

RHETORIC, WORLD-VIEW, AND STRATEGY IN UNITED STATES NATIONAL
SECURITY STRATEGY DOCUMENTS.

By

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Abstract

Beginning in 1987, American Presidents have published a National Security Strategy (NSS), a public statement of their administration's grand strategy for the conduct of foreign policy. Despite breaking with a centuries-old tradition of secrecy, NSS documents have been routinely dismissed by scholars and experts as little more than an exercise in public relations or "mere rhetoric." In this dissertation, I argue that such a dismissive attitude is unproductive because it overlooks important linkages between the public expression of foreign policy, the influence that symbolism and rhetoric have on threat perception and policy choice, and the diverse (and continually shifting) array of audiences that such documents reach and influence. I engage in a close rhetorical analysis of the NSS documents of Presidents Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama in order to make this argument. Additionally, I demonstrate that NSS documents are an important resource for comparatively evaluating various administrations' foreign policies, thus facilitating better deliberation over grand strategy. While NSS documents may not function as "blueprints" for foreign policy, they are an important site for grounding public argument over the future of American foreign policy in an increasingly uncertain world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Although statecraft has been practiced for thousands of years, the publication and dissemination of a statement of grand strategy by a state is a relatively recent development. As John Lewis Gaddis (2002) observes, “it’s an interesting reflection on our democratic age that nations are now expected to publish their grand strategies before pursuing them. This practice would have surprised Metternich, Bismarck, and Lord Salisbury, though not Pericles” (p. 50). American grand strategy, or the “collection of plans and policies that comprise the state's deliberate effort to harness political, military, diplomatic, and economic tools together to advance that state's national interest,” (Feaver, 2009a, para. 3) has been officially published since 1987 in a document titled The National Security Strategy (NSS).

The role and utility of NSS documents remain incredibly murky, despite their 27 year history. Political scientists and foreign policy experts almost invariably praise and condemn these documents in the same breath. Fontaine and Lord (2012) are a representative example: “the very mention of grand strategy can evoke eye-rolling...and discussions of grand strategy are all too often divorced from the actual execution of national policy... Yet this view undervalues grand strategy and the opportunities it affords... [Grand] strategy can help policymakers see how the pieces fit together” (p. 6).

The functions of NSS documents are puzzling because grand strategy itself is a complex blend of theory and practice, combining history, political science, public policy arguments, and economics (Feaver, 2009a, para. 8). Presidents also do not possess total freedom in articulating grand strategy. The ability to translate statements into policy action is subject to several constraints, including the global distribution of power, government bureaucracy, and public

opinion (Kreps, 2009, p. 630). Despite all of their shortcomings, even the bitterest critics of NSS documents admit that they are “usually worth reading” (Walt, 2009, para. 4). Why do foreign policy scholars and experts turn to NSS documents as a crucial site for interpreting a president’s foreign policy (especially recently), despite their failure to serve as a direct blue-print for foreign policy actions? Moreover, why do administrations invest a great deal of their cognitive resources in producing them if they have little direct bearing on policy, are unlikely to ever be read broadly by the public, and there is no credible Congressional sanction for failing to produce them?

Rhetorical analysis offers critical tools and perspectives that can aid in answering these and other questions. As Burke (1973) suggests, “every document bequeathed us by history must be *treated as a strategy for encompassing a situation*” (p. 109, italics in original). Foreign policy in a democracy is an inherently rhetorical realm. The problems of threats, resources, and the distribution of power are often material in nature, but effective solutions demand rhetoric; influential audiences (whether they are other parts of government, the public, alliance leaders, foreign audiences abroad, or even the administration itself) must successfully identify with an administration’s world-view to align resources and policy tools with goals. Coordinated action to solve global problems and manage threats requires that these audiences buy-in to the president’s assessment of threats and possible solutions. Evaluating NSS documents as instances of symbolic action may enable critics to understand how NSS documents function as a “terministic screen” (Burke 1966) for a presidency, illuminating the interplay between motives, world-view, and situational constraints that influence individual policy choices. Thus, even if NSS documents may never be an “off-the-shelf blueprint” for foreign policy (Fontaine & Lord, 2012, p. 6), they may tell us a great deal about the thinking of individual presidencies. In doing so, they can also

inform critics about the differences between and within individual presidencies which can facilitate better public argument about foreign policy.

In this dissertation, I offer a rhetorical analysis of several NSS documents. Specifically, I will analyze the NSS documents of Ronald Reagan (NSS 1987 & NSS 1988), George W. Bush (NSS 2002 & NSS 2006), and Barack Obama (NSS 2010). These five documents can help to address several important controversies about foreign policy and each president's legacy while helping build a rhetorical theory of grand strategy formulation. Each set of documents addresses significant controversies within these presidencies. For Reagan, the issue is whether the hardline policies and principled thinking that characterized his first term were present in his second term or whether he repudiated such approaches in favor of pragmatism and diplomacy. For Bush, the issue is whether he also dramatically changed his foreign policy from assertive unilateralism to cautious multilateralism after the initial failure of the Iraq war. For Obama, the issue is the reverse; did he come into office espousing conciliatory engagement and then reject it after the strategy failed?

This selection of NSS documents also illuminates several important controversies between presidencies. Between Reagan and Bush, the issue is whether the latter can be understood as a 21st century version of the former, a comparison that has been evoked and challenged by numerous commentators. Between Bush and Obama, the issue is whether or not there is *any* divergence in their foreign policies; a dominant interpretation is that the two share the same world-view and strategy.

In the remainder of this chapter, I lay the groundwork for the subsequent chapters through four sections. First, I provide necessary background information on grand strategy and NSS documents. I also detail several of the criticisms of NSS documents from scholars and

experts. In the second section, I argue that NSS documents can be productively examined from a rhetorical perspective because they stand-in as a snap-shot of any given administration's terministic screen. Third, I establish my rationale for study as well as the reason for selecting the 5 NSS documents of Reagan, Bush and Obama. In the final section, I discuss my method of analysis and preview the subsequent chapters of analysis.

NSS Background and Process

Prior to the existence of a formal NSS document, national security strategies existed in a different sense. Throughout history, grand strategies typically only emerged “organically from decades or centuries of trial and error,” conditioned “fundamentally by geography and culture” (Garrity, 2012, para. 1). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, seminal documents and arguments also catalyzed new thinking about a nation's role in the world, such as Mahan's “sea power” thesis or Mackinder's “heartland” theory (Garrity, 2012). However, concerns “about not revealing too much” led most heads of state to “concentrate on implementation, leaving explanation to historians” (Gaddis, 2002, p. 50). That changed at the dawn of the Cold War with George Kennan's (1947) “long telegram.” Published in *Foreign Affairs* under the pseudonym “Mr. X,” Kennan outlined the rationale for the grand strategy of containment against the Soviet Union. Kennan's theory evolved into National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68), which established a zero-sum strategy of aggressive contestation and rollback of communism. Over the course of the next 20 years, the particulars of the strategy evolved with each new administration, but NSC-68 served as the overarching framework. During the Nixon administration, the preparation of official statements on strategy became routine with Henry Kissinger's “State of the World” reports (Gaddis, 2002). Although these documents were never circulated publicly,

they did “revive the Periclean precedent that in a democracy even grand strategy is a matter for public discussion” (Gaddis, 2002, p. 50).

The 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization act, which amended the 1947 National Security Act, established a statutory requirement for the annual creation and publication of an NSS document. Section 603 of the act requires that the president submit a comprehensive report detailing the national security strategy of the United States to Congress every year. The document must “include a comprehensive description and discussion of the following”:

- (1) The worldwide interests, goals, and objectives of the United States that are vital to the national security of the United States.
- (2) The foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defense capabilities of the United States necessary to deter aggression and to implement the national security strategy of the United States.
- (3) The proposed short-term and long-term uses of the political, economic, military, and other elements of national power of the United States to protect or promote the interests and achieve the goals and objectives referred to in paragraph (1).
- (4) The adequacy of the capabilities of the United States to carry out the national security strategy of the United States, including an evaluation of the balance among the capabilities of all elements of national power of the United States to support the implementation of the national security strategy.
- (5) Such other measures as may be helpful to inform Congress on matters relating to the national security strategy of the United States (50 U.S.C. 402).

Congress's reasoning in mandating a document was not because they believed the United States was operating without a strategy. Instead, policymakers were concerned that presidencies were suffering from a dearth of coherence in articulating a clear vision of values, interests and objectives, as well as the appropriate instruments of power to be called upon in advancing them (Snider, 1995, p. 2). Even though a NSS has been required annually since 1987, only 15 have been produced. The Reagan administration released 2 documents (1987, 1988); George H.W. Bush produced 3 (1990, 1991, and 1993); and the Clinton administration produced one every year except its first (1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000). By far the worst offenders have been the second Bush and Obama administrations. Bush produced only 2 documents in its 8 years (2002, 2006) while Obama has only produced one after 5 years in office.

While the reason *why* executives produce an NSS is well known, it is less clear *how* they go about doing so. The document originates within the National Security Council (NSC) and circulates through Policy Coordination Committees, interagency working groups that represent multiple federal government agencies. The final, authoritative review occurs when the document clears to the Principals Committee, whose membership includes the secretaries of state, defense and treasury; the head of the National Security Agency; the director of national intelligence; and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Doyle, 2007). Although some complain that the documents themselves are not written directly by the president, it is not a serious problem for the present analysis; "even if early drafts are developed by lower-ranking staff, the president and senior-most presidential aides will scrub it closely, more closely than any other governmental white paper" (Feaver, 2010a). Moreover, presidents have taken the document seriously enough to place some of their most trusted advisers in charge of the initial drafts of the report. For example, Bush tasked then- National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice with drafting NSS

2002 (Zelikow, 2011) and NSS 2010 was drafted by Ben Rhodes, one of Obama's key foreign policy advisors and speech-writers (Ackerman, 2010).

Publicly-available government strategy documents are now increasingly common, both in the United States and around the world. Domestically, the NSS belongs to a genus of strategy documents that are all required to be prepared and made publicly available by law; other core documents include the National Defense Strategy (NDS), the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), and the National Military Strategy (NMS) (Dale 2008, p. 3). Several other powerful states also publish an official strategy document including: the European Union, Russia, Canada, and Austria (DCAF 2005, p. 9). While beyond the reach of the present study, a rhetorical examination of national security policy documents at the international level could prove very fruitful. A comparative history of the rise and use of publicly disclosed strategies may shed light on the argumentative nature of statecraft in the wake of mass democratization and globalization. Little comparative analysis has been done, even at the policy level, with some minor exceptions (Berenskoetter 2005).

Despite the historical novelty of the NSS process, most scholars and policymaking experts deride NSS documents. For many, they are "regarded as a lightly edited statement of generalities" or a "compendium of every executive branch's wish list" (Adams, 2008). Others have criticized them for simplifying policy complexities (Miskel, 2002). These criticisms emanate from some of the leading figures in political science. For example, Stephen M. Walt (2009), a professor and former dean of Harvard's School of government, cautions that one "shouldn't assume these reports actually tell [us] what the administration is going to do. They are often drafted by committee, or by some hired pen, and the president may not play much (any?) role in the process" (para. 4). Michael Boyle (2010) argues that the committee process produces

a textual product that borders on unreadable; the result is “the most watered down consensus that the bureaucracy can bear” (para. 2). James Traub (2010) similarly complains that NSSs “come surrounded with such a dense carapace of hokum that the reader can barely discern an actual meaning” (para. 2). Others lament that the documents set no clear priorities. Regarding NSS 2010, Mead (2010) argued it was “less a strategy paper than a statement of faith and a wish list” (para. 1). Gerson (2010) noted that “it reads like a State of the Union without space constraints” (para. 4). Crook stated it most forcefully: “To judge the content ... you have to overlook the way it is expressed...It was run through a management-speak machine. It emerged, repetitious and full of misprints, with added verbiage and reduced intellectual content. Then it was put through a second time” (2010, para. 3). Those within various administrations regard the document as a political headache:

What President in a fast-paced, media-oriented world wants to articulate once a year, in a static, written report a detailed statement of his forward-looking strategic vision? If ever there is a surefire means of insuring that one’s boss would be “hoisted on his own petard,” this is it to many of the President’s closest political advisors. (Snider, 1995, p. 4, quotations in original)

Such insiders greatly prefer personal Congressional negotiations, testimony and public speeches to “campaign to the electorate of America” on foreign policy matters (Snider, 1995, p. 4).

It may be tempting to join these critics and dismiss NSS documents because they are not a perfect policy blue-print and are sometimes difficult to read. However, the historical novelty of these documents alone warrants critical attention (Bartolotto, 2004). Even if they are not a blue-print for policy guidance, presidents nevertheless invest substantial intellectual resources and time in producing them. Given the poor compliance records by Bush and Obama after their first

documents, compliance with law is clearly not the sole factor responsible for producing NSS documents. If NSS documents are not simply an index of policy options, what are they? In the next section, I argue that a rhetorical perspective that conceptualizes NSS as instances of symbolic action clarifies the function and utility of the document.

NSS Documents as Terministic Screens

NSS documents are an excellent site for establishing the parameters of an administration's rhetorical world-view. Although many political scientists and policy experts criticize NSS statements as an exercise in "public relations" rather than real "analysis," a rhetorically-centered perspective reveals several qualities about these documents. In this section, I argue that NSS documents are best understood as a snapshot of the terministic screen through which an administration relates to the world.

By virtue of being a statement of *strategy*, the NSS is a rich ground to explore the broad themes an administration uses to link together individual policies (Bartolotto, 2004, p. 1). Such documents advance what Peter Feaver and Ionut Popescu (2010) call the "theory of the case," articulating "what is America's role in the world, what threatens that role, and what we should do about it" (para. 2). Such documents are distinctly rhetorical in nature, providing an unparalleled glimpse into an administration's core motives and view of the world precisely because it is not a speech:

Precisely because it is a public document, it must authentically reflect the administration's world-view; it is not a fortune cookie prediction of what the administration will do in any particular setting, but it is an authoritative statement of the principles that guide the president. (Feaver, 2010a, para. 2)

The document therefore plays a pivotal role in shaping the public's conception of threats in the world and America's role in responding to them (Dale, 2008).

The audience-centered function of NSS documents also highlights their rhetorical nature. Precisely "because it is not a speech," the document can develop depth and nuance that "no one would inflict upon a listening audience" (Feaver, 2010a), yet it is formulated with several audiences in mind. As Richard Weitz (2011) argues, "these national security documents serve both formal and informal functions for their multiple audiences, both within the United States as well as abroad" (para. 9). The awareness of manifold audiences suggests that each document is a form of strategic communication rather than a description of policy; "a nation's leaders... think ahead, anticipate how other nations or groups may react, plan their own responses, closely monitor the direction of actual events, and then redirect their actions as necessary" (Stark, 2011, p. 41). The rhetorical cast of strategy documents is even more pronounced during times of great uncertainty, as Daniel Drezner (2011) argues:

[There] are moments when grand strategies really do count: during times of radical uncertainty in international affairs... During normal times, decision-makers will extrapolate from current capabilities or past actions to predict the behavior of others. In novel times, however, grand strategies can signal to outsiders the future intentions of a country's policymakers, reassuring or repulsing important audiences... In this situation, when everybody is unsure about what comes next, grand strategies can provide a functioning road map for how to interpret current events and the appropriate policy responses. (para. 12)

Moreover, NSS documents *are* reaching foreign audiences. Documents are directly delivered to foreign governments through the United States Information Agency (Snider, 1995, p. 5). NSS

2010 was covered by several international press outlets. Russian, Afghan, Iranian, and Lebanese newspapers all provided their own reactions to the document or ran a syndicated story from the Associated Press (Belyaninov, 2010; Daily Star, 2010; Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 2010; Iran TV, 2010). NSS 2010 is also being studied by the Chinese government to understand Obama's motivations. The government-owned China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations published a comparative analysis of NSS 2010 and other NSS documents based on statistical word usage (Yang & Guo, 2010). NSS documents are thus a clear instance of symbolic action intended to shape both domestic and international publics' conceptions of threats in the world and America's role in responding to them.

