

AN ESSAY ON
**FEAR APPEALS
AND HOW BUSH
CRAFTED THE
WAR ON TERROR**



 MIND
ON
FIRE
BOOKS

MARTINEZ

Fear Appeals and How President Bush Crafted the War on Terror

By Willy Martinez



**Merchant of Horror, Sci-Fi, Fantasy, Grimoire and
Non-Fiction**

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Abstract

In order to understand how fear appeals in the public relations of a war campaign can be so successful; this study will analyze the address to the nation performed by former President George W. Bush, “President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours.” This analysis will unpack how President Bush applied three main heuristics of fear appeals in his speech: presenting the audience with only two choices; Making an apparent threat to the specific audience, and by amplifying the threat with time limitations and attachments to a consequence if the audience does not take action.

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Intro

“Few on September 11 questioned whether we were really at war; only later did it become clear that this was a rhetorical reconstruction” – David Zarefsky

It seems like the terms “terrorists,” “terror,” “insurgents,” “secret caves,” and “unknown enemy” are all commonly accepted by Americans to be synonymous with the nation’s current war efforts. These terms have in fact become common places in our vocabulary and they either directly or indirectly affect our lives. **How** they may affect our lives will be examined in this paper; more specifically, how they are used by Presidential administrations as fear appeals to gather the American people to respond with physical action or “war” against others. Attempting to understand how fear appeals in war rhetoric can be so successful, this study will analyze former President George W. Bush’s address to the Nation on March 17, 2003.

Some critics argue that Presidential rhetoric has little to no effect or that “Presidents usually fail in their efforts to move the public” (Edwards 9). However, according to David Zarefsky, Edwards is bound to see Presidential rhetoric as failing since he assumes that for the rhetoric to have any effect it must be “measurable,” much like the impact of an injection of propaganda (607). Zarefsky, on the other hand, takes Presidential rhetoric and the effects it has on the American public not as measurable per se given the complexity of its various components: the relationship between the text and the audience, the rhetor and the text and the text itself as interpretable, and the context of its delivery. To his mind all of these factors help us understand Presidential rhetoric and its potential short and long-term impact on the audience. Its impact, then, can more properly be comprehended if taken to be interpreted rather than measured (9). This paper will contest the

generalization made by Edwards about Presidential rhetoric being measurable, and align with Zarefsky's work by not attempting to measure Presidential rhetoric with data because rhetoric is "often richly layered and multivocal, that calls for interpretation" and needs "unpacking" of the text (Zarefsky 228, 227). From the three dimensions of rhetorical transactions discussed in "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," Zarefsky claims that a key relationship in studying Presidential rhetoric is the rhetorician's interpretation of the text, in order to uncover different meanings of significance, or a reconstruction of the text. To uncover the significance of Bush's 2003 speech, then, this study will examine the rhetorical devices applied by the Bush administration to persuade the American public ~~into~~ to pursue one of America's longest conflicts.

In the academic field, researchers debate or suggest how war speeches and rhetoric are tailored to manipulate or persuade the people: some say the manipulation is couched in a binary the speech sets up between the civilized versus the barbarians; others say it relies on a sense of nationalism or identity; or that war rhetoric is centered on instilling the duty to save a world in which the idea of peace is threatened (De Castella, Evans, Ivie, Mulloy). Interestingly though much of the research points to the element of fear, whether implicit or explicit, fear is a subject across the board for scholars of war rhetoric as well as is the heuristic of the common place or aesthetic appeals. Using a rhetorical lens to understand the use of fear appeals in war rhetoric is important because "rhetoricians approach these questions with a different set of tools and perspectives than do political scientists or diplomatic historians, rhetoricians may be able to contribute uniquely to the understating of acts that require the persuasion of auditors" (Bates 449). In analyzing the use of war rhetoric in Bush's 2003 speech, this study will extract the four main rhetorical heuristics of fear appeals Bush uses: presenting a dichotomy, making an apparent threat, aesthetic appeals and applying intensity.

