us of greater influence and importance because of our role model status in hurdling obstacles of adversity, especially in the enactment of our foreign policy measures, which has become known socially and academically as American exceptionalism. One idea that stems from this perspective which President Obama does not go out of his way to avoid is that it is as if we are the only nation in the world that has ever come face to face with <terrorism> and we must rely on ourselves and our own resourcefulness to brave these troubling times. We also take a strange sense of confidence and satisfaction in being the target of threats and acts of violence, because the hostile attention marks us as undoubtedly and undeniably special. Unity domestically, as President Obama demonstrated, is also a means of combating <terrorism>, and one way to generate this sense of togetherness is through recognizing our accomplishments from the past to reassure us that we can and will endure regardless of what acts of <terror> we become the targets of – it presents us with a feeling of security that borders on invincibility.

However, as we have seen these past few years, 9/11 was only the beginning of the unfolding of modern <terrorist> plots. The things the world has seen in the past several years were at one point unimaginable acts beyond comprehension. Since 9/11 was of such a large scale and in many ways the first of its kind, the United States has assumed a leadership role like never before – our handling of the situation has become an exemplary model for subsequent victim nations to follow. One such example is Mumbai, India, and their path to recovery following the <terrorist> attacks of November 26th, 2008. During a visit to the country on the anniversary of the devastation, President Obama (2010g) offered compassion and comfort to the Indian people, saying:

We'll never forget the images of 26/11, including the flames from this hotel that lit up the night sky. We'll never forget how the world, including the American people watched and grieved with all of India. But the resolve and the resilience of the Indian people during those attacks stood in stark contrast to the savagery of the <terrorists>. The murderers came to kill innocent people that day.

The striking similarities in this description and those that have echoed for years following the 9/11 attacks speak volumes, from the loss of life to the image of the inferno to the heroism of the Indian people. President Obama connected the two very different peoples – Americans and Indians – by describing them both as “innocent”, as undeserving of the harm that was unleashed upon them. Americans were able to more easily empathize with the situation even though it was being experienced in a nation whose standard of living we cannot relate to – a society that we feel separated and removed from even though it exists alongside us. Simply the fact that this incident is being referred to as 26/11 demonstrates how the United States is able to shape all post-9/11 attacks in terms of our own image. President Obama utilized these parallels in order to make the correlation that we are all one people of a global community – “...just as Indian citizens lost their lives on 9/11, American citizens lost their lives here on 26/11” (2010g). The juxtaposition of 9/11 and 26/11 is heavy handed and well played. This mutual emotional suffering strengthened the strategic military and diplomatic alliance between the two nations, as proven by “the shared determination of India and the United States, two partners that will never waiver in our defense of our people or the <democratic values> that we share” (2010g). President Obama introduced Iraq, India, and Afghanistan as examples of partnerships that are created by collective commitment as well as a means for generating this unity. Because of our “shared determination” and <democratic values>, we banded together as partners. By having

developed and strategic partnerships with our allies, we reinforced our global collective commitment to all of the free nations of the world. Because of our promise to “never waiver in our defense”, President Obama was directly implying that the <terrorists> would never win.

Implications

Despite the difficult challenges of overcoming the damaging foreign policy rhetoric of the Bush Administration in a post-9/11 world, President Barack Obama successfully established his own unique rhetoric regarding the <War on Terror>. By juxtaposing <terrorism> to <democratic values>, specifically the <rule of law> in particular, President Obama was able to convey a message that called for collective commitment on a global scale. He simultaneously bridged the split between the partisan two party system, merging the Republican morality complex with the Democratic judicial perspective, reminding both the politicians and the people of the United States of America of their legacy of exceptionalism. President Barack Obama efficiently developed an ideology and successfully launched an ideographic campaign that established the groundwork for his next three years in office in dealing with foreign policy affairs.

President Obama used the transformative rhetoric of his first year to segue the nation in a more personalized understanding of the <terrorist> issue – rather than speaking in terms of the previous administration, he was more comfortable and self-assured in vocalizing his own understanding as his rhetorical presentation of the War on <Terror> became more specific in targeting violent extremists such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban. By removing the term <terrorism> largely from his rhetoric, he made the implication that the <terrorist> threat is also being removed from the modern world as the global community unifies to protect and preserve the <rule of law> and <democratic values> for future generations. As a leader of the free world, the

United States was lifted to a new level of exceptionalism by becoming a model of how to defend against and stay one step ahead of <terrorist> plots to destroy our way of life.