One of the most significant audiences for the NSS is the administration itself. The drafting of the initial NSS plays a major role in cementing the foreign policy identity of an administration. Every new administration faces a tough transition period as new appointees mix with the members of the "permanent government" and negotiate their roles in addition to the policies and strategy of the presidency. The challenge of this period is compounded by a lack of clear guidance or a template for the NSS (Wormley, 2009; Bartolotto, 2004; Kanter, 1988), and "no administration has sufficient national security legs that early in their tenure to release a document of this scope and import" (Feaver, 2010b, para.2). As a result, the first NSS of every administration with the exception of Reagan was substantially delayed (Feaver, 2010b; Snider, 1995). Don Snider (1995), who drafted NSS 1988 and consulted on several others, comments on this identity-building function at length:

The process of creating the report also creates internal consensus on foreign and defense policies... Every new administration faces this challenge as it transitions from campaign to governance, particularly if foreign policy has not been a major

issue in the campaign. The fact is, it is simply impossible to document a strategy where none exists! Few things educate new political appointees faster as to their own strategic sensings, or to the qualities and competencies of the "permanent" government they lead within executive bureaucracies, than to have to commit in writing to the President their plans for the future and how they can be integrated, coordinated and otherwise shared with other agencies and departments. The ability to forge consensus among these competing views on direction, priorities and pace, and getting "on board" important players three political levels down from the president is recognized as an invaluable, if not totally daunting, opportunity for a new administration. (p. 5-6)

The importance of forging an internal consensus and achieving identification across the cabinet and government "cannot be overemphasized" (Snider, 1995, p. 5). The NSS process is a key moment for every presidency (with the exception of Reagan, who did not produce one until 1987) because it forges a common foreign policy language and symbolic platform for both the administration and the public. The NSS thus serves as every presidency's "mental view of the world" (Bartolotto, 2004, p. 5). Ultimately, administration's "reveal themselves through the documents animating focus" (Ackerman, 2010, para 1). The document can thus stand in as a snap-shot of any given administration's "terministic screen" (Burke, 1966) of the world and the policies it believes are needed for success.

The NSS also has real policy relevance, even if it is not simply an index of policy priorities. It serves as an umbrella that structures and attempts to lend coherence to a much broader array of foreign policy tools and organizations within the government. Former head of U.S. Central Command, General Anthony Zinni (2009) argues that the NSS is "the authority for

our own government structure, all the way down because from the strategy cascades the actions and the organization and the allocation of resources to make that [strategy] happen” (para. 3).

The NSS directly links to the other vital strategy documents responsible for defense and security policy, such as the previously mentioned NDS, QDR and NMS. Grand strategy documents have numerous implications for good policymaking, as Fontaine and Lord (2012) note:

A well-crafted grand strategy serves several purposes, including: Helping policymakers view policies holistically and understand how issues and relationships are entwined; Aiding decisionmakers in setting priorities and allocating scarce resources; Assisting bureaucracies in coordinating disparate activities by disseminating priorities and explaining the importance of particular objectives; Communicating national interests and intentions to reassure allies, deter adversaries and reduce the likelihood of miscalculation; Improving the accountability of policies and leaders by providing benchmarks by which success or failure may be evaluated; and Forcing decisionmakers to think systematically about the medium to long term, instead of focusing merely on urgent short-term pressures. (p. 6)

Thus, even if the NSS does not determine policy, it certainly influences those outcomes. As a result, the NSS ultimately “affects the direction that the nation takes, and indirectly the course of the world” (Bartolotto 2004, p. 2).

It should now be clear that NSS documents matter a great deal, even if many experts find them frustrating to deal with. With a rhetorical perspective firmly in place, I outline the specific rationales for studying the selected NSS documents of Reagan, Bush and Obama.

Rationale for Selection and Study

There are several rationales for a rhetorical analysis of NSS documents and the 5 selected for study. I hope to resolve three major critical problems. First, a rhetorical analysis of grand strategy and NSS documents serves a purpose that is both practical and multi-disciplinary: the improvement of public argument concerning foreign policy and a greater ability for the field of rhetoric to engage with the fields of political science and international relations. Beyond this chief rationale, the specific NSS documents I have selected can clarify important debates among rhetoricians, historians and foreign policy experts about the Reagan, Bush, and Obama presidencies (as well as the differences between them). In this section, I first document the existing deficiencies in public argument about foreign policy and argue for a study of the NSS to correct them. Next, I review the existing literature within the field of rhetoric concerning the NSS and the foreign policy of each presidency, highlighting areas where the present study will contribute. While focusing on existing rhetorical scholarship, I will also quickly preview the broader social controversy concerning each president that a study of the NSS can help clarify.

Properly understood as a screen for viewing the world, the primary rationale for rhetorically analyzing NSS documents emerges. The essential characteristic of a strategy in and of itself is the articulation of linkages between the ultimate goals of a presidency and the policies needed to achieve those goals. The scope and implications of those linkages are not always immediately clear, however. As Will Inboden (2010) argues, “it is a hard task to produce a National Security Strategy. The challenges are manifest, including: addressing multiple audiences ...balancing precise policy guidance with lofty principles, describing complex objectives in clear prose, and anchoring sound ideas in a coherent framework” (para. 1). As a result, there is not always a clear hierarchy within the text that establishes how different policies

are prioritized. Weitz (2011) argues that “even the term “strategy” is a bit of a misnomer because they typically list a number of priorities and programs but refrain from establishing a clear hierarchy among them” (para. 11). However, “acknowledging that doesn't mean that [NSS's are] unimportant... But that importance lies less in their typically nonspecific policy and program commitments than in what they communicate about how the promulgating administration sees the world and America's role in it” (Sinnreich, 2010, para. 4). Former National Security Adviser Samuel Berger (2010) notes that the content of an NSS “can easily become laborious and impenetrable,” yet it does “convey the president's principles and priorities” (para. 3).

This ambivalence invites a rhetorical analysis because it directs critical attention to the principles and priorities deposited within the text itself. Burke's (1973) notion of “key terms” and associational clusters describes the symbolic work undertaken in the creation of these linkages. The beginning terms of a text exert a strong influence on the overall arguments within it because—as a screen—they function to directly imply some conclusions and outcomes over others. Once the initial term is posited, “many implications “necessarily” follow” (Burke, 1966, p. 46, quotations in original). Thus, individual policies within an NSS are simultaneously justified through argument *and* entailment. The two are inseparable because the strength of the argumentative warrant is derived from the world-view posited by the overall screen.

A rhetorical analysis that reveals the relationship between policy arguments and the symbolic world-view of a president may improve the overall quality of public argument over foreign affairs. Many policy experts discount the significance of rhetoric and grand strategy in evaluating American foreign policy. Walt (2010), for example, argues that “what matters is not what the administration says in [the NSS]... What matters is what they actually do in foreign policy” (para. 16). Drezner (2011) believes that grand strategies basically remain constant

despite every administration's attempt at "intellectual differentiation and rebranding" (para. 7).

Bradley Thayer (2010) provides the most forceful articulation:

It seems that we have no steely eyed Cardinal Richelieu or Prince Metternich, Hans Morgenthau or George Kennan who served as the unapologetic advocate of *Machtpolitik, Realpolitik, or raison d'e'tat* and placed the interests and security of his country before all. At least no politician or commentator is a realist in his rhetoric. Yet once the glow and honeyed words of the inauguration are past and the administration actually has to advance America's interests, the mask slips in deeds if not in rhetoric, and realism is reborn. In fact, it never went away. (p. 1, italics in original)

Concluding that two presidents are identical after finding similar themes or individual policy arguments present in their guidance documents is a relatively poor way of evaluating foreign policy. All presidencies could be considered the same so long as the same policy instruments are *available* for use. Yet not all presidencies behave identically, reach for the same policies in response to similar challenges, or calculate risks similarly. Approaching a document like the NSS as if it were an inventory of goals and tools creates an anemic analysis because it does not shed light on the priorities or risk analysis that govern whether a president will reach for one tool instead of another. Such a narrow focus on capabilities undercuts the quality of public argument about competing policy perspectives by obscuring the role that the underlying terministic screen of a presidency plays in policy selection.

A rhetorical lens can help clarify the differences between different presidencies and how they approached similar security challenges by illuminating the relationship between their rhetorical motives and likely policy choices. This perspective is essential to adequately

understand the function of NSS documents. Even though they are called into existence by legislative mandate, they do not carry the force of law in and of themselves. Studying them as symbolic action that seeks identification with a particular world-view is important because it provides a corrective to the tendency of many political scholars to look at policies and their justifications strictly within a legal or legislative context. Such an approach presupposes that such policies are a-rhetorical, or derived *a priori* in some vacuum of rational-choice decision making. This understanding severely constrains our ability to study both rhetoric and policy because it limits scholars from exploring the creative boundaries between the two. A rhetorical analysis of the NSS may shed some light on this boundary, revealing the ways in which rhetorical descriptions of the world shape and influence policy making by defining salient issues and constructing particular understandings of foreign policy threats, state interests, and legitimate uses of power. This in turn can facilitate clearer decision-making about what form American leadership should take in the 21st century.

An analysis of the selected NSS documents also promises to contribute a great deal to the field of rhetoric itself. NSS documents have been largely ignored by rhetoric scholars with the exception of NSS 2002. As the official instantiation of the “Bush Doctrine,” it has received extensive attention. Mitchell and Newman (2006) explore the historical roots of NSS 2002, arguing that it uses many of NSC-68’s rhetorical strategies, despite the former being billed as a strategy for a post-Cold War world. Areas of overlap included the use of hyperbolic discourse that “blurs important distinctions, distorts priorities and complicates threat perception” and utilizing similar institutional practices to carry out policies (Mitchell & Newman, 2006, p. 72). Dunmire provides a similar analysis, broadening her discussion of NSS 2002 to a discursive analysis of 9/11 in Bush’s rhetoric (2009). Goodnight examines the rhetorical strategies

employed by the Bush administration in “selling” the ideas contained within the NSS to the broader public, both domestic and foreign (2006). NSS 2002 reversed the burdens of proof for establishing an imminent threat, potentially turning any country into a legitimate target for the exercise of military force. Der Derian (2003) engages in a discursive analysis of the document, finding within it “a blueprint for a permanent war” which presents the world with two options: “peace on U.S. terms, or the perpetual peace of the grave” (p. 24). Hartnett and Stengrem (2006) similarly criticize NSS 2002, finding a rhetorical strategy for a “millennial military state” that seeks to usher in an age of “evangelic capitalism” under the guise of benevolent universalism (p. 176).

The field’s present research demonstrates the rich potential that NSS documents hold, supporting further exploration. The area is far from exhausted, however. Leaving the analysis at NSS 2002 overlooks how the Bush Doctrine shifted throughout the Bush administration or how the policies and assumptions of that document link up with other NSS documents or the broader legacy of American foreign policy. Moreover, much of the existing literature takes an ideological approach to criticism. While helpful for many research questions, it can deflect attention from the rhetorical effects of the NSS process itself or the outlook of individual presidents beyond political ideology.

Expanding research beyond NSS 2002 to include other documents can contribute directly to the field of rhetoric. Recently, Engels and Saas (2013) have issued a challenge to rhetorical scholars to cultivate the study of two species of war rhetoric: speech that attempts to produce assent for war and speech that seeks to create acquiescence and apathy. The latter species of discourse represents “the new war rhetoric” in their view; “acquiescent rhetorics facilitate war by shutting down inquiry and deliberation and, as such, are anathema to rhetoric’s nobler,

democratic ends” (Engels & Saas, 2013, p. 231). A rhetorical analysis of NSS documents can take up Engels and Saas’ challenge. By revealing how presidencies disclose a picture of the world through strategy documents (and thus seek public identification with the nature of that world), this study can clarify the relationship between assent and acquiescent rhetorics in foreign policy.

Rhetoricians would do well to develop critical connections between rhetorical world-view and policy choices that can aid the public in making meaningful decisions about foreign policy and military action. By drawing connections between the parameters of world-view and underlying rhetorical strategies (especially the use of national myths) and the subsequent policies those justify, a rhetorical study of the NSS promises to enhance the study of foreign policy discourse by giving rhetoricians the critical tools needed to engage in public debates over policy. As Zarefsky (2007, 2014) notes, much of American foreign policy is supported (consciously and unconsciously) by the mythos of American exceptionalism. According to him, it is the “frame of reference” for the entire enterprise (2014, p. 175). Yet there are many different strains, expressions, and implications embodied *within* that mythos. Rhetors have used the myth to pursue conflicting goals at different times throughout history. It has warranted policies of both intervention and isolationism, as well as multilateralism and unilateralism (Zarefsky, 2014). Far from being a static myth that imposes a single vision of foreign policy, American exceptionalism is a potent rhetorical strategy that can be used for different ends. Understanding how differences in world-view and mythos implicate policymaking decisions can create a more robust accounting of foreign policy deliberation.

The specific NSS documents I have selected also contribute to evolving debates over the rhetoric and legacy of each specific president. Beginning with Reagan, communication scholars

have long recognized the centrality of rhetoric in Reagan's policy successes and popularity, as well as the cause of his failures (Stuckey 1990). His ability to weave together anecdotes, storytelling and foundational myths of the Enlightenment and American exceptionalism, and the heroism of the individual into a broader tapestry allowed the "Great Communicator" to inspire the public and unify them around his core policies of reducing government size while bolstering defense spending (Rowland, 2011; Lewis, 1987; Erickson, 1991; Moore, 1987).

During Reagan's presidency, his foreign policy rhetoric was strongly criticized by many within the field. War rhetoric critics argued that Reagan's representations of the Soviet Union fit the classical mold of scapegoating the enemy as a savage menace to civilization and redeeming the United States as the unwilling, virtuous victim in order to legitimize defense build-ups, explain policy failures, or warrant American military interventions abroad (Ivie, 1984; Klope, 1986). Reagan's approach to nuclear weapons and missile defenses was blamed for short-circuiting public debate through the use of myth, science, and metaphor (Rushing, 1986; Schiappa, 1989). Goodnight went as far as to argue that Reagan "resurrected" war rhetoric from the confines of nuclear deterrence by revalidating the central myths of war through his insistence on developing war-fighting capabilities in addition to deterrence (1986).

More recent research has cast Reagan in a different light, however. Critics have recently argued that Reagan's strong emphasis on democratic principles was essential in bringing about internal Soviet political reforms, verifiable arms control agreements, and helping to draw down the end of the Cold War. Unwavering and explicit moral clarity was a key ingredient in Reagan's most memorable foreign policy speeches including Westminster, the Brandenburg Gate, and Moscow State University (Rowland & Jones, 2010; Rowland & Jones, 2006; Jones & Rowland, 2007; Howell, 2003; Howell, 2008). Howell argues that Reagan's refusal to budge on the issue

of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) drove home the lesson to the Soviets that the United States would not compromise on democratic principles and helped pave the way for human rights liberalization (2008). Jones, Rowland, and Howell also demonstrate the deft rhetorical maneuvering that Reagan displayed in expressing these democratic principles, either by artfully “reversing” (Rowland & Jones, 2010, p. 64) or “subverting” (Howell 2003, p. 108) the central tenets of Marxism/Leninism and by identifying Russian and American goals and aspirations as being fundamentally the same (Jones & Rowland 2007, p. 79; Howell 2003).

The recent research on Reagan has also revealed a counterpart to Reagan’s use of principled rhetoric: his pragmatism and fear of nuclear war. Throughout Reagan’s presidency, many audience members attributed the persistence of pragmatism to things that he *had* to say but did not necessarily *believe* as Rowland argues (2011). Rowland and Jones, however, have demonstrated that pragmatism was a central pillar of Reagan’s strategic and political thought; it enabled him to maintain flexibility and adapt to new circumstances (Rowland, 2011; Rowland & Jones, 2006).

There is an important gap in the current research on Reagan’s rhetoric, however. Rowland and Jones’ work presents a challenge to explore the boundaries of principle and pragmatism further. While it is amply clear from their work that one cannot understand Reagan without addressing the role that pragmatism played for him, it is my aim to go further and seek out the relationship it has with Reagan’s strong, principled defense of democracy and the deep, symbolic well it draws from to better understand the opportunities and dangers contained within. Additionally, there is a great deal of disagreement among scholars of all stripes about whether and when Reagan was a principled hawk or a pragmatic dove. Evidence of these two elements in a significant policy document like the NSS would suggest that principle bounded by pragmatism

was Reagan's screen for viewing the world and not just an oratorical tactic as the conventional wisdom suggests.