Presenting a Dichotomy/Binary

Fear appeals are best stated when the rhetor offers the audience only two options, limiting them to the dichotomy, which some critics say may be unethical. Many of the scholars writing this subject are bedeviled by the binary in war rhetoric, and there are probably more bodies of writing that talk about this than there have been presidents. For example, in "How an Elite-Engineered Moral Panic Led to the U.S. War on Iraq", author Scott Bonn claims that Presidential Administrations are being manipulative and that President Bush aimed to "create fear, reinforce stereotypes, and exacerbate pre-existing divisions in the world" (228). These same pre-existing divisions are talked about in Brad Evans "Liberal War Thesis" as the "otherness to be the problem to be solved" (749). As Joane Esche puts it in "Legitimizing the "War on Terror", the "American national identity in opposition to an 'evil other' is a binary which is done intentionally to limit the audience's options to only two choices: the good or the bad (358). In the article "Images of Savagery in American Justification for War," Robert Ivie uses the Johnson administration's insistence on the aggression from the North for analysis (729). The enemy is said to be portrayed as savages "seeking to subjugate others by force of arms" and members of "tyrannical forces of aggression" (279). Images like this seem to indicate intent to promote fear and division. What is interesting is that President Johnson's speech from 1965 applies the same heuristic of fear appeals in claiming the enemy has a "desire for conquest" as President Bush ~~did~~ does over 30 years later (281).

In addressing to the Nation on Iraq on March 17, 2003, Bush begins the speech by talking about how the United States has worked with other nations to attempt to disarm Iraqi leaders of weapons of mass destruction - from the opening line of his speech, he begins to establish the division between us and them - the civilized against the savages. Throughout the speech, Bush asks those of the civilized world to join the fight against an oppressive "thug and killer" (279). He does this by framing the

act of joining the coalition and opposing Saddam Hussein through metaphors and “advocating the coalition as the embodiment of Civilization standing against Saddam Hussein’s Savagery” (Bates 450).

In the article “Legitimizing the War on Terror,” Joanne Esche advances this same argument, pushing her audience to believe that the argument for wars is built on two foundations, the second of which is a division between barbarians and savages, another binary. What Esche has called a political myth can be seen as “imbuing language with power, shaping what people consider to be legitimate, and drawing determination to act” (357). This idea of “mythical discourse” is no myth at all; it is done constructively. What is even more interesting is that Esche’s study specifically focuses on the Bush administration by examining the content of over 50 official texts that would suggest “lexical triggers” relating to fear appeals (357).

A more comprehensive view of fear appeals is studied by philosopher, Michael Pfau, who has also recognized this dichotomous or binary fear appeal; he argues for what he calls “civic fear” which is seen as an “emotional state that, at its best, opens up deliberative possibilities” (233). Civic fear is contrasted with the traditional binary fear appeal that is said to be “pressingly common” in today’s political realm (233). A civic fear appeal is used to bring a worry or problem to the attention of the audience, in which all avenues of addressing the problem can be unpacked or disputed. This approach then moves beyond a simple binary structure, and isn’t used to limit the audience on choices or logic. In summary of Pfau’s work, the rhetor must be aware that fear appeals can bifocal, so the goal then in a civic environment is to be more explorative so that the community can respond deliberatively. Intentionally though, the notion of civic fear was not evoked in President Bush’s speech; the President’s main aim was to spread fear and limit the audience to a binary, as presented by Esche and Bonn. Once the division between “the us versus them” has been drawn, and the audience’s logic in choices has been limited, the President then emphasizes the eminent threat, so to speak.

The Deliberate Threat

“Our nation is founded on the rhetoric of enemyship” (Engels and Saas 225)

Brad Evans has labeled the issue of fear as “a global imaginary of threat” in his article, “The Liberal War Thesis: Introducing the Ten Key Principals of Twenty-First Century Biopolitical Warfare” (748). He supports this idea through Immanuel Kant’s notion of the autonomous individual at peace, which allows governments to “collapse the local into the global.” It is said that the idea of peace set forth by Kant’s work is being threatened because Liberalism “is directly furlled by the universal belief in the righteousness of its mission, since there is no universally self-evident allegiance to the project, war is necessarily universalized in its pursuit of peace” (749). It is this pursuit of peace that insinuates that there is a present threat – which in turn leads to fear.