Today, the War on <Terror> is considered over, but not yet done with (see Harnden, 2010). In order to understand what lies ahead, we must continue to look back into an exploration of President Obama's handlings of <terrorism> during its final years of legislative debate and how the ideograph is handled in the post-War on <Terror> era. It should be noted whether he continues this shift from abstract to more concrete definitions of <terrorism>, whether he focuses more so on domestic unity rather than international collective commitment, and how he plans to continue to oppose <terrorism> - whether it is more so by means of preservation of our ideals such as the <rule of law> and <democratic values> or neutralization through prevention of the gathering of new members and new materials to use against the free world. From there, we can develop a contemporary and working understanding of how <terrorism> is evolving at this moment in politics, media, and foreign policy. This way, we will be able to comprehend the impact and efficacy of President Barack Obama's ideographic campaign, and be able to appreciate the rhetorical legacy that the next Commander-in-Chief will inherit. At this point at the end of his second year, some of the challenges his next-in-line may face would be the expansion of <terrorism> from these specifics that President Obama is now working towards targeting that could be perhaps too narrow. They will have to develop a keen understanding of the partisan nature and current status of the House in order to advance the hybridized definition that President Obama forged in his first year and echoed in his second. Further, they must remain comfortable in our American exceptionalism, because at least for right now, the United States acts role as a leader and role model which the rest of the world looks to in dark and troubling times.

In a statement before the G8 Leaders halfway into his second year, President Obama (2010e) implicitly summarized his rhetorical intent:

<Terrorism> will not be defeated by force alone. It is critical to address the conditions conducive to the spread of <terrorism>, and, in particular, that governments promote the <rule of law>, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, <democratic values>, good governance, tolerance and inclusiveness to offer a viable alternative to those who could be susceptible to <terrorist> recruitment and to radicalization leading to violence.

By answering the call to collective commitment and taking proactive measures of employing the full extent of the <rule of law> and our <democratic values>, we have already begun to fight against <terrorism> rather than waiting to fight back as a trigger response to a <terrorist> attack whose consequences would be nothing short of tragic. President Obama realized that the only way to defeat <terrorists> is not to reason with them or meet them on a battle field, for they do not appeal to logic nor do they adhere to traditional means of combat warfare – the best and only way to ensure success is to neutralize them before they strengthen their resolve or their arsenals of men and weapons.

As President Obama became more comfortable in his role as president, the United States become more comfortable accepting the burden of responsibility as a world leader in a time of change, where now the largest issue facing foreign policy affairs is the threat of a <nuclear terrorist> attack. Through his resolve and his rhetoric, President Obama overcame the adversities set before him by the previous administration and a severely partisan house. As commander and chief, he defended our <rule of law> and <democratic values> which encouraged American exceptionalism that defined our leadership role in the global community. Through his

manipulation of the <terrorist> ideograph, President Barack Obama furthered American foreign policy relations and partnerships by establishing a discourse that would unite both the nation and the world, irrevocably changing the direction of history as we await the unfolding of the future of the global fight against <terrorism>.

References

- Ambrose, S.E. (1991-92). The president and foreign policy. *Foreign Affairs*, 70, 120-38.
- Amernic, J. H., & Craig, R. J. (2004). 9/1 1 in the service of corporate rhetoric: Southwest Airlines' 2001 letter to shareholders. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 28(4), 325-341.
doi:10.1177/0196859904267121
- Bacevich, A.J. (2009). *The limits of power: The end of American exceptionalism*. New York: Holt.
- Bostdorff, D.M. (1994). *The presidency and the rhetoric of foreign crisis*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Campbell, K. K., & Jamieson, K. H. (2008). *Presidents creating the presidency: deeds done in words*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Delgado, F. (1995). Chicano movement rhetoric: An ideographic interpretation. *Communication Quarterly*, 43(4), 446-455.
- Denton, R.E. & Woodward, R.C. (1990). *Political communication in America*, 2nd ed. New York: Praeger.
- Edwards, J. L., & Winkler, C. K. (1997). Representative Form and the Visual Ideograph: The Iwo Jima Image in Editorial Cartoons. *Quarterly Journal Of Speech*, 83(3), 289.
- Enck-Wanzer, D. (2012). Decolonizing Imaginaries: Rethinking “the People” in the Young Lords’ Church Offensive. *Quarterly Journal Of Speech*, 98(1), 1-23.
doi:10.1080/00335630.2011.638656
- Harnden, T. (2010, May 27). Barack Obama declares the ‘War on Terror’ is over. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/7772598/Barack-Obama-declares-the-War-on-Terror-is-over.html>

- Hasian Jr., M., & Condit, C. (1996). The rhetorical boundaries of 'the law': A consideration of the rhetorical culture of legal practice and the case of the 'Separate But Equal' Doctrine. *Quarterly Journal Of Speech*, 82(4), 323.
- Hodgson, G. (2009). *The myth of American exceptionalism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hoffman, K.S. (2011). Visual persuasion in George W. Bush's presidency: Cowboy imagery in public discourse. *Congress and the Presidency*, 38, 322-343.
- Kuypers, J. A., & Althouse, M. T. (2009). John Pym, Ideographs, and the Rhetoric of Opposition to the English Crown. *Rhetoric Review*, 28(3), 225-245.
doi:10.1080/07350190902958677
- Mason, D.S. (2009). *The end of the American century*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- McCrisken, T. (2003). *American exceptionalism and the legacy of Vietnam: U.S. foreign policy since 1974*. New York: Palgrave.
- McGee, M. (1980). The "Ideograph": A link between rhetoric and ideology. *Quarterly Journal Of Speech*, 66(1), 1-16.
- Neustadt, R.E. (1990). *Presidential power: The politics of leadership*. New York: Wiley.
- Obama, B. H. (2009a, February 24). Address before a joint session of Congress. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from The American Presidency Project Web site:
<http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=85753>.