In addition to exploring the relationship between principle and pragmatism in Reagan's thought, a study of the Reagan and Bush NSS documents engages a comparative controversy between the two presidents. A dominant understanding that emerged during Bush's campaign and presidency was that he was the intellectual offspring of Reagan; the two shared values, outlook, policy preferences and communication styles, especially in foreign policy (Dumbrell, 2002; Leffler, 2004; Mazarr, 2003). At the same time, research by long-time Reagan biographer Lou Cannon and his son have challenged that view (Cannon & Cannon, 2008). Isolating the world-view of Reagan and Bush (and its implications for important policies like the use of force and diplomacy) can shed light on potential differences in conservative approaches to foreign policy.

Of the three presidents I analyze, the one who has received the most attention from rhetoricians by far is Bush. Extant scholarship of the second Bush administration has clustered around three themes. First, some have looked at the operation of narrative and myth in his speeches responding to 9/11. The cultural memory of World War II plays a profound role, according to these scholars (Bostdorff, 2003; Noon, 2004). Others have keyed into the role that narrative plays in shaping a response to different crises like 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina (Anker 2005; Holme & Summers 2007; West & Carey 2006). Second, scholars have examined the rhetorical justification of the "Bush Doctrine" strategy of anticipatory self-defense. Keller and Mitchell edited a book-length treatment dedicated to this (2006) while Winkler sought to determine whether the preventive dimension concerning the use of force represents something novel, or whether it fits within the broader defined genre of war rhetoric (2007). Through a

comparative analysis of Bush with Reagan, she found several generic features of preemptive and preventive war rhetoric. Arguments in support of such actions typically entail a high degree of strategic misrepresentation; “the nation’s leaders used fabrication, exaggeration and reliance on questionable sources to sustain their claims about their enemies” (Winkler, 2007, p. 325). Third, there have been numerous criticisms that contend Bush’s rhetoric taps into specific myths in order to ideologically legitimize a radical right-wing agenda. Many have argued that this is most predominantly at work in his 9/11 responses; Bush’s rhetoric controls and re-interprets the events of 9/11 by emptying them of their specific context so that they stand in for a bigger threat, allowing him to justify policies such as the invasion of Iraq (Murphy, 2003; Smith, 2005; Hariman, 2003). Kellner (2007) likewise sees Bush’s rhetoric as one which is primarily ideological; his war rhetoric especially is driven by an aggressive politics of fear that constitutes a certain “politics of lying” (623) Some have even claimed that the previous decade witnessed the death of presidential rhetoric (and possibly democracy itself); Bush did not operate within the traditional channels of “eloquence, logic, pathos or narrative storytelling, but by marshalling... disinformation and cascades of confusion-causing misdirection...to confuse public opinion, prevent citizen action, and frustrate citizen deliberation” (Hartnett & Merceia, 2007, p. 600).

Across all three of these themes, the primary rhetorical frame in Bush’s rhetoric is a Manichean dualism that sees the world only in terms of good or evil. A few have concentrated on the rhetorical significance of the frame itself. Gunn (2004) believes that Bush’s war rhetoric fits in with an increasingly dominant trend towards demonism in popular and political culture; Bush calls forth and constructs the rhetorical body in order to exorcise and purge the impure elements of evil from within it. Other scholars see explicit religious overtones in his descriptions of good and evil; for them, the entire War on Terror is centered on distorted religious motives that are

enacted through the construction of an international devil figure (Riswold, 2004; Ivie, 2004).

Scholars have also looked beyond the 9/11 context and argued that the dualistic mode of relating to the world also animated the 2004 election and American attempts to reconstruct Iraq after the invasion (Spielvogel, 2004; Zagacki, 2007).

A rhetorical analysis of NSS documents can address two questions related to Bush. First, NSS documents can illuminate the relationship between foreign policy and rhetorical representations of enemyship. Ivie's (1996, 2005a, 2005b, 2007) research on democracy and war rhetoric is a valuable contribution that seeks to locate Bush's attitudes towards democracy within a deeper cultural framework of American history. War rhetorics are founded in projections of democracy's shadow onto external enemies. In this sense, Bush is not an aberration but a logical manifestation of American political culture; this projectionist phenomena carves out the substantive content of democracy by reproducing a culture of war that rallies around the empty signifier of democracy promotion (Ivie & Giner, 2007). NSS documents across time and party ideology can help clarify whether dualism is an inherent part of foreign policy rhetoric or whether there are significant differences.

The second issue about Bush that I explore is whether his rhetoric or world-view stayed constant throughout his presidency. Nearly all of the existing literature on Bush's rhetoric focuses on his response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the public campaign to invade Iraq. Very little has been done to address evolutions in his rhetoric, especially in the second term. This is concerning, given research outside of rhetoric that suggests the Bush administration dramatically changed after its second term, becoming more diplomatic, multilateral, and cautious (Gordon, 2006; Nye, 2006; Feaver 2010b; Radsan, 2010). Critically comparing NSS 2002 and

NSS 2006 can help reveal whether any significant shifts in rhetoric or world-view occurred as Bush transitioned into his second term.

NSS documents can also contribute to rhetoricians' understanding of Obama. While scholars have focused extensively on his landmark domestic addresses (Cox, 2012; Danisch, 2012; Darsey, 2009; Frank, 2009 & 2011; Rowland & Jones 2007 & 2011; Rowland, 2011; Sweet & McCue-Enser, 2009; Terrill, 2009), comparatively little attention has been paid to foreign policy, although a handful of studies exist. Some have concentrated on the 2008 campaign. Bostdorff (2009) argues the central point of stasis throughout most of the election was how Obama differed from the Bush administration (and McCain) on the Iraq War, a theme that carried over into debates even after the focus shifted from foreign policy to the economy. Ivie and Giner (2009a; 2009b) argued that Obama's foreign policy rhetoric in the campaign expressed "exceptionalism in a democratic idiom," articulating a vision of cooperation and humility that had the potential to correct the excesses of American exceptionalism (pp. 361-362). They argued that the potential of his "democratic exceptionalism" would hinge on "how it manages the tension between its two terms" (Ivie & Giner, 2009a, p. 371).

The few looks at Obama's foreign policy discourse since his election are split on whether Obama has gone in the direction of exceptionalism or democracy. Edwards (2014) believes that he has actively sought to enact the vision of "democratic exceptionalism" through a number of high-profile speeches to foreign publics. Ivie (2011) is less convinced. Evaluating the 2009 West Point address that announced the troop surge in Afghanistan, he argues that Obama missed a crucial opportunity to challenge American militarism by advancing a robust vision of a just and sustainable peace. Obama's pragmatism and awareness of political contingencies produced a rhetoric that "could easily deceive the president enough to rationalize just war and lose sight of

just peace in Afghanistan and beyond” (Ivie, 2011, p. 744). Terrill (2011) reaches a similar conclusion. In analyzing the Nobel Prize speech in Oslo, he argues that Obama failed on two counts. First, Obama’s tendency to see complexity and contingency in everything was insufficient to challenge various fundamentalisms that threaten the world. Second, Obama’s vision for international order reinforced war as a solution and gave the United States exclusive moral authority to conduct violence, even in the name of peace.

There is thus a sharp divide in the rhetorical judgments about Obama that a study of NSS 2010 can clarify. Domestically, his ability to invite an audience to take up diverse perspectives and acknowledge contingency is seen as a strength that makes Obama transformational; it offers a way to navigate the challenges of a culturally diverse and interconnected public.

Internationally, this same ability is regarded as counterproductive for dealing with a global scene that is itself increasingly culturally diverse and interconnected. This division may be an effect of viewing Obama’s foreign policy world-view as “pragmatism all the way down,” without a clear set of foundational principles. This sentiment is shared by rhetoric and foreign policy scholars.

Danisch (2012) has argued that Obama uniquely brings a pragmatic philosophy to bear on public address and has no underlying core principles other than a commitment to cooperation and conciliation. Former Army general Montgomery Meigs “does not see a new paradigm in Obama's actions”; Obama is simply “pragmatic and realistic” (Savage, 2011, para. 13). Drezner (2011) similarly argues that “the administration takes pride in its foreign policy pragmatism, but that makes it difficult to promote a new grand strategic vision (para. 32). A public policy document like NSS 2010 that emphasizes a “broad conception of what constitutes our national security” by linking domestic and foreign policy initiatives together is an ideal text for further developing rhetorical judgments about President Obama (Obama 2010, p. 50).

There is also an important comparative question to be answered through the study of Bush and Obama's NSS documents. Critical analysis of strategy-making matters most during times of great uncertainty (Leffler & Legro, 2011). The post 9/11 era is a rhetorical challenge as well as a national security problem. Bush and Obama have had to rearticulate America's role in the world during a time when there has been no consensus on the nature of the threats that America faces or the policies needed to address them. American military and economic clout is also not as clear as it once was since the Iraq war and the recession. Comparing how both administrations evoke a particular understanding of the world and America's role within it can show how differences in world-view, ideology and rhetorical choices can shape policy outcomes, if at all.

Additionally, the temporal proximity between the Bush and Obama administrations allows for more in-depth case studies of individual policy controversies. A prime example is Iran's nuclear program. A close analysis of how Bush and Obama characterized Iran's program, the threat it presented, and the solutions called for can illuminate the broader relationship between rhetorical approaches and policy outcomes. Over the last 12 years, thwarting an Iranian bomb has been a central concern for the United States. Given the intersection between the case study and the key themes that have characterized American grand strategy since 9/11 (the Middle East, terrorism, WMD proliferation, democracy promotion, etc), it is a potentially rich site to explore the interworking of rhetoric and foreign policy.

Finally, understanding Obama's approach to foreign policy requires a detailed comparison with Bush. For better or worse, NSS 2002 was such a radical departure from tradition that critics almost always read NSS 2010 against the backdrop of the Bush documents. Because NSS 2002 and 2006 establish the baseline for how experts judge Obama's foreign

policy, the parameters of Bush must also be established to have a clear view of NSS 2010's rhetorical function.

Method of Analysis and Chapter Preview

Selecting a method of analysis is always somewhat of a hazardous endeavor, especially with foreign policy discourse. Presidential rhetoric is a mix of stories, myth, rational argument, ideological obfuscation, and performance. The hazard of selecting any one theoretical approach, as Black (1980) notes, is that the critic is “disposed to find exactly what he or she expected to find” (p. 333). Because my overarching purpose is to understand what NSS statements contribute to public argument (and because public argument is often a diverse mix of story, myth, evidence, values, and reasoning), it would be foolish to wall myself into one particular approach. Thus, the present study will broadly utilize a Burkean “key terms” analysis in a close but open-ended search of NSS documents. Such a reading should allow the documents to speak on their own terms, avoiding the limitations and frustrations so commonly experienced by others who have criticized these documents before. In order to fully grasp the character of each NSS document, it is important to map the main topoi that different administrations prioritized over other choices. By placing these topoi and arguments into context with the events that helped to shape this particular document, a more robust understanding of the role the NSS plays in democracy and international affairs can be achieved. However, as Ivie (1980) argues, there is no “single, accepted schema for identifying the essence of topoi” other than sticking closely to the terms of the text itself (pp. 282). Thus, relevant proof could range from “the premise of an explicit argument to the vehicle of a subtle metaphor” (Ivie, 1980, p. 283). Given the prevalence of myth and stories, I will also be on the lookout for moments where implicit or explicit pieces of narrative (e.g. plot, scene, and characters) ground a particular world-view. This study, though

methodologically eclectic, thus follows in the spirit of Burke's injunction that "the main ideal of criticism, as I conceive it, is to use all that there is to use" (Burke 1973, p. 23).

To understand the relationship between the governing terms of a document and the various policy tools a president has at their disposal, the critic can investigate the individual policies, arguments or roles that cluster around key terms in order to create a cohesive world-view. The close study of a text can offer us a method of disclosing the particular world of a rhetor because any given terminology (or screen for viewing the world) is not only a "reflection of reality", but also a "*selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (Burke 1966, p. 45, italics in original). Over the course of a text, this pattern of selectivity ultimately reveals a sort of "type-casting" wherein the critic can begin to derive a pattern and track the ways in which the "selection of role is a symbolic act":

The work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations. He uses "associational clusters." And you may, by examining his work, find "what goes with what" in these clusters—what kinds of acts and images and personalities and situations go with his notions of heroism, villainy, consolation, despair, etc....By inspecting his work "statistically," we or he may disclose by objective citation the structure of motivation operating here. There is no need to "supply" motives. The interrelationships themselves are his motives. (Burke 1973, p. 20, quotation marks in original)

One must investigate a text "inductively, obediently" with a view towards spotting the "dramatic alignment," looking for the "equations that reinforce each of the opposing principles" (p. 69). Far from accepting a term on face, a key terms analysis seeks out connotations and associations; "the

‘symbolism’ of a word consists in the fact that no one quite uses the word in its mere dictionary sense...the overtones of a usage are revealed ‘by the company it keeps’” (p. 35).

Burke’s notion of “key terms” is particularly apt for investigating a document like the NSS. Goodnight (2006) demonstrated how such an analysis can reveal the complex relationship between “pivotal terms” and the policies within an NSS. Through an analysis of NSS 2002, he documents how the pivotal terms of “preemption” and “imminence” “paradoxically jettisoned the policies of deterrence and containment...while spinning the ‘war on terror’ into a new Cold War” (p. 97). The strength of his research suggests this method is particularly useful for unpacking the broader symbolic action within NSS documents.

There are six subsequent chapters of analysis. Chapter 2 begins with Reagan and the 1987 and 1988 NSS documents. I explore the relationship between principle and pragmatism in Reagan’s world-view in order to clarify the role that each played in his foreign policy towards the Soviet Union, especially the impact Reagan had managing the danger of nuclear war (whether accidental or intentional) and stimulating Soviet reforms near the end of the Cold War. Chapter 3 focuses on NSS 2002 and 2006 and the George W. Bush administration. Given that the core question concerning Bush’s foreign policy is whether there was a change halfway through his administration, I compare NSS 2002 and 2006 in order to explain the divergent reactions of policy experts to each document. In Chapter 4, I turn to Obama’s NSS 2010, seeking to understand the parameters of the president’s world-view and how it differs from the Bush administration. Chapters 5 and 6 depart from a strict textual analysis of NSS documents in favor of a more detailed case study approach. In each, I explore the rhetorical strategies and policy outcomes of the Bush and Obama presidencies on the policy question of Iran’s nuclear program. I document what their NSS documents outline for guidance on Iran and how that translated into

rhetorical, diplomatic and political action throughout each president's tenure. Chapter 7 concludes by considering the relationship between a president's rhetorical world-view and specific foreign policy tools (and the role the NSS plays in articulating that relationship).

Chapter 2 - “Peace, Yes, but World Freedom as Well”: Reagan and the End of the Cold War

Ronald Reagan’s foreign policy legacy defies generalizations. Throughout his 8 years, he consistently appealed to common interest, cooperation, and diplomacy with the Soviet Union while routinely denouncing their system as evil and contrary to universal values. In policy, his administration oversaw an enormous expansion in military spending and repeated efforts to use arms control to eliminate those very weapons. In seeking to explain this confusing situation, rhetoricians, historians, and political scholars have all wrestled with the relationship between principle and pragmatism in Reagan’s thought. Although the existing research sheds considerable light on how pervasive either was for Reagan, a tendency has been to reduce one to an effect of the other or to suggest that Reagan simply switched approaches halfway through his administration. For those who do not reduce one to the other, the relationship between Reagan’s principle and pragmatism is still murky; how they reinforced or undermined each other and their relationship to policy is still unclear.

In this chapter, I argue that one answer to this puzzle is found in the NSS documents of President Reagan (NSS 1987 & NSS 1988). I contend that he structured the grand strategy of the United States around *both* the principle of advancing the freedom of the individual and the pragmatic goal of avoiding a nuclear war. Reagan navigated the dramatic tension between these two terms through a rhetoric of truth-telling. Specifically, he recast the traditional International Relations (IR) concept of realism from a theory that described “the truth of the interstate system” into one that described four essential “truths about the Soviet Union.” While it is hardly surprising that Reagan assumed the role of a truth-teller given his views of the Soviets, it is surprising that these four truths reflected a mutable “both/and” perspective of the world. By

rearticulating the truths of realism in this way, Reagan was able to navigate between principle and pragmatism while successfully providing himself a very narrow ledge to navigate traditional realism's "security dilemma" (the theory that the more steps a state takes to defend itself, the more threatening it will appear to other states).