Aristotle understood the basics of fear appeals and in the *Rhetoric*, he defines fear as “a sort of pain or agitation derived from the imagination of a future destructive or painful evil” (28). This “painful evil” is what this paper will address as the deliberate threat presented by the rhetor. Aristotle also paired the emotion of fear with confidence, something that is necessary for pushing the audience to act once fear has been instilled in the audience. After all, the main aim is to persuade the audience to take the suggested action, so once fear has been spread, enough confidence must be instilled to convince the audience that they in fact can overcome the fear just addressed. Philosopher Douglas N. Walton suggests that “only if the feasibility and ease of the recommended action outweigh the threat will the respondent be persuaded to take action” (Prus 304). Krista De Castella formulates an understanding of how fear is spread in her article

“Two Leaders, Two Wars: A Psychological Analysis of Fear and Anger Content in Political Rhetoric about Terrorism”. To be able to define fear and place limits to its scope of meaning, she borrows from appraisal theory and terror management theory. One of the main points that she pulls from terror management theory is that “the elicitation of fear also requires concerns about one’s ability to cope with the present threat or (uncertain coping)” (183). In Walton’s study, “Practical Reasoning and the Structure of Fear Appeal Arguments”-he is concerned with which appeals are successful in leading the audience to take the suggested action. Walton’s research uncovers that “when the [rhetor] uses the fear appeal argument, it [also] has to provide enough incentive to overcome [the threat’s] resistance”, meaning that after the fear has been spread, the rhetor must then give the audience enough confidence to overcome the threat mentioned by the rhetor (307). Beth Innocenti also talks about building confidence in her research, but she addresses this as “presenting grounds” for the rhetor’s claim (283). Joining the classic Aristotelian view of fear and confidence with what is being published today, we can study how Bush carefully accomplishes the task of presenting a deliberate threat, and then builds confidence in the American audience.

Looking at President Bush’s speech, the first instance where a specific threat is mentioned is in paragraph three. There is a mention of how U.N. weapon inspectors have “been threatened by Iraqi officials, electronically bugged, and systematically deceived”. Shortly following this remark, there is a statement regarding a “history of aggression in the Middle East.” Alluding to the location of the Middle East can serve to connect the current threat to the long-standing undercurrent of fear within the minds of the Christian World since the crusades. It is no secret that this location has been a center of turbidity; its mere mention arouses a “passion similar to that of terror” (Burke 121). Another direct threat stated in Bush’s speech to the American people is drawn when the claim is made that Iraq has possession of nuclear weapons with which the terrorists could “fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country or any other” (277).

The rhetoric is clear in that there is imminent danger at home for the American people if actions are not taken when Bush claims that “[s]hould enemies strike our country, they would be attempting to shift our attention with panic and weaken our morale with fear” (279). The enemy has been charged with instigating fear, the deliberate threat has been made clear and important.

Pulling in support from different academic communities, this study has found that researchers writing about war rhetoric do in fact talk about fear and confidence, the difference lay in terminology. Walton, Innocenti and Pfau refer to the deliberate threat as “taking a risk”. Risks are important, but the rhetor must be careful not to exaggerate claims made or the respondents will lose interest and discredit the rhetor or “use it as an avenue to escape the pressure of the argument” (Walton 312). When a speaker marks their territory for their claims, they “risk criticisms on the grounds of poor judgement or fear mongering” (Innocenti 282). Bush took risks right from the beginning of his speech on March 19th when he claims that the Iraqi regime has a “history of reckless aggression in the Middle East” and that Iraq has harbored terrorists which could use chemical, biological or nuclear weapons “obtained with the help of Iraq”. These examples from the speech are both, a “deliberate threat” and “risks” taken by President Bush. As the World learned after the invasion was complete, no nuclear weapons were ever found in Iraq, and that was the main source of criticisms about President Bush’s claims and reasoning for going to war with Iraq. In that same speech, Bush was adamant about Iraq’s nuclear intent and that “no nation can possibly claim that Iraq has disarmed ...it will not disarm so long as Saddam Hussein holds power”. Pfau agrees that a speaker should be prepared to take risks in order to get “audience to take certain action” (219). And Bush was successful in motivating the American audience to support the war with the deliberate threat, but he was later criticized for his risks taken, and the world-wide audience continues to criticize his risks to this day.