Obama, B. H. (2009b, February 27). Remarks on military operations in Iraq at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American Presidency Project Web site:

[http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=85807.](http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=85807)

Obama, B. H. (2009c, March 12). Remarks at the National Defense University. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American Presidency Project Web site:

[http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=85854.](http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=85854)

Obama, B. H. (2009d, April 6). Remarks to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in Ankara. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American Presidency Project Web site:

[http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=85972.](http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=85972)

Obama, B. H. (2009e, April 20). Remarks at the Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, Virginia. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American Presidency Project Web site:

[http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86024.](http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86024)

Obama, B. H. (2009f, May 13). Commencement address at Arizona State University in Tempe. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American President Project Web site:

[http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86138.](http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86138)

Obama, B. H. (2009g, July 8). G8 declaration on counter terrorism. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American Presidency Project Web site:

[http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86411.](http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86411)

Obama, B. H. (2009h, October 6). Remarks at the National Counterterrorism Center in McLean, Virginia. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American Presidency Project Web site:

[http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86733.](http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86733)

- Obama, B. H. (2009i, October 20). Remarks to Joint Terrorism Task Force staff members in New York City. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86795>.
- Obama, B. H. (2009j, October 26). Remarks prior to a meeting with the cochairs of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board and senior members of the intelligence community. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86817>.
- Obama, B. H. (2009k, December 1). Address to the nation at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86948>.
- Obama, B. H. (2009l, December 10). Address accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway. Retrieved July 3, 2012, from the American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=86978>.
- Obama, B. H. (2010a, January 27). Address before a joint session of Congress on the state of the Union. Retrieved December 12, 2012, from The American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=87433>.
- Obama, B. H. (2010b, March 7). Remarks on the parliamentary elections in Iraq. Retrieved December 12, 2012, from The American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=87619>.
- Obama, B. H. (2010c, April 13). Remarks at the opening session of the Nuclear Security Summit. Retrieved December 12, 2012, from The American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=87738>.

- Obama, B. H. (2010d, May 12). The President's news conference with President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan. Retrieved December 12, 2012, from The American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=87894>.
- Obama, B. H. (2010e, June 26). G-8 leaders statement on countering terrorism. Retrieved December 12, 2012, from The American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=88156>.
- Obama, B. H. (2010f, August 31). Address to the nation on the end of combat operations in Iraq. Retrieved December 12, 2012, from The American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=88362>.
- Obama, B. H. (2010g, November 6). Remarks on the second anniversary of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India. Retrieved December 12, 2012, from The American Presidency Project Web site: <http://www.presidency.uscb.edu/ws/print.php?pid=88677>.
- Parry-Giles, T. (1995). Ideology and poetics in public issue construction: Thatcherism, Civil liberties, and 'terrorism'. *Communication Quarterly*, 43(2), 182-196.
- Pew Global Attitudes Project (2008, December 18). Global public opinion in the Bush years. Retrieved December 4, 2012, from <http://www.pewglobal.org/2008/12/18/global-public-opinion-in-the-bush-years-2001-2008/>.
- Schonberg, K.K. (2003). *Pursuing the national interest: Moments of transition in twentieth century American foreign policy*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Smith, T. (2007). *A pact with the devil: Washington's bid for world supremacy and the betrayal of the American promise*. New York: Routledge.
- Stuckey, M.E. (2004). *Defining Americans: The presidency and national identity*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press.

- Towner, E. B. (2010). A <Patriotic> apologia: The transcendence of the Dixie Chicks. *Rhetoric Review*, 29(3), 293-309. doi:10.1080/07350198.2010.485969
- Tulis, J. (1987). *The rhetorical presidency*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Valenzanno, J. M. III (2006). Freedom and terror: President George W. Bush's ideograph use during his first term. Unpublished dissertation. Atlanta, GA. Georgia State University.
- West, M. & Carey, C. (2006). (Re)enacting frontier justice: The Bush administration's tactical narration of the Old West fantasy after September 11. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 92, 379-412.
- Winkler, C. (2006). *In the name of terrorism presidents on political violence in the post-World War II era*. Albany: State University of New York Press.