This analysis suggests several implications. First, it demonstrates that principle and pragmatism are not necessarily opposite "either/or" concepts. Rather, they can function together as a "both/and" orientation towards the world. NSS 1987 and 1988 demonstrate that the differing reactions to Reagan are not because he was sometimes principled and sometimes pragmatic, but instead are due to his creativity in fusing policy and rhetoric around principle bounded by pragmatism in the moment. Second, it shows that the rhetorical terms of Reagan's foreign policy were remarkably consistent, at least throughout his second term. In light of other research, this also suggests that both were central themes of *both* terms in office. Finally, I conclude that the balance between principle and pragmatism both aided and worked against the president's efforts to end the Cold War.

I reach this conclusion in four sections. First, I review existing interpretations of Reagan's policy rhetoric and discuss the rhetorical significance of Reagan's NSS document, especially for understanding the relationship between his desires to win the ideological battle of the Cold War and manage the danger of nuclear weapons. Second, I describe the traditional concept of realism and show how Reagan simultaneously appealed to it and redefined it throughout NSS 1987 and NSS 1988. Third, I turn from the general theory Reagan established to the specific truths about the Soviets that he advanced within his revised theory. I argue that these truths did not simply accommodate appeals to principle or pragmatism, but *necessitated* policies that embodied both. Finally, I discuss implications from this analysis for understanding the

relationship between principle and pragmatism in presidential rhetoric and Reagan's broader role in ending the Cold War.

Three Different Reagans

Prevailing judgments about Reagan's legacy cluster around 3 major schools of thought: liberal, conservative, and pragmatic. In this section, I detail each and argue that Reagan's NSS documents can help explain these divergent interpretations given his dominant role in the formation of strategy in the National Security Council (NSC) and his administration's approach to drafting the first two legally required NSS documents. I conclude this section by isolating two important "leads" to guide analysis of the documents: Reagan's strong belief in the perversity of the Soviet system and his fear of nuclear warfare (whether by accident or design).

Three major characterizations of Ronald Reagan's role in bringing the Cold War to a close have emerged. First, liberals tend to dismiss Reagan as an intellectual lightweight (Diggins, 2007, p. xvii) and chalk his success up to historical luck: the USSR was going to collapse on its own weight and Gorbachev would have instituted his reforms regardless. Reagan was simply an "amiable dunce" who played no major role (Garthoff, 1994; Morris, 2000). Second, conservatives believe that Reagan was a staunch anti-Communist and "Cold Warrior" who forced the Soviets to capitulate and eventually reform (Arquilla, 2006; Kengor, 2006; Schweizer, 2002). For this latter group, Reagan's role was decisive; his "talk of democracy and good-versus-evil" is "now widely understood as having contributed importantly to the greatest victory in world history" (Leffler, 2005, p. 410). A third pragmatic view has emerged in midst of the considerable evidence that Reagan was highly involved in foreign policy and sincere in his desire for negotiating arms control. One subset of this school emphasizes a radical break in Reagan's foreign policy in 1984. From this perspective, Reagan entirely redefined the face of the Cold

War, opting for engagement and dialogue over containment and pressure in 1984 (Cannon, 2003; Gaddis, 2005; Matlock, 2004; Diggins, 2007; Fisher, 1997 & 2003). This group contends that there was a clear turning point where Reagan came to fear a nuclear war through accident or miscalculation and all but abandoned the hardline policies of his first 3 years (Diggins, p. 350; Fisher, 1997, p. 34). A second subset of the pragmatic view emphasizes consistency in Reagan's approach, noting that his guiding pragmatism was present throughout his entire administration (Rowland 2011). In chapter 1, I demonstrated that research within the field of rhetoric reflects many of these same divisions.

While it is clear that principle and pragmatism were central features of Reagan's Cold War rhetoric, it is less clear to what extent this combination dominated his presidency. Each interpretation attributes Reagan's principled or pragmatic rhetoric to political expedience. Defenders of his pragmatism have sought to explain away his strong use of moral principles and Manichean language as necessities to marshal public support for his arms control initiatives (Gaddis, 1992, p. 131; Diggins, 2007, p. 355), whereas defenders and critics of his principled discourse believed his pragmatism was an effect of things he had to say but did not believe, as Rowland notes (2011, p. 36). The 2 NSS documents are important because evidence of both elements in such significant policy documents would suggest that principle bounded by pragmatism was Reagan's screen for viewing the world and not simply an oratorical tactic.

Additionally, NSS 1987 and 1988 are especially useful for understanding Reagan's overall world-view. There is good reason to believe that the NSSs represent Reagan's vision throughout his *entire* administration. 1987 was the first time in Reagan's 8 years that he was legally required to publicly articulate his grand strategy. Prior to the 1986 legislation that required the document, Reagan and his team developed grand strategy entirely in secret (Lettow,

2005). However, NSS 1987 was an attempt to document for the public what Reagan's strategy had been throughout his entire presidency. Reagan NSC member Don Snider was actively involved in drafting both documents and argues that the rushed timeline in 1987 required the NSC to simply document what they believed their approach had been the past six years (Snider, 1995, p. 7). As such, NSS 1987 concentrated almost exclusively on military policy and the Soviet Union, establishing what Reagan's approach to the Soviet problem had been all along (1987, p. 40). The 1988 document carried over that approach nearly word-for-word and added in emphasis on economic and diplomatic forms of power (p. 7-8). Furthermore, Reagan was highly involved in the policy process (Anderson & Anderson, 2009; Lettow, 2005; Matlock, 2004). As Anderson and Anderson (2009) argue:

Every president can, if he wishes, take charge of deciding *each and every policy*...Reagan made it clear how he would use that power the first time he chaired the NSC meeting. The message he drove home during that first meeting was clear and simple: "I will make the decisions" ... Those 5 words would shape the foreign policy of the United States for the next 8 years. (Anderson & Anderson, 2009, p. 19-20, emphasis added)

He insisted on chairing every NSC meeting and played an "extraordinarily active role" in the process by "reviewing and commenting on draft segments" of strategy (Lettow, 2005, p. 69). Finally, several policies in the NSS (especially nuclear ones) were definitively Reagan's; it was "Reagan himself, not his advisors or outside influences" that "was the driving force" behind them (Lettow, 2005, p. x).

A cluster analysis of key terms is particularly apt for investigating Reagan's NSS documents. As I argued in chapter 1, Burke's (1973) methodology allows a critic to trace the

relationship between key concepts and terms throughout a text. However, a critic must first identify a potential “lead” or “hypothesis” to initially direct the inquiry (Burke, 1984, p. 195). Rhetorical critics have focused on the Manichean dualism at work in Bush’s thought in NSS 2002 as their initial lead (Mitchell & Newman, 2006; Dunmire, 2009; Der Derian, 2003; Hartnett & Steingram, 2006). However, the problem posed by Reagan is distinct. If the central agon in Bush’s world-view was a dramatic struggle for good over evil, Reagan’s was the dramatic struggle between his deep moral convictions about the perversity of the Soviet system and his knowledge that a single misstep in contesting communism could bring about the end of civilization (Cannon & Cannon, 2008).

The principle of advancing human freedom and the pragmatic need to avoid a nuclear showdown thus provide the initial “lead” for this chapter. Substantial evidence suggests that the tension between the two ran deep in Reagan’s thinking. His fear of nuclear war is now well known (Gaddis, 2005, p. 227-228; p. 41; Diggins, 2007, p. 347). Considering that the destruction of civilization was a real possibility throughout the 80s, it is clear that the pragmatic imperative to avoid nuclear war was itself an unyielding moral principle. Yet Reagan was convinced that avoiding a nuclear confrontation could not be the sole end of strategy. Although there was a large degree of strategic stability under the policies of *détente*, perpetuating it was an equally immoral outcome in his eyes because it gave legitimacy to the Soviet economic and political system (Gaddis, 2005, p. 225). Reagan also knew that maintaining the nuclear balance of terror in perpetuity was a losing proposition because accidents or miscalculations made effective deterrence unsustainable (Cannon & Cannon, 2008, p. 41). Successfully dealing with the Soviets required a “both/and” response. Thus, while Reagan certainly used dramatic dualism and mythology to describe the Soviet Union (Gaddis, 2005, p. 222; Lewis, 1987; Erickson, 1991;

Moore, 1987), the most important dramatic clash in his symbolic action was the tension between principle and pragmatism. With such a “lead” in mind, I turn to the texts of the NSS documents in subsequent sections. After establishing principle and pragmatism as the central agon that individual policies cluster around, I argue that Reagan navigated the tension through his creative use of “realism” and truth-telling.

Recasting Realism

The moral duty to advance the cause of individual freedom and the pragmatic imperative to avoid war are the central terms in NSS 1987 and 1988; individual policies and their attendant justifications cluster around both throughout each text. Logically, these two terms are at odds with one another; cooperative diplomacy with an adversary that is perverse and evil seems tenuous at best. Moreover, the incentive for such an adversary to negotiate is rather low if the United States is not willing to recognize their political or economic order as legitimate. Despite the tension, Reagan elevated both terms to the highest level in his strategy. He subsequently transcended the tension between these demands by invoking a foundational theory of international relations: realism. In this section, I isolate the dramatic tension between principle and pragmatism in the NSS documents before discussing Reagan’s use of realism. After quickly backgrounding the tradition of realism in the field of IR, I argue that Reagan’s use simultaneously invokes the traditional assumptions of the concept while transforming them substantially.

Identifying the role that principle and pragmatism play in NSS 1987 and NSS 1988 is straightforward; it is immediately clear that each document is structured around this central symbolic tension. Both documents place defeating totalitarianism and avoiding a nuclear war on the same footing; they are singled out as the only two *transcendent* threats that the United States

and the world face (Reagan, 1988, p. 9). Reagan proclaims in both documents that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” (1987, p. 22; 1988, p. 15). However, the national interest entails more than mere survival; the “promotion of our democratic way of life” is identified as the “basic thrust of our National Security Strategy” (Reagan, 1987, p. 9). Failure to triumph in the larger ideological struggle for freedom would be on par with a thermonuclear holocaust because a world at peace but only “half-free” was intolerable (p. 10). The essence of both documents might be condensed to a single statement: “Undergirding all of this is our continuing commitment to public candor about the nature of totalitarian rule and the ultimate objectives of U.S. foreign policy: *peace, yes, but world freedom as well*” (Reagan, 1988, p. 9, emphasis added). Under these terms, failure on either count was intolerable.

While it is not rare to see dramatic dualism in foreign policy and war rhetoric (Wander, 1984, Ivie, 1980 & 1984, Cherwitz, 1978) or for the individual policies of a presidency to contradict, it is much less common to see a grand strategy founded on two priorities that are in such tension. How does one avoid a nuclear war without recreating détente, an equally immoral outcome in Reagan’s eyes? Reagan performs this balancing act throughout NSS 1987 and 1988 by redefining realism. While realism as a theory traditionally expresses “the truth of the interstate system” in order to explain and predict state behavior, Reagan’s reformulation expresses “the truth of the Soviet Union” to give a series of military and diplomatic policies a general orientation.

Political realism has existed in various forms since the time of Thucydides (1982) and can be reduced to a common set of assumptions regarding political behavior. Its expressions, from Hobbes through the 20th century, assert that relations between nation-states assume the form of tragedy. The persistence of anarchy at the international level drives states to behave

exclusively out of self-interest, causing competition to overwhelm cooperation. Some classical realist thinkers have contended that self-interest is a reflection of a basic human will to power and violence (Hobbes, 1994, Morgenthau, 1954), but thinking evolved in the mid-20th century to focus on the structures of the interstate system as the cause of interstate behavior (Waltz, 1962 & 1979). According to this structural school of thought, every state is largely the same; behavior reflects objective security facts, including geography, a state's relative strength, and the relative strength of others (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 3). Though there are significant theoretical differences among realist scholars such as the divide between offensive realists (Mearsheimer, 2001; Schweller, 2001) and defensive ones (Waltz, 1979 & 2000; Layne, 1997 & 2006; Walt, 2005), their common theme is that heads of states will always maximize self-preservation and focus on the world "as it is," not "how it could be." As such, a state will focus on another's capabilities and relative power advantages as the only reliable indicator of their intentions.

Reagan utilized several tenets of modern realism throughout both documents to orient his foreign policy with the Soviet Union (1987, p. 16; 1988, p. 26). NSS 1988 brands itself as a strategy of "realism": "We have sought to deal with the world as it is, not as we might wish it to be. A strategy without illusions, *based on observable facts*, has been our goal" (1988, p. 2, emphasis added). Many of the basic assumptions about security and state behavior cited in each NSS strongly resemble traditional elements of realism that had guided American thinking since the end of World War II (Layne, 2006, p. 3). Reagan argues that states will always act according to their national interests and that those interests are products of geography. Reagan quotes Walter Lippmann to argue the content of that interest is reflected through a state's behavior:

The behavior of nations over a long period of time is the most reliable, though not only, index of their national interests. For though their interests are not eternal,

they are remarkably persistent... There is not great mystery why this should be:
the facts of geography are permanent... (1988, p. 1, ellipsis in original)

Thus, the national interest of the United States is a reflection of geography. It provides the United States with an unprecedented degree of security from conventional attack but also requires it to be a global power; Reagan defines the primary objective of U.S. foreign policy as the need to prevent a hostile hegemon from controlling the Eurasian landmass (p. 2).

Despite being stylized as a “realist” strategy, Reagan transforms the concept into something different by adding the variable of national values and rejecting the traditional security thesis of realism as “too narrow a conception” (1988, p. 3). The “immutable of geography” (p. 39) are only half of the equation; ideals are thus a central element of the national interest. For the United States, that includes “human dignity, personal freedom, individual rights, the pursuit of happiness, peace and prosperity” (p. 3). Thus, while Reagan embraces one core realist tenet by arguing state behavior is dictated by their national interest, he rejects another by linking transcendent values to that interest. In Reagan’s view, “strategy is grounded in unchanging geographic considerations *and* designed to preserve the fundamental values of our democracy” (p. 2, emphasis added).

Second, Reagan directly refutes a core component of structural realism: the security dilemma (Jervis, 1978; Glaser, 1997). The premise of the security dilemma is straight-forward. Because the international system is characterized by anarchy, states must obtain security through military capabilities; the attempt by one state to obtain security inherently makes it a threat to others and spurs other states to enhance their own capabilities, which in turn threatens the original state. Reagan significantly departs from realism by stating that the source of conflict with the Soviets is values, not capabilities. NSS 1987 characterizes the division between the

United States and the Soviet Union as a “fundamental [difference] in economic, social, and political beliefs” (1987, p. 6). Reagan goes even further in NSS 1988 and rejects the security dilemma thesis entirely: “we have never lost sight of the fact that nations do not disagree because they are armed; they are armed *because they disagree*” (p. 10, emphasis added). According to this logic, the global balance of power is not due to the paradox of security competition, but rather because of disagreements “on very important matters of human life and liberty” (p. 10).

Reagan’s view of IR in NSS 1987 and 1988 thus advances and revises realism. It is realist insofar as the objective facts of geography and proximity to other states influence state behavior. Yet by arguing that the quality of a state’s governance strongly affects how threatening it is to others and by establishing the moral imperative of human freedom, Reagan changes the theory from a general explanation of state behavior into a strategic orientation towards the Soviets. What makes this blend uniquely “Reagan” is the facticity of it all. He entered office already deeply convinced that the Soviet system was contrary to the classical values of liberalism (Diggins, 2007, pp. 8-9). Moreover, he was supremely certain that the United States would be victorious in the Cold War because the Soviet Union was on the wrong side of the truth about the good life (Gaddis, 2005, p. 22). NSS 1987 makes this line of thinking clear:

I have seen that *time is on our side* against those forces in this world that are committed to the elimination of freedom, justice, and democratic ways of life.

Time is running out for those regimes because people everywhere realize that the way of life imposed by those forces is counter to basic human values. (p. 41, emphasis added)

It is important to note that Reagan did not see this outcome as preordained or inevitable; he was highly skeptical of such deterministic views (Diggins, 2007, pp. 5-6). He recognized that the

long-game was in the United States' favor but that it would require policymakers to fully grasp the truth of the world system.