Another layer needed to present a successful deliberate threat to an audience is to ensure that the fear appeal be time

indexed or temporal in nature. Walton points out in his empirical research that the most effective fear arguments “frequently involve a choice between long term safety and immediate gratification (307). What this means for the rhetor is that they should make it evident that the threat is current and should be acted upon as soon as possible. And we see this in President Bush’s speech, the American audience is told that “before the day of horror can come, before it is too late to act, this danger will be removed” (Bush paragraph 7). Because of the events of 9/11, the threat seems immediate and not in the distant future like smoking cigarettes which are also a threat, but cigarettes are a long term threat. The time ramifications were made clear in Bush’s speech by stating that the United States would “meet the threat now” (Bush). It was made clear that action would be in the near future. Interestingly though, no definite time is marked, the emphasis is on acting sooner than later in his comment, “[b]efore the day of horror can come, before it is too late to act, this danger will be removed” (Bush). Towards the end of his speech, President Bush says that “we (

the American audience) choose to meet that threat now, where it arises, before it can appear suddenly in our skies and cities” (Bush). Fear must be close at hand- time must be emphasized- we fear what is about to happen, “both temporally and spatially” states Pfau (222). We don’t usually fear death because it is either far off or unseen, but emphasizing a threat and calling for immediate action makes the threat much more plausible.

Aesthetic Appeals and the Sublime / Collective Memory

“[T]he violence of the new war rhetoric is less about the manipulation of individual psyches and more about the creation of a symbolic landscape” Engels and Saas – 227

In 1756 Edmund Burke asserted in *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, that the sublime “is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” – and neuroscientists have recently found in their studies that there is in fact a section of the brain that becomes more active during times of being appealed to aesthetically (Burke 34). Neuroaesthetics research is concerned with the neural correlates of aesthetic experiences, and traditionally only dealing with beauty. Jacobs et al. ‘s study takes a step beyond studies that traditionally only deal with beauty – that they deal as well with stimuli that are ugly and promote fear. In the study by Jacobs et. al., “Neural Correlates of Visual Aesthetics – Beauty as the Coalescence of Stimulus and Internal State”, the researchers examine the aesthetic correlates without areas of the brain being compared to other stimulus. Jacobs et. al. have discovered that “task-stimulus interactions are also present during the aesthetic judgment of visual textures [and] implies that these areas form a network that is specifically devoted to aesthetic assessment, irrespective of the stimulus type”, in other words, whether the stimulus be ‘ugly’ or ‘beautiful’ (1). In summary, neuroaesthetics research has found what Burke wrote over 170 years ago to be true, that the whole mind is influenced by the sublime or aesthetic appeals – only Burke further asserts that terror is the most influential of all the appeals of the sublime because “ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure” (34). This network of devoted assessment in aesthetics can be compared with Edmund Burk’s assessment of how people perceive the sublime and the beautiful, and furthermore, how President Bush uses the sublime in his speech to intensify his fear appeals. By teasing out some of the aesthetic statements in President Bush’s speech, this analysis provides evidence that Bush does in fact apply heuristics of fear and the sublime in his address to the nation prior to the invasion of Iraq.

Furthering the conversation on how fear is addressed, Robert Ivie and Oscar Ginger in their article, “Hunting the Devil: Democracy’s rhetorical Impulse to War” attempt to draw on the history of a demon within presidential rhetoric beginning with