The full scope of Reagan's "realism" now comes into view: American foreign policy should reflect the facts of the IR system insofar as those facts are an expression of the "truth about the Soviet system." NSS 1987 argues that realism consists of "[recognizing] the nature of the Soviet Union" and choosing policies that line up with the truth of that system (p. 16); NSS 1988 reiterates this definition of realism and calls for policies that are founded on "a realistic view of the Soviet aims and capabilities" (p. v).

It is important to note that many of these themes or premises are not unique to Reagan; several are staples of America's foreign policy tradition. Nor is Reagan's use of strong, principled language to describe the differences between the American and Soviet systems particularly striking. However, Reagan's theory of realism is only half of the equation; it simply provides a general orientation for his strategy. In the next section, I detail the specific individual truths of the Soviet system that Reagan tells throughout each NSS document. By viewing individual truths holistically, a flexible and mutable world-view emerges.

The Truth about the Soviets

NSS 1987 and NSS 1988 express four specific truths about the Soviet Union: their system is contrary to basic human values, they seek to establish global hegemony, they are not as risk-adverse as the United States, and they are liars whose words cannot be trusted. However, the subsequent policies these truths call for cluster around the central terms of advancing human freedom and avoiding nuclear war. Because these two goals are *both* absolute, a mutable element surfaces in each of Reagan's truths. Taken together, Reagan's Soviet strategy logically required each of his most significant policies, even those many believe he either abandoned after 1983

(hardline tactics) or was never sincere in pushing (arms control and diplomacy). Specifically, the truths about the Soviet system in NSS 1987 and 1988 simultaneously necessitated the following policies: a substantial increase in military power and nuclear deterrence, an unwavering openness to dialogue and arms control, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), and high-profile public criticism of the Soviet system. While these tools are in tension individually, they cohere into a logical whole when one directly foregrounds the symbolic alignment between principle and pragmatism in Reagan's world-view.

The first truth expressed is that the Soviet system is a social arrangement contrary to the core values of humanity. The starkest difference between the United States and the Soviet Union is the role of the individual within society. According to Reagan, the freedom of enterprise “is one of the prime areas in which the United States—and the free world generally—differ in all respects from the communist world” (1987, p. 11). Reagan sees this difference as both instrumental and moral; “an open world of free enterprise and the free movement of people, goods, and ideas are not only the keys to our prosperity, but *basic moral principles*” (1988, p. 2, emphasis added). Individual freedom is the core of America's “message to the world;” “that individuals and not governments should control their economic, spiritual and political destinies” (1987, p. 41; 1988, p. iv).

Reagan elevates the principle of individual freedom to a genuine security interest that holds the key to international security. He dismisses the view that security is only concerned with “protection from external attack” as “too narrow a conception” (1988, p. 3). Instead, American foreign policy “must start with the values that we as a nation prize,” such as “human dignity, personal freedom, individual rights, the pursuit of happiness, peace and prosperity” (1988, p. 3). Societies that respect individual rights contribute to international stability (1987, p. 35) and have

the advantage in battle; “the initiative, enterprise, and motivation of free people is a source of great strength when individuals are put to the supreme test of combat” (p. 21). The skill and strength of heroic individuals are qualities “which the Soviets cannot match” (p. 21). Reagan sees this truth of the Soviet system as the central foundation for his entire strategy:

People across the world see that we offer a vision of the future. Our adversaries offer the darkened ways of an unsatisfied past through domination by military force, stifling statism, and political oppression. I have used every opportunity these past six years to drive this theme home, both here and abroad. This is also the dominant theme of our National Security Strategy—the very pulse of our nation which must be carried into the future to ensure that we remain strong and innovative, vibrant and free. (1987, p. 41)

Given this truth, the only political arrangements that are legitimate or sustainable are those founded on freedom. The Soviet system would never last precisely “because it is based on military power and dictatorship, not democratic consent” (1988, p. 27).

The second fact about the Soviets is that they are an aggressive revisionist state that will not accept a peaceful status quo. Instead, they seek “to alter the existing international system and establish Soviet global hegemony” (1987, p. 6). Such aims “constitute the overall conceptual framework of Soviet foreign and defense policy” (p. 6). While Reagan acknowledges that he cannot know the Kremlin’s “precise, near-term, tactical plans” (p. 6), their long-term ambitions are clear and backed with “irrefutable evidence” (p. 3).

Reagan cites five pieces of evidence of expansionism in NSS 1987. First, they have “undertaken an unprecedented militia buildup...which has been the most significant source of the USSR’s influence on the international scene” (p. 6). Next, the Soviets seek trade with the

west to “obtain economic leverage, technology and foreign exchange,” as well as to “shorten weapon development times, reduce costs, and to compensate for the weakness of the Soviet economy” (p. 6). In addition to economic clout, the Soviets have sought to cultivate their political influence through “the world’s largest propaganda machine, incorporating overt and clandestine activities in all types of media” (p. 7). Furthermore, Reagan argues that the Soviets have continued to “promote and exploit regional instabilities” around the world (p. 6). Finally, he states that “the evidence of the relationship between the Soviet Union and the growth of worldwide terrorism is now conclusive” (p. 6).

The picture had not changed much in 1988. Reagan argued that the military buildup by the USSR and the Warsaw pact countries was “ongoing” and “far in excess of any plausible need for self-defense” (1988, p. 5). The periphery of the Eurasian continent “*remains* the primary locus of Soviet expansionist interests” (p. 20, emphasis added). Reagan acknowledged that there has been a great deal of talk about “new thinking” (p. v), but believed that the “long-term threat has not perceptibly diminished” (p. 26).

Third, Reagan argues that the Soviet strategic doctrine emphasizes risk-taking. There are two related elements to this truth. Soviet values are inherently risk-prone because they do not represent their people. He asserts that their “perceptions of the world and value system are substantially different from our own” (1987, p. 21). Because Reagan “can never be entirely certain of Soviet perceptions” (p. 21), he infers from the first truth above what their perceptions and values might be; protecting individual rights or economic enterprise are automatically excluded from consideration. Instead, Soviet rulers value nothing more than political rule and power for its own sake. In contrast, “our strategy...places at risk those political entities the Soviet leadership *values most*: the mechanisms for ensuring survival of the Communist Party and

its leadership cadres, and for retention of the Party's control over the Soviet and Soviet Bloc peoples" (p. 21, emphasis added).

Additionally, the Soviets possess a nuclear war-fighting mentality and do not maintain strategic nuclear forces solely for deterrence. Reagan's evidence is Soviet investments in offensive and defensive nuclear capabilities: "Their active and passive defenses, their unrelenting buildup of offensive forces, and their published doctrine all provide evidence of the Soviet nuclear warfighting mentality" (1987, p. 23). Soviets ultimately seek a credible first-strike capability that could decapitate American second-strike forces: "their goal has been, and remains, attainment of an effective disarming first-strike capability" (p. 23). Reagan reiterates each element of this truth in the 1988 document (p. 14; p. 15).

The fourth truth established is that the Soviets are liars whose words cannot be trusted. Again, there are two related elements: strategic doctrine and arms control. Reagan argues that Soviet doctrine is inherently difficult to read and predict because it is founded on a "strong doctrinal emphasis on surprise" (1987, p. 29; 1988, p. 18). Thus, American policymakers must constantly "guard against technological surprise which might threaten one element of our strategic forces" (1987, p. 22). The United States cannot evaluate Soviet words or promises, only their behaviors. Otherwise, the "unrealistic illusions" of détente (p. 17) will allow the Soviets to continue to deceive by claiming to peacefully coexist with the West while carrying out a "contest in which all forms of struggle are permissible short of all-out war" (p. 7).

Arms control negotiations are where Reagan finds the greatest evidence of deceit. He cites a "poor Soviet compliance record," noting persistent failures to follow through on key provisions of existing arms control agreements (1987, p. 24). They are unwilling to engage in good faith reductions to nuclear forces and seek to "gain a significant advantage" through

“cheating or abrogation” (p. 23). Belief in Soviet deception continued in the 1988 document; Reagan noted “the continuing pattern of Soviet violations” that he had documented in several reports “submitted to the Congress on Soviet noncompliance” (1988, p. 17).

It is important to note that none of these are immutable truths for Reagan. They are however very durable ones that are difficult to change. The 1988 document is most insightful on this point; Reagan had yet to see *any* convincing evidence (observable facts) that Gorbachev’s promises for reform amounted to anything more than talk: “we hear talk of ‘new thinking’ and of basic changes in Soviet policies at home and abroad... but we have yet to see any slackening of the growth of Soviet military power, or abandonment of expansionist aspirations” (1988, p. v). Their fundamental goal was still to dominate Eurasia, Gorbachev’s “proposed domestic reforms and foreign policy initiatives” notwithstanding (p. 5). Highly publicized reforms encouraged Reagan, but did not constitute real “evidence that the Soviets have abandoned their long-term objectives” (p. 26). However, Reagan was still open to the possibility that the Soviet government could fundamentally reform itself and would “welcome real changes” should they occur (p. v). He committed to “remain sufficiently flexible to seize the initiative and explore positive shifts in Soviet policy which may strengthen U.S. security”, though he was not convinced that the present moment reflected fundamental change (p. 26). Even if he was skeptical that the moment of change had arrived, he was open to the possibility of it, believing that continued pursuit of his policies “may eventually alter Soviet behavior in *fundamental ways*” (p. 26, emphasis added). Thus, while Reagan was *always* pragmatically open to being persuaded otherwise about the truth of the Soviet system, the strength of his belief set a very high bar for Gorbachev to clear. In deciding whether they would pass the test, Reagan would judge them by their actions and not their words (p. v).

The key terms of individual freedom and decreasing the risk of nuclear war called for a set of policies that could strike the precarious balance required according to these truths about the Soviet Union. Because the terms are expressed at the start as a “both/and,” “the real challenge for American statecraft is how best to realize this commonality of interests, so as to preserve peace, without ... abandoning our commitment to the cause of freedom and justice” (1987, p. 6). In order to respond to this dual challenge, Reagan anchors specific policies for dealing with the Soviet Union around the “three guiding principles” of “realism,” “strength,” and “dialogue” (1987, p. 16; 1988, p. 26). Under these principles, the blend of policies that emerge are those major ones that Reagan is most remembered for: a massive increase in defense spending, the pursuit of arms control dialogue, the SDI, and the consistent use of strong, public criticisms of the Soviet system.

First, the “truth about the Soviets” necessitated greater military spending and the maintenance of nuclear war-fighting capabilities. The substantial increase in spending levels that characterized the first three years of Reagan’s presidency “was essential to redress the serious imbalances between U.S. and Soviet capabilities” (1987, p. 37). However, Reagan did not believe he had corrected the imbalance early on and could then “switch” to focus on diplomacy. According to NSS 1987, serious gaps remained. Because the Soviets fundamentally respect strength and exploit weakness, American forces “must not only be adequate, but must be *unmistakably perceived* as adequate” (p. 37, emphasis added). Furthermore, the war-fighting mentality of the Soviets demanded American reciprocity (1987, p. 21). The terms of Reagan’s strategy requires the *capability* to fight a nuclear war, despite Reagan’s *intention* to never do so: “These capabilities do not imply the United States seeks to fight a nuclear war...But we seek to deter an adversary with a very different strategic outlook ... To achieve this we must ensure that

they clearly perceive that the United States has the capability to respond appropriately...” (p. 22). American full-spectrum military dominance was also essential to eventually defuse the nuclear situation through arms control. In Reagan’s view, the buildup provided the “foundation for serious arms control negotiations” (1987, p. 23). Reagan argues that it was American military might that brought the Soviets to the table at Reykjavik in 1986 (p. 23).

Second, the facts of the situation also demanded unwavering openness to dialogue. Absent clear communication with the Soviets, the possibility for miscalculation was high. Situations like the 1983 Able-Archer crisis, wherein NATO military exercises led the Soviets to place their nuclear forces on high alert, made it clear to Reagan that American capabilities could appear threatening to the Soviets. He knew that if intentions were not crystal clear, the U.S. could be perceived as the aggressor (Diggins, 2007, p. 348-349; Fisher, 1997, p. 33). Thus, the NSSs recognize that both sides “share the common goal of avoiding direct confrontation and reducing the threat of nuclear war” (1987, p. 6) and the importance of always maintaining “a dialogue with the Soviet Union in order to seize opportunities for more constructive relations” (1988, p. 5). Although Reagan’s interpretation of realism rejected the “security dilemma” as an explanation for why the U.S. and Soviets were military competitors, he understood that American defensive capabilities could be perceived as offensive by the Soviets.

Following from the commitment to dialogue was the need for arms control, but not without certain conditions that recognized the truth of the Soviet system. Arms control was not an “end in itself,” but a stepping stone that could minimize the risk of nuclear war (1987, p. 23). Thus, the arms control policies Reagan outlines as useful in the NSSs are reductions (rather than codified increases), equitable, and most importantly verifiable (p. 24). Reagan rejected any effort that either left the world with more nuclear weapons than before or that could not prevent Soviet

cheating. When viewed in light of Reagan's "truth about the Soviets," it is clear that dialogue and diplomacy was not the sole strategy after 1984. Instead, they were tools that could be used so long as they were conducted on a "realistic and reciprocal basis" (1988, p. 5).

Third, the truth about the Soviet Union gave Reagan the impetus for one of his most controversial policies: the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which was publicly announced by Reagan in March 1983. The program was an effort to develop a global network of ground and space-based interceptors capable of targeting and destroying ballistic missiles in flight. While some have argued that the missile shield was a dangerous effort to arm the heavens (Goodnight, 1986, Rushing, 1986), Reagan saw it as the crucial technology that could finally rid the world of nuclear weapons, even going as far as to offer to share the technology with the Soviets (Cannon & Cannon, 2008, pp. 48-49; Diggins, 2007, p. 380). Under the terms of the NSSs, the SDI program was not the key technology because it created an impenetrable shield. In fact, Reagan readily admitted that it was neither proven nor "leak-proof" (1987, p. 22). Instead, the SDI was required for two reasons, both of which reflected the truths about Soviet intentions. First, "even less than perfect defenses could significantly increase stability by eliminating plausible incentives for a Soviet first strike" (p. 22). Second, the SDI could make arms control verifiable and eliminate Soviet incentives to cheat, thus enabling deep reductions in nuclear levels (p. 22). Reagan repeats each rationale in 1988 (p. 15; p. 17). For Reagan, the SDI was the crucial piece that allowed him to reduce the danger of nuclear war while still remaining cognizant of the nature of the Soviet Union.

Fourth, the truth of the Soviets demanded high-profile, public criticism of their system. Under Reagan's brand of realism, the Cold War was fundamentally a war of ideas. While he was confident that the odds favored the West (and that the United States' greatest asset was its

example), his strategy called for explicitly holding up the American example and starkly outlining the difference between the two systems:

American spirit and prosperity represents a critical challenge to the ideology and the practical record of our adversaries: free, pluralist societies work. This power of example represents a potent advantage of American society, but we *should not leave its expression to chance*. It is in our interest to spread this message in an organized way. (1987, p. 9, emphasis added)

In order to be effectively “realistic” in his policies, Reagan argued that frankness was required because it was “the foundation of productive and enduring relationships among nations” (1988, p. 2). Frankness could accurately communicate the American example while serving a key security function. Being open and upfront about his fundamental disagreements with the Soviets was preferable because it avoided the danger of false hopes and expectations. Otherwise, such false expectations could create “rapid fluctuations” in U.S.-Soviet relations (1987, p. 17). Reagan believed that frankness could be coupled with dialogue to create relations that were “more stable and predictable” and achieve significant reductions in nuclear arsenals (1988, p. 2). Thus, it should hardly come as a surprise that Reagan consistently used strong, principled rhetoric to show the wrongness of the Soviet system; his strategy *required* it. He “[refused] to believe that it is somehow an act of hostility to proclaim publicly the crucial moral distinctions between democracy and totalitarianism” (p. 10).