the founding fathers. The difference here is that the Ivie and Ginger assert that “We the people – fear the enemy within: an impassioned ogre of mob violence” (580). This article works under the premise that there is a monster within the American identity; only, the attributes of this monster are projected onto the enemies of America. President’s discourse is said to be a “manifestation rather than aberration of US political culture” which is a direct “reflection of the nation’s troubled democratic identity” (580). Even though the main audience in discussion in this article is focused on the American people, it is never the less, another researcher identifying the dominance that fear plays in discussions about war rhetoric. Another article, written by Ivie and Ginger, “Hunting the Devil: Democracy’s rhetorical Impulse to War” discusses President Bush’s war rhetoric against terrorists and claims that “the defacement of America’s terrorist enemies by the president’s rhetoric set the stage for a classic psychological projection” which is based on the work of Carl Jung in which “an unintentional transfer of a part of the psyche which belongs to the subject onto an outer object” (586). It is once again the controlling or shaping of the psyche of the American people that fortifies Presidential war rhetoric’s success. And again this paper will not address the psychology of the American people, but it is another example of how fear is said to be effective to the American people.

Following up with the work on the Sublime, presented by Edmund Burke, he wrote that the sublime encompasses fear to make his assertion about the strongest emotion, fear, and that the sublime “operates in a manner analogous to terror” (36). So how did the Bush administration use sublime rhetoric to strengthen his campaign in shaping the landscape from a beautiful horizon, into an uncertain region? Bush places locations and the enemy into an obscure category, because to “make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary.” (Burke 48). And In Cezar M. Ornatowski’s work, “Rhetoric Goes to War: The Evolution of the United States of America’s Narrative of the War on Terror”, Cezar contends that “words and images became central in a way that transcended, thanks to the internet and other media of instant global

communication, their role in past conflicts, including the Cold War”, supporting the importance of imagery in war rhetoric (68). There is no doubt that sublime imagery has been implemented into the speech to have an stronger effect on the American audience; this study will now analyze Bush’s speech to understand how he was successful.

Looking at Bush’s speech, President Bush utilizes obscure imagery and locale to his advantage. Locations of danger within the United States are not made specific in Bush’s speech and common places are utilized to engage the larger populous. Among these common places are “our skies and cities” (279). Bush also declares that he has personally taken measures to ensure “security of our airports and increased Coast Guard patrols of major seaports” as well as working “closely with Governors to increase armed security at critical facilities across America” (279). Threat is presented as being all around the nation, from the skies to the local government agencies. No safe places are left for the American people to take haven; they are not presented with any other alternative to fighting. Bush addresses the people of Iraq in this speech as well whom are apparently not exempt from the common place threat. Bush tells his Iraqi interlocutors that “if we must begin a military campaign, it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against you” (278). Bush insists on referring to the enemy as “lawless men”, indicating that the enemy will be anybody who does not submit to American procedures; the enemy will not be limited to the Iraqi military factions or Saddam and his family. Such a claim is void of context but is followed up with an offer of aid to the Iraqi people in the form of food and medicine. Although there are different aesthetics of the sublime, Burke holds strong to the notion that he “know[s] of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power, [which]...rises...from terror...the common stock of everything that is sublime” (59). It is not the beautiful, but the sublime which has the power to compel and destroy us.

Continuing on with vague and obscure times or persons, in making a claim to act before it is too late, Bush argues that action must be taken “before the day of horror can come”, the

possible danger of a possible terrorist attack killing “thousands, or [even] hundreds of thousands of innocent people”. In addressing the people of Iraq, Bush promises them that “[w]e will tear down the apparatus of terror”, a statement appealing to the ugly of the sublime. This apparatus that Bush speaks of is in reference to the regime, but referring to their government as an apparatus dresses their regime being akin to a cold machine, or broken system. Bush then urges the Iraqi military – “do not fight for a dying regime” – personifying the apparatus as a living entity which can also die. If the American people do not take heed to Bush’s words, then “a policy of appeasement could bring destruction of a kind never before seen on this earth.

Flipping over the rhetorical landscape onto its head, in ending his speech, President Bush then uses the beauty in the sublime in believing the “Iraqi people are deserving and capable of human liberty”.. “the power and appeal of human liberty is felt in every life and every land”... “And the greatest power of freedom is to overcome hatred and violence, and turn the creative gifts of men and women to the pursuits of peace”. Ending his speech with beautiful aesthetics serves a double purpose; not only does it take the listener to a peaceful place after being taken to a dark place, but it also builds confidence and gives hope to Americans and Iraqis. This control of the sublime is what helps carry the audience through his claims and shows a potential for progress if the audience chooses to accept his claims. Even though controlling emotions with the sublime does not seem important on its own, it can be very effective when used comprehensively with overcoming the threat and division between a people as discussed earlier. The use of the sublime can also be used to heighten awareness in the audience, this will be discussed in the next section.

Intensity

In order to emphasize the division between the good and the bad, Bush uses intensity in his speech to heighten his claims. According to Beth Innocenti’s study, the third characteristic of

fear appeals, intensity, can be accomplished “by attending to word choice, syntax, and broader units of composition” (285). There are different levels of intensity, low or high, and it is up to the speaker/writer to determine which is appropriate and which will leave the speaker with less criticism after the audience has chosen to take action or not, and following the repercussions of their decisions. High intensity claims, however, will also make it more difficult for the audience to say they “did not see the potential harms” (285). So, if the rhetor is going to make high intense claims, then he/she should have a high level of confidence and grounds to take risks. Bush was confident in his claims about Iraq harboring chemical weaponry, but history shows that Bush was not correct in his intense claims. Michael Pfau insists that “at the dawn of the 21st century fear appeals never the less have reached a new peak of intensity” (216). And the speech given by President Bush on March 19th, is no exception to the rule of intensity. Bush ends the third paragraph to his introduction with a slight increase in intensity when he states that “peaceful efforts to disarm the Iraqi regime have failed again and again – because we are not dealing with peaceful men” (Bush, 2003). He then goes on to refer to these non-peaceful men as “thugs and killers.” Intensity is not only aimed towards the terrorists; Bush adds intensity to the American audience’s actions by saying that since terrorist attacks are unannounced, “responding to such enemies only after they have struck first is not self-defense, it is suicide” (Bush, 2003). In this instance, Bush asserts that threat will not only come from direct attacks, but that *suicide* will come from lack of action. Bush calls their inaction to be suicidal to raise the intensity and importance of the audience needing to take immediate action. The administration has coupled the effects of a threat with intensity.

Implications and Discovery

“All life has an original predisposition to good and a simultaneous propensity to evil” – Brad Evans

It is difficult to make claims about the influence of fear appeals as they occur or have just recently occurred. However, the War on Terror began fourteen years ago which gives us enough time to be able to collect information and look back in retrospect and study the trends in Presidential war rhetoric, as well as what theorists have written across disciplines. America may not have understood or agreed with the Presidential rhetoric at the time, but as the author of “Presidential Rhetoric and Power of Definition” states, the “[t]ruly significant outcomes of Presidential rhetoric may pass un noticed until long after the fact” (Zarefsky 236). Communication scholar, Cezar M. Ornatowski uncovered a document from 2008, in which a Department of Homeland Security memorandum directed at United States of America’s senior government officials and diplomats asserted that “words matter...in an age where a statement can cross continents in a matter of seconds” (71). Acknowledging that words and terminology should be strategic, it is of complete relevance for practitioners of discourse to understand how these terms are being constructed and when to best use them.

In this essay we have looked at the different ways war rhetoric has been discussed/characterized in order to understand how Presidential war rhetoric utilizes fear appeals. Studying fear appeals from an Aristotelean viewpoint in the sense that “nothing is inherently good, bad, or meaningful in any other terms” can be useful for rhetoricians because it puts them in a position of maximum control (Prus 13). The more layered or complex that this nexus of fear can be created, the more control the rhetor can have over their hearers. By identifying the tools available to the rhetor when considering fear appeals, I conclude the same as Scott Boon does in “How an Elite-Engineered Moral Panic Led to the U.S. War on Iraq”, that “a President can precipitate a moral panic as well as decrease public concern about that issue and dissipate moral panic” – and in the case of this speech, Bush has precipitated panic (229). More specifically, in this research paper, we have learned about the four major tools in fear appeals by studying President Bush’s address to the nation on a war with Iraq: presenting a

dichotomy, making an apparent threat, aesthetic appeals and applying intensity, in order to have the greatest effect on the audience.