In detailing these policies, my point is not that Reagan argued for them for the first time or in some unique way with NSS 1987 and 1988. What is striking is that these policies, which are seemingly at odds with each other, logically cohere *because* of the alignment between principle and pragmatism in Reagan’s thinking. This mix of seemingly contradictory responses

was called for to both avoid nuclear exchange and win the Cold War. If one begins from the perspective that promoting human freedom and reducing the threat of nuclear war are on equal footing and must be balanced, each individual policy is a logical entailment of the way Reagan perceived the truth about the Soviets. An arms build-up and the maintenance of a massive nuclear arsenal were required to signal to the Soviets that nuclear war-fighting was a losing option. This was needed despite Reagan's personal beliefs in the immorality of deterrence because he was convinced the Soviets reasoned differently than the United States. The policies of dialogue and arms control were in turn required because Reagan was not blind to the facts that American intentions might be wrongly perceived by the Soviets. However, he was unwilling to place arms control ahead of advancing individual freedom because the two were equally important in his view. Thus dialogue had to be coupled with an obligation to tell the world the truth about the Soviet system and programs like the SDI had to be leveraged in order to show to the Soviets that deception was a losing strategy. Ultimately, the key terms of both strategies created a set of clusters where pressure and dialogue were both required, where Reagan was both a hawk and a dove. With this perspective in mind, I discuss the implications that follow from this "both/and" understanding of Reagan's foreign policy in the next section.

Conclusion & Implications

In this chapter, I developed the relationship between principle and pragmatism in Ronald Reagan's foreign policy to reconcile divergent interpretations of his legacy by liberals, conservatives, and pragmatists. The key finding is that Reagan's principle and pragmatism were not contradictory rhetorical strategies, but elements of a world-view that rested on equal footing. Furthermore, Reagan was able to creatively balance them by recasting the theory of realism from a general prediction of state behavior into an orientation towards the ideological struggle of the

Cold War. A variety of implications related to both rhetoric and policy can be drawn from this conclusion.

The central implication is that principle and pragmatism (at least for Reagan) are not necessarily opposite modes or rhetorical impulses, but instead can additively work together in grounding a president's symbolic world-view. Reagan's principled views of the nature of the Soviet system or the ideological contours of the Cold War were never without a pragmatic valence, whether it was his deep fear of nuclear war (by design or accident) or his constant urging for arms control. Nor were his pragmatic concerns for peace without an element of principle as well. While Reagan was open to the possibility that Gorbachev could reform the system and that arms control negotiations could help reduce nuclear dangers, he insisted on strong public criticism throughout his administration and remained committed to maintaining nuclear superiority and developing the SDI to prevent Soviet cheating. NSS 1987 and 1988 thus underscore that principle and pragmatism in rhetoric do not exist solely in an "either/or" construct. Rather, the two can represent a "both/and" orientation towards the world. The same could be said for the theory of realism and its chief intellectual counterpart: idealism (the theory that state behavior is driven by values). Political scientists and rhetoricians alike often treat the two as diametrical opposites. For Reagan, the two could never be separated. A state's intentions (especially the Soviets) could not be disentangled from either their capabilities or values.

In understanding Reagan's complicated rhetorical legacy, a subsequent lesson of this chapter is a reconciliation of existing interpretations of his foreign policy. Ultimately, there are not "competing" views of Reagan and his rhetoric so much as there are "partial aspects," each of which contain a great deal of truth that can aid in understanding his role in ending the Cold War. Far from being incorrect, each established view is *necessary* to bring the others into focus.

There are two additional implications for understanding Reagan's legacy at the level of policy. First, the "reversal" thesis advanced by some scholars is challenged by the texts of NSS 1987 and NSS 1988. Both add to a growing body of evidence that both pragmatism and principle were consistent throughout the entire Reagan presidency. Reagan was willing to sit down and dialogue with Soviet leaders (including Breznev) as soon as he assumed office (Cannon & Cannon, 2008, p. 30), despite believing the Soviets would "lie or cheat for the purpose of advancing communism" (Diggins, 2007, p. 352). There was also a strong element of principle after 1984, evidenced notably in his 1987 Brandenburg Gate address. The interconnection between policies in the NSS challenges the belief that American foreign policy towards the Soviets abruptly changed halfway through Reagan's tenure. Winning the ideas of the Cold War and maintaining the nuclear peace were transcendent for Reagan; one could not be subordinated to the other.

Finally, this chapter suggests that Reagan's role in bringing the Cold War to a close was incredibly complex. In their rush to embrace, dismiss, or condemn Reagan, the three schools of thought cited at the beginning of this chapter do not always give credit to Reagan's policies for *both* their successes and their shortcomings. Reagan's strong opinion of the Soviets, when coupled with his pragmatic hope for dialogue, sometimes threw up barriers as it also created opportunities. Wilson's (2008) research of recently declassified Soviet documents shows their leadership was often bewildered and threatened by Reagan's approach (pp. 462-463), despite a desire on their part to engage with the United States (p. 456). At the same time, Reagan's strong convictions and consistent behavior helped convince Gorbachev that he needed to reform the Soviet system, despite the inherent risks he faced in doing so.

The SDI is a paradigm example for understanding just how narrow the ledge was that Reagan carved out for his strategy to maneuver on. His stubborn attachment to a technology that was unlikely to ever work played an outsize role in the final years of the Cold War. Despite his repeated insistence that the SDI was for defense only, evidence shows that the Soviet thinking reflected considerable fear that this wasn't true. For the Soviets, SDI represented the realist paradox of the "security dilemma;" it created an overwhelming fear of a nuclear first strike (Wilson, 2008, p. 468), drowned out appeals to common interests like the 1984 "Ivan & Anya" speech (p. 469), and convinced Andropov and Chernenko not to seek out dialogue (p. 471). Reagan's insistence on pursuing the technology was also the key sticking point in negotiations with Gorbachev at both Geneva and Reykjavik (Gaddis, 1992, p. 129; Cannon & Cannon, 2008, p. 46). The SDI represented the Gordian knot that tied words, actions, and intentions into each other. Exchanges at Geneva and Reykjavik capture the essence of this dilemma. At Geneva, when Reagan "asked Gorbachev to trust America's intentions as well as its technology", the following unfolded:

GORBACHEV: It's not convincing. It's emotional. It's a dream. Who can control it? Who can monitor it? It opens up an arms race in space.

REAGAN: As I said to you, I have a right to think you want to use your missiles against us. With mere words we cannot abolish the threat. (Diggins, 2007, pp. 363-364)

An episode from Reykjavik shows that Gorbachev was of the same mind: "If you will not share oil-drilling equipment or even milk processing factories, I do not believe you will share SDI" (Diggins, 2007, p. 380). Reagan's deeply seated beliefs about the nature of the Soviet system were playing out like the classic tragedy that IR realists predict, with neither side willing nor able

to separate the other's words from their countries' capabilities and behavior. Fortunately, a lapse into tragedy was not to be.

Paradoxically, it was Reagan's *consistency* in asserting principles and his earnestness for dialogue that communicated to Gorbachev the sincerity of his desire to abolish nuclear weapons (Gaddis, 2005, pp. 231-232). At the same time, Reagan's refusal to budge on SDI made the prospects for maintaining the arms race so unattractive for the Soviets that Gorbachev calculated sweeping reforms would be a surer bet, though an uncertain one at that (Cannon & Cannon, 2008, p. 49; Diggins, 2007, p. 387 & p. 381). However, if Reagan's consistency had failed to speak louder than the technological potential of a fully functioning SDI, it is difficult to imagine Gorbachev making the same decision to reform. Even if the SDI dramatically raised the costs of arms-racing for the Soviets, surely they would have attempted to keep up if they believed the technology gave the United States a credible nuclear first strike capability.

For Reagan's part, he was slow to realize just what Gorbachev represented. Although he was sincere in being open to the possibility of fundamental Soviet change, his principled beliefs got the better of his pragmatic sense. The skepticism about Gorbachev expressed in NSS 1987 and NSS 1988 (as well as the Brandenburg Gate speech) suggests that Reagan was not aware he was pushing against an open door at the time (Gaddis, 2005, p. 236). While Reagan was always open to the possibility of reform, there was a heavy burden of proof for Gorbachev to meet. Ultimately, Reagan's consistency, principle, and pragmatism made for some of his greatest successes while also imposing serious limitations and dangers.

Chapter 3: “The Work of Generations”: Narrative in NSS 2002 & 2006

Despite existing since the Reagan administration, NSS documents received little scrutiny or attention from scholars until George W. Bush’s NSS 2002, which placed NSS texts squarely on the public’s radar. As the formal instantiation of the “Bush Doctrine,” the document has received ample critical attention from several fields of study. In the case of rhetorical studies, it is the *only* NSS document that has been studied. The only other NSS produced by the second Bush Administration, NSS 2006, has been almost entirely ignored. At one level, this is hardly surprising; both documents exhibit a nearly identical structure. They both advance the same strategic goals from “[championing] aspirations for human dignity,” to “igniting a new era of global economic growth” (NSS 2002, 1-2; NSS 2006, 1). Both directly appeal to democracy promotion and the preventive use of violence, two components of Bush’s foreign policy that have drawn the most fire from critics. Commentators from both the political left (Pfaff 2006, Kaplan 2006) and the right (Dale 2006) noted that the 2006 document maintained the same direction and policies that characterized NSS 2002. Unsurprisingly, those on the right praised this as a strength while those on the left used it to link their criticisms of the old document to the new one.

What is surprising is that NSS 2006 received a largely positive reaction from an audience not commonly identified as fans of Bush’s foreign policy: experts known for stressing the use of soft power, diplomacy and multilateralism. While NSS 2002 had been vilified by this audience as a dangerous and radical expression of violent regime change (Daalder 2002, Daalder & Lindsay 2003, Jervis 2003, Nye 2003 & 2005, Mearsheimer 2002), reactions to NSS 2006 differed greatly. Joseph Nye, former dean of Harvard’s school of government and a leading scholar on “soft power”, argued that NSS 2006 was a “major alteration of U.S. grand strategy”

from the earlier Bush doctrine and believed that “the shift has been more than rhetorical: Bush’s diplomacy toward North Korea and Iran has recently been much more multilateral than it was during his first term” (2006, p. 140). The Brookings Institute declared that “with the publication of [NSS 2006], the Bush Revolution is officially over” (Daalder 2006). John Mearsheimer, a leading International Relations thinker from the University of Chicago, responded similarly in an interview: “It’s not an especially hawkish document. It makes arguments about using force that most security experts- left or right- would agree with...It could have been written by Woodrow Wilson or Bill Clinton” (Christian Science Monitor 2006). The reaction from the European Union Institute for Security Studies (an EU funded think-tank) also argued for this reversal thesis: “the revised [NSS 2006]...moves America’s security thinking away from Mars and closer to Venus...The level of attention given to [promoting democracy] and the *conceptual sophistication* surrounding the topic in the strategy suggests that the promotion of democracy is not just propaganda but has become a core tenet of US foreign policy” (Zabrorowski 2006, emphasis added). The central question I address in this chapter is thus: why was NSS 2006 received so differently by many moderate and liberal critics when it contained essentially the same arguments as the controversial 2002 version of the document?

In order to answer this question, I depart from the Burkean method of cluster analysis utilized in chapters 2 and 4 and address the Bush documents at a different level: narrative. I argue that both NSS 2002 and 2006 are structured around an implied narrative that provides meaning for American foreign policy action in the world by creating a stage where history unfolds as the dramatic struggle between different agents and characters. While there is some overlap between the narrative structure of the two NSSs, there are important changes that alter the meaning and salience of the individual arguments and policy justifications that are advanced

in each. These shifts in turn can be explained by looking at how events on the ground challenged the validity of the initial foreign policy narrative articulated by the Bush administration. Specifically, I contend that NSS 2006 is a recast of the narrative in NSS 2002 in order to confront the perceived failures of the Bush administration's foreign policy during the time between the publications of the two documents. The stakes for such an analysis are considerable. It suggests that narrative can have extensive influence in giving meaning to policy choices and argumentation. As a result, foreign policy critics must not only challenge administrations at the level of argument, but also at the level of narrative. Additionally, it supports the view that NSSs function rhetorically to narrate a story about insecurity that in turn influences the policy responses deemed appropriate. Finally, it tells us much about the complex boundaries between narrative, policy arguments and public address.

I build this argument in five sections. First, I lay out a theory of implied narrative and locate that theory within the broader debate among rhetoric scholars about the function of narrative discourse. Next, I turn to NSS 2002 and describe the implied narrative within it and demonstrate how it failed to resonate with an audience of foreign policy experts while also being undermined by several policy failures on the ground. The subsequent section analyzes how NSS 2006 responded to these challenges by recasting the narrative. The fourth section underscores the irony and danger of this shift in narrative theme. While NSS 2006 was coded by some as a reappraisal of a failed strategy, the new narrative theme reinforced the controversial and dangerous policies of the Bush Doctrine. Finally, I conclude with discussion about the implications of this analysis for analyzing foreign and defense policy rhetoric.

Theory of Implied Narrative

Narrative plays a central role in much of human discourse (MacIntyre 1981; Fisher 1984, 1985). Though scholars debate over just how central that role is (McGee & Nelson 1985; Warnick 1987; Gring-Premble 2001; Rowland 1987, 1988, 1989), even the most conservative interpretations of narrative discourse admit of the possibility that story-telling in public address can be either explicit or implicit (Rowland 1989, p. 42). In this section, I establish the central elements of an implied narrative and argue for the enlightening potential such a lens holds for explaining the divergent reactions to NSS 2002 and NSS 2006.

In order to trace the elements of an implied narrative within a text, the critic must identify the plot trajectory and the central characters (Rowland, 1987, p. 273). For a story to exist, whether fictional or factual, there must be a “chronological account of an event or process” (p. 266). This chronological account is what sets the scene and characters into dynamic motion and allows the plot to advance and develop. Plot is the decisive concept for any narrative because it is what gives meaning to both character traits and action. Ricouer (1981) explains these necessary narrative elements:

...a story describes a sequence of actions and experiences of a certain number of characters...These characters are represented in situations which change or to the changes of which they react. These changes, in turn, reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the characters, giving rise to a new predicament which calls for thought or action or both...Accordingly, to follow a story is to understand the successive actions, thoughts and feelings as displaying a particular *directedness*.
By this I mean that we are pushed along by the development and that we respond

to this thrust with expectations concerning the outcomes and culmination of the process. (p. 277, italics in original)

Thus, we can think of the dramatic interplay between plot and the characters set within a narrative as a unifying device that gives meaning to a situation as well as teleologically moving an audience towards a certain conclusion by raising and then settling expectations in accordance with the underlying, immanent qualities of those involved in the narrative. Through plot development, a narrative is able to do more than simply add one episode of action on to another. Instead, by associating the moral dimension of character qualities with the advance of the plot, narrative discourse is able to “construct meaningful totalities out of scattered events” (p. 278).

In political discourse, these elements of narrative often appear in a “stock political plot” that advances a story explaining an “event’s origin, its setting in space and in time, its consequences for actors and spectators, and the future effects of dealing with it in a particular way” (Bennett & Edelman, 1985, p. 159). How the story narrates the origin of political events and its location in history is decisive for establishing the meaning of not only the event, but also for suggesting the correct or necessary policies for remedying a problem. When a political narrative sets in motion the dynamic interplay between “the who, what, where, why, how and when” of a story, it also defines the entire range of political choices available: “in choosing any such ultimate cause, we are also depicting a setting, an appropriate course of action, and sets of virtuous and evil characters, and doing so in a way that will appeal to some part of the public that sees its own sentiments or interests reflected in that choice of a social scene” (Bennett & Edelman, 1985, p. 159-160). Narrative thus fashions the facts of a political scene, enabling the rhetor to provide history with undeniable clarity “because the analytical perspective has made it so” (Bennett & Edelman, 1985, p. 162).

Another dominant feature of these stock political plots is their implied nature. Far from being explicitly recounted by the text, the implied narrative provides a variety of thematic keys that evokes a narrative “by a term or a reference” (Bennett & Edelman 1985, p. 164-165). These “pregnant references” provide a sequence of evocations that “make reference to a set of overlapping scenarios featuring settings, characters, and actions not included in the text” (p. 165). As such, the critic should not look only for an explicit, complete narrative, but also for the “seedbeds of stories” that cue an audience into the broader narrative theme that provides the policies advocated inside the text with meaning. This implicit nature may even serve a political or ideological function by providing a shield from criticism, reducing the chance that policy opponents will challenge the one who is casting the narrative because they often operate outside of the direct view of the audience (p. 165).