The truth of the matter is that arguments don't have to be logical, as Aristotle makes clear in *On Rhetoric* - they only have to seem logical. And Bush's speech is a perfect study of this claim. This speech affords us a current application of successful fear appeals, which adds complexity and relevancy to the canon of fear appeals as prescribed over 2,300 years ago by Aristotle. As practitioners and teachers of discourse, we must teach our students and fellow citizens to see beyond the Presidential reconstructions move towards Pfau's explorations of using civic fear, in order to be a more informed and thoughtful community.

Appendix

Link to article: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html>

President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours

Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on March 17, 2003, 8:01PM Eastern.

THE PRESIDENT: My fellow citizens, events in Iraq have now reached the final days of decision. For more than a decade, the United States and other nations have pursued patient and honorable efforts to disarm the Iraqi regime without war. That regime pledged to reveal and destroy all its weapons of mass destruction as a condition for ending the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

Since then, the world has engaged in 12 years of diplomacy. We have passed more than a dozen resolutions in the United Nations Security Council. We have sent hundreds of weapons inspectors to oversee the disarmament of Iraq. Our good faith has not been returned.

The Iraqi regime has used diplomacy as a ploy to gain time and advantage. It has uniformly defied Security Council resolutions demanding full disarmament. Over the years, U.N. weapon inspectors have been threatened by Iraqi officials, electronically bugged, and systematically deceived. Peaceful efforts to disarm the Iraqi regime have failed again and again -- because we are not dealing with peaceful men.

Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised. This regime has already used weapons of mass destruction against Iraq's neighbors and against Iraq's people.

The regime has a history of reckless aggression in the Middle East. It has a deep hatred of America and our friends. And it has aided, trained and harbored terrorists, including operatives of al Qaeda.

The danger is clear: using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country, or any other.

The United States and other nations did nothing to deserve or invite this threat. But we will do everything to defeat it. Instead of drifting along toward tragedy, we will set a course toward safety. Before the day of horror can come, before it is too late to act, this danger will be removed.

The United States of America has the sovereign authority to use force in assuring its own national security. That duty falls to me, as Commander-in-Chief, by the oath I have sworn, by the oath I will keep.

Recognizing the threat to our country, the United States Congress voted overwhelmingly last year to support the use of force against Iraq. America tried to work with the United Nations to address this threat because we wanted to resolve the issue peacefully. We believe in the mission of the United Nations. One reason the U.N. was founded after the second world war was to confront aggressive dictators, actively and early, before they can attack the innocent and destroy the peace.

In the case of Iraq, the Security Council did act, in the early 1990s. Under Resolutions 678 and 687 -- both still in effect -- the United States and our allies are authorized to use force in

riding Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. This is not a question of authority, it is a question of will.

Last September, I went to the U.N. General Assembly and urged the nations of the world to unite and bring an end to this danger. On November 8th, the Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1441, finding Iraq in material breach of its obligations, and vowing serious consequences if Iraq did not fully and immediately disarm.

Today, no nation can possibly claim that Iraq has disarmed. And it will not disarm so long as Saddam Hussein holds power. For the last four-and-a-half months, the United States and our allies have worked within the Security Council to enforce that Council's long-standing demands. Yet, some permanent members of the Security Council have publicly announced they will veto any resolution that compels the disarmament of Iraq. These governments share our assessment of the danger, but not our resolve to meet it. Many nations, however, do have the resolve and fortitude to act against this threat to peace, and a broad coalition is now gathering to enforce the just demands of the world. The United Nations Security Council has not lived up to its responsibilities, so we will rise to ours.

In recent days, some governments in the Middle East have been doing their part. They have delivered public and private messages urging the dictator to leave Iraq, so that disarmament can proceed peacefully. He has thus far refused. All the decades of deceit and cruelty have now reached an end. Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our choosing. For their own safety, all foreign nationals -- including journalists and inspectors -- should leave Iraq immediately. Many Iraqis can hear me tonight in a translated radio broadcast, and I have a message for them. If we must begin a military campaign, it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against you. As our coalition takes away their power, we will deliver the food and medicine you need. We will tear down the apparatus of terror and we will help you to build a new Iraq that is prosperous and free. In a free Iraq, there will be no more wars of aggression against your neighbors, no more poison factories, no more executions of dissidents, no more torture chambers and rape rooms. The tyrant will soon be gone. The day of your liberation is near.

It is too late for Saddam Hussein to remain in power. It is not too late for the Iraqi military to act with honor and protect your country by permitting the peaceful entry of coalition forces to eliminate weapons of mass destruction. Our forces will give Iraqi military units clear instructions on actions they can take to avoid being attacked and destroyed. I urge every member of the Iraqi military and intelligence services, if war comes, do not fight for a dying regime that is not worth your own life.

And all Iraqi military and civilian personnel should listen carefully to this warning. In any conflict, your fate will depend on your action. Do not destroy oil wells, a source of wealth that belongs to the Iraqi people. Do not obey any command to use weapons of mass destruction against anyone, including the Iraqi people. War crimes will be prosecuted. War criminals will be punished. And it will be no defense to say, "I was just following orders."

Should Saddam Hussein choose confrontation, the American people can know that every measure has been taken to avoid war, and every measure will be taken to win it. Americans understand the costs of conflict because we have paid them in the past. War has no certainty, except the certainty of sacrifice.

Yet, the only way to reduce the harm and duration of war is to apply the full force and might of our military, and we are prepared to do so. If Saddam Hussein attempts to cling to power, he will remain a deadly foe until the end. In desperation, he and terrorists groups might try to conduct terrorist operations against the American people and our friends. These attacks are not inevitable. They are, however, possible. And this very fact underscores the reason we cannot live under the threat of blackmail. The terrorist threat to America and the world will be diminished the moment that Saddam Hussein is disarmed.

Our government is on heightened watch against these dangers. Just as we are preparing to ensure victory in Iraq, we are taking further actions to protect our homeland. In recent days, American authorities have expelled from the country certain individuals with ties to Iraqi intelligence services. Among other measures, I have directed additional security of our airports, and increased Coast Guard patrols of major seaports. The Department of Homeland Security is working closely with the nation's governors to increase armed security at critical facilities across America.

Should enemies strike our country, they would be attempting to shift our attention with panic and weaken our morale with fear. In this, they would fail. No act of theirs can alter the course or shake the resolve of this country. We are a peaceful people -- yet we're not a fragile people, and we will not be intimidated by thugs and killers. If our enemies dare to strike us, they and all who have aided them, will face fearful consequences.

We are now acting because the risks of inaction would be far greater. In one year, or five years, the power of Iraq to inflict harm on all free nations would be multiplied many times over. With these capabilities, Saddam Hussein and his terrorist allies could choose the moment of deadly conflict when they are strongest. We choose to meet that threat now, where it arises, before it can appear suddenly in our skies and cities.

The cause of peace requires all free nations to recognize new and undeniable realities. In the 20th century, some chose to appease murderous dictators, whose threats were allowed to grow into genocide and global war. In this century, when evil men plot chemical, biological and nuclear terror, a policy of appeasement could bring destruction of a kind never before seen on this earth.

Terrorists and terror states do not reveal these threats with fair notice, in formal declarations -- and responding to such enemies only after they have struck first is not self-defense, it is suicide. The security of the world requires disarming Saddam Hussein now.

As we enforce the just demands of the world, we will also honor the deepest commitments of our country. Unlike Saddam Hussein, we believe the Iraqi people are deserving and capable of human liberty. And when the dictator has departed, they can set an example to all the Middle East of a vital and peaceful and self-governing nation.

The United States, with other countries, will work to advance liberty and peace in that region. Our goal will not be achieved overnight, but it can come over time. The power and appeal of human liberty is felt in every life and every land. And the greatest power of freedom is to overcome hatred and violence, and turn the creative gifts of men and women to the pursuits of peace.

That is the future we choose. Free nations have a duty to defend our people by uniting against the violent. And tonight, as

we have done before, America and our allies accept that responsibility.
Good night, and may God continue to bless America.
END 8:15 P.M. EST

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