Previous research has supported the argument that narrative plays an important role in presidential rhetoric and public address, especially since the organizing frame of Cold War competition collapsed (Rockman 1997; Stuckey 1995). Several have found narrative to be an important element of understanding George W. Bush’s rhetoric in responding to the crises of both 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina (Anker 2005; Holme & Summers 2007; West & Carey 2006). This scholarship demonstrates the value of studying the underlying narratives in American foreign policy.

In the next two sections, I draw out the implied narrative that serves as the encompassing frame for NSS 2002 (as well as the empirical challenges that ultimately undermined it) before turning to NSS 2006 to see how the narrative responded and adapted to its predecessor’s shortcomings. Given that an invocation of plot and the dimensions of characters embedded within are the central dimensions of implied narrative, considerable attention will be paid to the

rhetor's explanation of an event's origin, its setting in the space and time of history, and the deserving and undeserving characters within the plot.

NSS 2002 & Subsequent Challenges

The Bush Doctrine established by NSS 2002 emphasized the use of military force to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against the United States or its allies. As I noted at the start of this chapter, these policies received staunch criticism from rhetoric and foreign policy experts alike. In order to understand how NSS 2006 was able to effectively recast the implicit narrative to account for policy failures, it is first necessary to establish the narrative parameters of NSS 2002. In this section, I analyze the implicit narrative that President Bush initially used to justify the Bush Doctrine. After establishing the story's parameters, I document how this narrative failed to resonate with moderate foreign policy experts as well as the problems the Bush administration encountered that created the impetus for recasting in 2006.

The implicit narrative of NSS 2002 centered on a central theme of exceptional American power. This theme is woven into the plot trajectory of the story, the characteristics of the hero, and the nature and scope of the enemy threat. These elements work together to not only justify the policies of preventive military force and aggressive regime change, but also create a framework of intelligibility where such policies are logically necessary. I now discuss each of these narrative elements in turn.

Bush used the decisive concept of plot to explain the nature of the security challenges the United States faced by establishing two intersecting story-lines to explain the past before strategically merging the two. This merging gave coherence to the present historical moment the United States found itself in. The first story track is that of an ageless battle between good and evil, represented by the dramatic clash between the forces of freedom and the "militant visions of

class, nation, and race” (NSS 2002, p. 1). Bush argued that this drama was not bounded by history or politics, but represented a universal struggle for good that transcended all cultural or temporal boundaries: “these values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society—and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people *across the globe* and *across the ages*” (p. iv, emphasis added).

Bush also referred to a second plot trajectory more historically specific than the first, but also a driver of conflict and war: the rise of the nation-state as a political concept and the attendant risks of inter-state competition due to shifts in the global balance of power. Bush alludes to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia as the origin of great power rivalry which has been a major cause of warfare over the last several centuries and argues that currently “the international community has the best chance since the rise of the nation-state in the seventeenth century to build a world where great powers compete in peace instead of continually prepare for war” (p. v). This secondary plot exists in tension with the first; it rests on the premise that the horrific wars of the last few centuries have been products of power imbalances instead of ideological conflicts.

Bush resolves this tension by dissolving the two competing story-lines into each other by identifying one as an effect of the other. He simultaneously argues that the world has arrived at the *end* of both trajectories while redefining inter-state rivalry as a problem of values rather than geopolitical power: “for most of the twentieth century, the world was divided by a great struggle over ideas: destructive totalitarian visions versus freedom and equality. *That great struggle is over...* America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones” (p. 1, emphasis added). The “great struggles” have ended with a “*decisive victory* for the forces of freedom” while power competition between states has receded into the past: “today, the world’s

great powers find ourselves *on the same side*” (p. iv-v, emphasis added). What stands before the audience is the chance to “take advantage of an historic opportunity” to “build a world where great powers compete in peace instead of continually prepare for war” (p. v). By super-imposing the violence of geopolitics and the nation-state on top of this first plot-line, Bush is also able to explain the threats of inter-state rivalry as derivative of the deeper conflict between good and evil, thus resolving problems with the story’s internal consistency. Ultimately, the use of plot in NSS 2002 explains the ultimate origins of violence by identifying the central force that pushes history forward: the clash between the universal values of freedom against the evils of tyranny.

The present stage in NSS 2002’s plot did not arrive inevitably but rather is a result of the heroic qualities of the United States. First, Bush argues that it is a global leader because it possesses a surfeit of influence in every single realm: “today, the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence” (p. iv). This strength is both unprecedented and unequalled (p. 1). Second, Bush argues that American material strength and influence is actually an *effect* of moral exceptionalism, thus linking raw power with heroism: American “strength and influence in the world” is “sustained by faith in the principles of liberty, and the value of a free society” (p. 1). In fact, it is the long development of America’s character over time that makes its current status possible: “our own history is a long struggle to live up to our ideals. But even in our worst moments, the principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence were there to guide us. As a result, America is not just stronger, but is a freer and more just society” (p. 3).

Just as power defines the hero, it also defines the enemy in Bush’s narrative. Bush casts the threat of extremism as a residual effect of American exceptionalism. Because American power has made state competition a relic of the past, the threat is now “shadowy networks of

individuals [who] can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than what it costs to purchase a single tank” and the tyrants who would provide them with assistance (p. iv). Bush takes pains to minimize the character qualities and power of these groups; “We are menaced less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few” (p. 1). Paradoxically, the source of the enemy’s strength is actually the fruit of democracy’s industriousness: “terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and turn the power of modern technologies against us” (p. iv). Without the accessibility of destructive technologies, there would be no major threat from a few unsavory individuals because they lack any particular dimension of power in the realm of leadership, ideology or cultural appeal. While exceptionalism creates prosperity for the free world, it also puts weapons in the hands of the few vestiges of tribal violence that remain.

The plot and the characters within NSS 2002 work together to give explanatory clarity to the present moment that United States’ foreign policy must respond to. Bush argues that the world stands at a critical point where the universal values of freedom can solidify and consolidate their triumph over authoritarianism and that it is the responsibility of the United States to lead the charge. All that stands in the way are the last vestiges of tribal values: “today, humanity holds in its hands the opportunity to further freedom’s *triumph over all these foes*. The United States welcomes our responsibility to lead in this great mission” (p. vi, emphasis added). The argument that freedom has *already* triumphed suggests that the plot has already arrived at its apex. Because the “great struggle is now over,” the opportunity exists for the United States to transform the present window of opportunity into an enduring feature of the global landscape: “this is also a time of opportunity for America. We will work to translate this moment of influence into decades of peace, prosperity, and liberty.” (p. 1)

The policies that are called for under the terms of this narrative come into greater focus when one recalls how Bush uses American power to emphasize the essential weakness of the enemy. The United States can discharge its responsibility through the rapid, surgical use of force to excise the last remaining threats of terrorists and tyrants. Bush justifies such policies through a metaphor of biology. Terrorism is a symptom or effect that is “spawned” by “underlying conditions” (which are not specified) (p. 6). Preventing the growth and proliferation of this organism will require supporting moderate Muslim governments to ensure terrorism does not find “fertile ground” in which to breed (p.6). In areas where it has already taken root, terrorist ideology must be “localized” and then excised through “direct and continuous action” against “terrorist organizations of global reach and ... or state sponsor ...which attempts to gain or use [WMD] or their precursors” (p. 6). Thus, Bush’s narrative radically reorients the calculus concerning the use of force from one of defense to one of active prevention (p. 15).

NSS 2002’s implicit narrative is an optimistic story that celebrates power. The unparalleled moral qualities of the hero have brought the world to the threshold of history’s end. If the United States is successful in mopping up the last traces of ideological struggle, the community of democracies will be able to flourish and prosper in peace for centuries to come. Success in this clean-up mission requires the United States to quickly exercise its superior military power to wipe out the last hold-outs of tribalist violence that remain.

Although NSS 2002 incorporated numerous hedges and qualifiers against relying solely on unilateral force, the terms of the narrative override these moments of caution. While NSS 2002 argues that “there will be no quick or easy end to this conflict” (p. 9) and that “no nation can build a safer, better world alone” (p. vi), the underlying structure privileges foreign policy choices that assume the threats of radical ideology and WMD are easily removed from a society.

This narrative is reflected in Cheney's famous prediction that "we will, in fact, be greeted as liberators" in Iraq (Meet the Press 2003), the president's bold declaration of "Mission Accomplished" after 6 weeks of fighting (New York Times 2003), and the published arguments of pro-war advocates (Krauthammer 2002; Rosen 2003; Thayer 2003) all of which overemphasized the simplicity of the threat and the superior strength of the United States. NSS 2002 ultimately created an overly simplistic (if not impossibly optimistic) set of assumptions for guiding the United States' foreign policy in the wake of the September 11th attacks.

NSS 2002 was strongly criticized by the chorus of moderate foreign policy experts cited at the beginning of this chapter. A detailed review of their reactions shows that this narrative of power failed because it contradicted their own dominant narrative of American foreign policy in three important ways. First, NSS 2002 broke with the American tradition of using force. Daalder characterized the strategy as a "*radically new doctrine* of military preemption" (2002, emphasis added). While the right to preempt an imminent attack has "long been a very useful tool to have in America's foreign policy toolbox," the 2002 doctrine conflates preemption with using force to *prevent* the acquisition from WMD and falls outside of the traditional character of American foreign policy; "every time when our nation's leaders confronted the question of launching a war to [prevent] an adversary from acquiring nuclear weapons... they decided against it" (Daalder 2002). Likewise for Mearsheimer (2011), the Bush Doctrine violated the American tradition of using force only as a last resort and, even then, only with great reserve and prudence (pp. 16-17). Mearsheimer found Bush's emphasis on regime change "at the point of the gun" to be extremely radical with "*no parallel* in American history" (2011, p. 21). Nye also criticized NSS 2002 because it focused "too heavily on military power alone" while seriously neglecting tools of "soft power and multilateral cooperation" (2003). He challenged the narrative's emphasis on the speed

and ease of using force, arguing that “the metaphor of war should not blind Americans to the fact that suppressing terrorism will take years of patient, unspectacular civilian cooperation with other countries” (2003).

Second, NSS 2002 abandoned the American tradition of multilateralism. Daalder and Lindsay (2003) claimed NSS 2002 was a “revolution in foreign policy” (p. 13) that abandoned the belief (held since Wilson) that “the key to creating that world lay in extending the reach of international law and building international institutions” (p. 6). This tradition of cooperation and institutions spanned from Truman through Clinton (pp. 9-12). Bush’s “revolution” was premised on shedding “the constraints imposed by friends, allies, and international institutions” (p. 13). While Nye’s view of foreign policy describes more fluctuations between unilateralism and multilateralism throughout history, he nonetheless believed that the Bush doctrine was historically novel: “The new unilateralists go a step further. They believe that today Washington...must escape the constraints of the multilateral structures it helped build after World War II” (2003).

Third, this audience bucked against NSS 2002’s assertion that there were no constraints on American power. Mearsheimer argued that the neoconservatives’ “rosy vision of Pax Americana...is not going to work” (2002). The central flaw with the Bush Doctrine was its simplistic theory of power: “the Bush administration failed to understand the limits of what American military power could do to transform the Middle East” (2011, p. 25). For Nye, Bush’s understanding of power did not adequately reflect the nature of the world: “The problem for U.S. power in the twenty-first century is that more and more continues to fall outside the control of even the most powerful state” (2003). NSS 2002’s assumptions about force, unilateralism, and faith in American power worked together to produce failure in Nye’s view:

Bush's doctrine differs from those of his predecessors... The Bush Administration's neo-Wilsonians failed not by pursuing the goals of democracy promotion, but by the means they chose. They are truncated Wilsonians, ignoring his emphasis on multilateral institutions and inadequate Trumanites, ignoring his prudence... The correct charge against the people who developed the Bush Doctrine is not idealism... Rather, the neo-Wilsonians who promoted the Iraq War were guilty of illusionism, a cognitive failure to produce an adequate roadmap of means that would balance the risk and realism in their vision. (2005)

The chief failure of "new unilateralism" was its inability to understand "not just the strengths but also the limits of U.S. power" (2009). Daalder & Lindsay (2003) similarly believed that the Bush Doctrine represented a new and dangerous approach to American power; it "turned John Quincy Adams on his head and argued that the United States should aggressively go abroad searching for monsters to destroy" (p. 13).

In recounting these reactions, I am not interested in assessing the historical truth of Daalder, Nye or Mearsheimer's understanding of American foreign policy or even suggesting that these three thinkers view history the same way. Instead, I have sought to call attention to the ways that each tested the strategy against their own view of American grand strategy throughout history. Each expert, to a significant degree, believed that the Bush Doctrine represented a break with tradition, was unsuitable for the present historical moment, and tossed aside important character traits like prudence, responsibility, and working within a community of democracies. In Fisher's (1984) language, NSS 2002 failed at the level of narrative fidelity (p. 8); the story did not resonate with this audience's understanding of the world or the tradition of American foreign policy.

Events on the ground and a long string of mistakes severely undercut the credibility of the strategy for the broader public as well. Unrealistic assumptions for success contributed to a lack of a post-invasion plan or exit strategy in Iraq (O’Hanlon 2005; Benjamin and Simon 2005; Bensahel 2006), American moral authority was undermined by human rights and torture scandals (Sundstrom 2006), and the growing insurgency revealed a threat far more complex and deadly than what the narrative predicted (Knights 2005, p. 371). Long-term questions about the necessity or desirability of the war aside, it was clearly a failure if judged by NSS 2002’s own terms. As this narrative unraveled, it created new “rhetorical dilemmas, not least tensions between the need to appear consistent and the need for flexibility, the need to appear credible and the need to dissemble” (Simons 2007, p. 188). The Bush administration needed to recast the narrative of foreign policy in a manner that would be consistent with previous policy choices while simultaneously confronting a dramatic series of perceived failures in the eyes of the audience.

NSS 2006: Recasting the Narrative

The 2006 NSS responded to shortcoming of NSS 2002 while remaining consistent in policy terms with the earlier document. Both texts are similar in terms of policy, but the narrative theme that provides meaning to the arguments within changes significantly. The arc of the plot-line is transformed while the scope of American power within the story is circumscribed. Instead of placing the world at the threshold of the end of history, the recast plot of NSS 2006 reactivates the primordial struggle between good and evil and identifies the United States as a heroic (albeit slightly weaker) figure whose responsibility is to lead the world’s democracies in this fight. In NSS 2006, Bush creates a story where the conflict is more difficult than 4 years before, the outcome increasingly uncertain, the enemy more powerful, and the attendant stakes for victory

far higher. He casts the story in this way to explain away the perceived failures of his first NSS while arguing for maintaining the same policies that had previously failed.

NSS 2006 sets this new narrative into motion with the very first words of the document: “America is at war. This is a wartime national security strategy required by the grave challenge we face—the rise of terrorism fueled by an aggressive ideology of hatred and murder...” (NSS 2006, p. i). However, the location on the plotline in history has changed dramatically in the new document. The unique window of opportunity that laid before the audience in NSS 2002 has disappeared and the audience now finds themselves set in the middle of a long, enduring struggle to ultimately root out all evil in the world: “It is the policy of the United States to seek and support democratic movements and institutions...with the *ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world*...Achieving this goal is the *work of generations*” (p. 1, emphasis added). The end of the Cold War that NSS 2002 had coded as democracy’s final triumph is reduced to simply the latest episode in a long saga and a new episode is just now beginning: “the United States is in the early years of a long struggle similar to what our country faced during the early years of the Cold War. The 20th century witnessed the triumph of freedom over threats of fascism and communism. Yet a new totalitarian ideology now threatens...” (p. 1). In this new story, the plot has not led to a single point where the US inherits and preserves the global peace. Instead, the heroic figure of the United States finds itself at an interval between long episodes of conflict which span several decades, if not centuries.

Bush’s redefinition of the plot also implicates how he explains the nature of inter-state rivalry and geopolitical competition. While the threat of great power rivalry was strategically dissolved in NSS 2002, it reemerges in NSS 2006. Trouble with other poles of power now threatens to reemerge in this new story, a fact the United States must be prepared to deal with by

hedging “appropriately in case states choose unwisely” (p. 36). Rather than the historical convergence in great power interests and values that occurs at the end of history in the previous document (NSS 2002, p. 28), relations among nation-states are measured by where each state stands in position to the universal struggle for democracy. “In the world today,” argues Bush, “the *fundamental character* of regimes *matters as much* as the distribution of power among them” (p. 1, emphasis added).

NSS 2006’s discussion of China and Russia makes this clear. Russia has shifted from no longer being a strategic adversary (NSS 2002, p. 26) to a country with “a diminishing commitment to democratic freedoms and institutions” (NSS 2006, p. 39). Likewise, China’s path towards democracy will determine whether the United States cooperates or clashes with them: “only by allowing the Chinese people to enjoy ...basic freedoms and universal rights can China ... reach its full potential. Our strategy seeks to encourage China to make the right strategic choices for its people, while we hedge against other possibilities” (p. 42).

The new narrative theme also transforms the audience’s understanding of the villains in this plot. Terrorism is something more significant than a few networks of radical individuals who have access to destructive technology. Instead, terrorism is an effect of tyranny. It results from “political alienation”, lack of justice and closed societies that do not permit the free circulation of ideas and information (p. 10). While quick military strikes may be necessary in the short-run, defeating terrorism cannot be dissociated from the larger narrative theme of advancing democracy’s triumph: “defeating terrorism in the long run requires that each of these factors be addressed. The genius of democracy is that it provides a counter to each” (p. 10). As a result, security from terrorism will only occur when the United States achieves the world-historical mission of eradicating tyranny from the world.

Finally, the transformative power of the shift in narrative theme dramatically alters the understanding of power and how the United States must interact with others in the world. The nature of the struggle exceeds even the grasp of the world's most powerful state. The United States ceases to be the unipolar hero who can shape the world in its image and instead becomes a leader at the head of a "growing community of democracies" (p. ii). Rather than going it alone, the United States must expand its national strength and cultivate "effective multinational efforts" that are "essential to solve these problems" of WMD proliferation, terrorism and disease (p. ii). The new narrative's tone shifts from triumphalist unilateralism to cautious multilateralism.

NSS 2006 also places a limit upon American power. The United States is now understood as exceptional because of the values that it stands for and less because of the material advantages it possesses. The deeper backdrop of the universal struggle for democracy is what provides American power with meaning:

The United States has long championed freedom because doing so reflects our values and advances our interests...because we believe the desire for freedom lives in every human heart and the imperative of human dignity transcends all nations and cultures...To protect our nation and honor our values, the United States seeks to extend freedom across the globe by leading an international effort to end tyranny and to promote effective democracy. (p. 3)

Thus, while exceptional moral qualities and relative power advantages assign the United States the responsibility to lead, it must be a multilateral effort. This logic even extends to the unilateral exercise of power. While NSS 2006 still preserves what Bush believes to be an inherent right to use force as an aspect of sovereignty, the transformed narrative qualifies its potential for use: "...we must be prepared to act alone if necessary, while recognizing there is little of lasting

consequence we can accomplish in the world without the sustained cooperation of our allies and partners” (p. 37).

Within the span of four years, the underlying story of the Bush administration’s foreign policy transformed from an optimistic celebration of exceptionalism to a darker tale filled with drama and uncertainty. While the United States still possessed many of the same heroic qualities as the first story, the challenge it faced was more daunting because the location of the plot and the character of the enemy had changed dramatically. In this story, a long struggle against totalitarian evil is just now beginning and the enemy is far more diffuse and powerful than a few scattered tribalists.

At first glance, the recast narrative within NSS 2006 may strike some as a sober reassessment of the limitations of American power. The reactions of several notable foreign policy experts cited at the outset of this chapter indicate that, at least for this powerful and influential audience, NSS 2006 was received as a repudiation of the regime change and prevention policies controversially established in NSS 2002 in favor of multilateralism and improved cooperation in the War on Terror. Such a reaction is problematic because it overlooks that NSS 2006 unapologetically and explicitly maintains the doctrine of unilateral, preventive military force: “the place of preemption in our national security strategy *remains the same*” (p. 23, emphasis added). If it is clear that the policy preferences in NSS 2006 are largely the same despite the change in the underlying narrative, what remains to be seen is how the Bush administration reconfigured the symbolic terms associated with preventive military force to achieve congruency with the new narrative. NSS 2006 accomplishes this by recoding the threat of rogue states and weapons proliferation as aspects of the greater struggle for democracy. The

next section explores how NSS 2006 embeds this controversial part of the Bush Doctrine within the parameters of a more familiar (and palatable) narrative for Bush's critics.

Certainty & Regime Change

The narrative logic of NSS 2006 does more than maintain the Bush Doctrine; it reinforces the desirability (if not the necessity) of forcible regime change and preventive military force by embedding the policy challenges of WMD nonproliferation into the broader agonistic struggle of good against evil. The moral dimensions of the story thus require the very same policies that experts found so problematic in NSS 2002. This section will explore the consequences of NSS 2006's sublimation of nonproliferation policies into the broader drama of good against evil. In it, I argue that Bush constructed a set of risk assessment coordinates that left the goal of regime change as the only *effective* solution to the potential danger posed by the proliferation of WMD. By establishing the problem of "certainty" as the ultimate acid test for assessing the danger posed by WMD and aligning "certainty" with democracy, the strategy guaranteed that regime change would remain as the only tolerable solution. This section will follow the text of the document across each of these threshold steps.

First, NSS 2006 establishes that the proliferation of WMD is the single largest threat facing the world. The document derives the warrant for this claim through a strategic conflation between the dangers posed by different types of WMD, a move which is largely carried over from NSS 2002 (Keller and Mitchell 2006, p. 9-10). The subsection of the document dedicated to "the world's most dangerous weapons" explicitly pulls apart the umbrella term WMD into a sub-pointed discussion of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. While the latter two of these weapon categories are noted as "a grave WMD threat" or "a serious proliferation concern," nuclear weapons stand alone by virtue of their sheer destructive power: "the proliferation of

nuclear weapons poses the greatest threat to our national security. Nuclear weapons are unique in their capacity to inflict instant loss of life on a massive scale” (NSS 2006, p. 19). Having set out the dangers unique to each class of weapons, Bush quickly collapses them back into the unified signifier of WMD. At the same time however, the document condenses the various security threats posed by *all* of these weapons into the unique danger of nuclear weapons, allowing Bush to associate the dangers of chemical weapons with the catastrophic impact of a nuclear blast: “When the *consequences of an attack with WMD are potentially so devastating*, we cannot afford to stand idly by as grave dangers materialize” (p. 23, emphasis added). The specter of the mushroom cloud becomes attached to *all* WMD, allowing the magnitude of the nuclear threat to subsume all other considerations.

The most dramatic and troubling change for NSS 2006’s approach to proliferation occurs when this threat assessment is paired with the dominant narrative struggle of good versus evil. This becomes startlingly clear when close attention is paid to the concept of “certainty” in NSS 2006 and how it is linked to the risk calculus carried over from NSS 2002. The synthesis of “certainty” and the nuclear threat is most clearly expressed in NSS 2006’s discussion of Saddam Hussein’s alleged WMD programs and the subsequent Iraq war. Bush does not list the destruction of Hussein’s regime as a “success” of the administration’s first term, at least not among those explicitly claimed as validation for their anti-proliferation strategy (p. 18-19). Instead, the Bush administration appended a small sub-section to the end of chapter five entitled “Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction” in which they addressed the charge that the failure to find evidence of WMD constituted a failure of the Bush Doctrine (p. 23-24). It is here that the divide separating “certainty” and democracy on one side and “uncertainty” and tyranny on the other is laid bare.

The subsection begins by claiming that the original auspices for regime change were much broader than the suspicion of WMD programs. The fundamental threat was the Hussein regime's irresponsible behavior: "Saddam Hussein's continued defiance of 16 UNSC resolutions, combined with his record of invading neighboring countries, supporting terrorists, tyrannizing his own people and using chemical weapons, presented a threat we could no longer ignore" (p. 23). Furthermore, Bush argues that the failure to find WMD in Iraq does not repudiate the *truth* of the threat; the United States still must "counter successfully the *very real threat* of proliferation..." (p. 23, emphasis added). The real lesson to be learned from the Iraq War is simply that "our intelligence must improve" (p. 23).

While Bush does argue for improving intelligence capabilities, he ultimately believes that any improvements will be insufficient to counter the true nature of the threat. Intelligence capabilities may be improved with time, but they can never overcome the *necessary uncertainty* that accompanies any non-democratic regime; the report argues that "there will always be some uncertainty about the status of hidden programs since proliferators are often brutal regimes that go to great lengths to conceal their activities" (p. 24). Thus, because of the absence of democracy, there is always the possibility—if not *inevitability*—of WMD proliferation. For proof, NSS 2006 reproduces a section of the Iraq Survey Group report (the final report on Hussein's WMD related activity in the aftermath of the invasion):

Saddam continued to see the utility of WMD. He explained that he purposely gave an *ambiguous impression* about possession as a deterrent to Iran. He gave explicit direction to maintain the *intellectual capabilities*. As U.N. sanctions eroded there was a concomitant expansion of activities that could support full WMD reactivation. He directed that ballistic missile work continue that would

support long-range missile development. Virtually no senior Iraqi believed that Saddam *had forsaken WMD forever*. Evidence suggests that, as resources became available and the constraints of sanctions decayed, there was a direct expansion of activity that would have the effect of *supporting future WMD reconstitution*.

(NSS 2006, p. 23, emphasis added)

Allowing the persistence of a possibility was thus inexcusable; there could be no guarantee that Hussein would permanently and irrevocably forsake WMD-related capability for the lifespan of his regime. By identifying the character traits of the evil tyrant together with even the possibility of the “intellectual capabilities” for WMD, NSS 2006 posits that the threat is inevitable so long as tyranny exists *anywhere*. NSS 2006 argues that the failure of American intelligence was indeed Hussein’s fault: “Saddam’s strategy of bluff, denial and deception is a dangerous game that dictators play at their own peril...It was Saddam’s reckless behavior that demanded the world’s attention, and it was his refusal to remove the ambiguity that he created that forced the United States and its allies to act” (p. 24). However, the terms of the narrative made compliance with non-proliferation demands by Hussein impossible. The Iraqi government could never sufficiently “remove the ambiguity” as long as they were identified as non-democratic; neutralizing the threat of WMD would require a change in regime in order to achieve sufficient certainty.

NSS 2006 declared that *only* the invasion of 2003 could eliminate the danger posed by Iraq’s WMD programs: “With the elimination of Saddam’s regime, this threat has been addressed *once and for all*” (p. 23, emphasis added). What enables the Bush administration to achieve this level of certitude? After all, it seems curious to brand the invasion of Iraq as a successful case of preventive warfare when there was no WMD threat to prevent. One must look

under what terms Iraq *is* explicitly declared a victory: as a paradigm case for the elimination of tyranny and the establishment of democracy. The Bush administration sees this method of forcible regime change as proof of the “extraordinary progress in the expansion of freedom, democracy, and human dignity” that “the world has seen [since 2002]”:

In Iraq, a tyrant has been toppled; over 8 million Iraqis voted in the nation’s first free and fair election; a freely negotiated constitution was passed by a referendum in which almost 10 million Iraqis participated; and, for the first time in their history, nearly 12 million Iraqis have elected a permanent government under a popularly determined constitution. (p. 2)

The elimination of tyranny provides the only possible guarantee of certainty on questions of WMD acquisition because of the identification of democracy as the ultimate force of good in the world. Because all people across history and culture desire freedom and peace (p. 2), and because democracies are responsive to the people and submit to their will (p. 4), and because democracies behave responsibly and settle their differences peacefully (p. 15), a democracy could never pursue WMD for aggressive uses against other states or its own people.

The ideological arguments in NSS 2006 constrain the options available to the United States for dealing with threats of WMD proliferation or acquisition by other states or organizations. Even though Bush argues that “taking action need not involve military force” (p. 23), and that the United States will employ “the full array of political, economic, diplomatic, and other tools at our disposal” (p. 6), the logic of the strategy forecloses the possibility that any of these alternatives to force could succeed. Because the essential character of a “tyrannical regime” precludes trust, predictability or certainty, and because the magnitude of a successful WMD (read: nuclear) attack is unacceptable, then the preferred tool for dealing with this danger is the

elimination of the regime. Thus, the ideological terms of NSS 2006 dictate the preference for a policy strategy that eschews compromise or negotiation in favor of one which more closely resembles the ultimate showdown between democracy and tyranny, between good and evil. The narrative structure of NSS 2006 was different from that of the previous document, masking the fact that the underlying ideological assumptions of the two were quite similar.

Conclusions & Implications

NSS 2006 recast the implied narrative surrounding the Bush administration's foreign policy in a manner that was able to generate a dramatic reversal in opinion among key foreign policy thinkers while strengthening the most problematic elements (forcible regime change and preventive military force) of the original strategy. There are three major implications from this chapter: it identifies the key difference between NSS 2002 and NSS 2006 while explaining the source of the divergent reactions; it clarifies the functioning of narrative within specialized fields; and it adds a needed layer of study to foreign policy argument.

First, the essential difference that explains the contrast in audience reception between NSS 2002 and NSS 2006 occurred at the level of implied narrative. It is important to note that both NSS 2002 and 2006 utilized many common themes or metaphors of American Cold War rhetoric, such as the division of the world into two distinct camps of good and evil (Hinds & Windt 1991, Bostdorff 2008, Ivie 1984) and the use of numerous metaphors of chaos, competition, and containment (Chilton 1996). Analyzing the implicit narrative reveals that the broader story in which these themes are embedded greatly influences audience reception. While Bush's strategic world-view and its rhetorical expression draws from a deep-well of American history, his departure from the established narrative of prudence, alliances and international cooperation in 2002 failed to resonate with a key audience. NSS 2006 in turn was a successful

return to these themes. While the ideas of democracy promotion and cautious multilateralism date back to Wilson, they find a modern expression in Reagan's 1982 Westminister address (Rowland & Jones 2010). This narrative frame has been a dominant theme of American foreign policy since Reagan; such themes dominated Clinton's post-Cold War rhetoric (Edwards & Valenzano 2007) and research shows they are fundamental tenets of American political culture (Ivie 1996, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). In some ways, NSS 2006 was also a return to Bush's most successful rhetorical strategies immediately following the 9/11 attacks when he characterized the fight as a great struggle between the forces of evil that required concerted action by the world's democracies (Murphy 2003, Bostdorff 2003).

In other words, the success of NSS 2006 in receiving praise from a host of moderate foreign policy experts was because he activated a narrative of American foreign policy that was far more compatible with his audience's understanding of the world and the role in it that the United States plays than the narrative in NSS 2002. Changes in narrative enabled Bush to draw upon the tradition and values of Truman and Reagan (NSS 2006, p. ii) while keeping the actual arguments and policies of his failed strategy essentially unchanged.

The reactions to NSS 2006 suggest the dominance of narrative in human thinking not only among the broader public, but in specific subfields of argument. The fact that an elite audience of policy experts believed that the administration had abruptly shifted its course demonstrates the centrality of narrative in shaping audience interpretation. The narrative framing of a document or text plays a crucial role by providing an interpretative scheme for evaluating specific arguments. Even when a text does not assume the form of a story, an audience will test the arguments for coherence by judging them against whatever dominant narrative they already hold to be true. Here, Rowland's (1989) insight about narrative fidelity and probability is helpful.

Even though these two tests of Fisher's might be insufficient to choose among competing stories, they are incredibly useful for understanding audience reaction: "when a work either explicitly tells a story or draws upon a story, narrative probability and fidelity are useful standards not so much for testing the argument in the work as for testing its potential credibility for a particular audience" (p. 52). Thus it is fair to say that both Fisher and Rowland were correct; narrative may not be the exclusive mode of discourse that a speaker can draw upon but it is an important means for audiences to make sense of political events and texts.

This chapter also suggests that small changes in a character's agency or the plot can profoundly alter audience reception. As Burke (1941/1973) suggests, characters in a story are often approximations of a larger principle (p. 333); alterations in plot or agency are met with a transferal of that principle's qualities elsewhere in the story in order for the drama to play itself out structurally (p. 334-336). In NSS 2006, the dramatic story-line and its attendant terms pushed the United States towards increasingly violent reckonings with authoritarianism, despite Bush's assurances that the United States would embrace cautious multilateralism in the future. While the agency implied for the President of the United States was more circumscribed in the new narrative, the actual policy options available were not. In this way, Bush spoke in accents that were "heard while not listening", to paraphrase Burke (p. 337).

There are significant lessons for critics of presidential and public argument. The power of narrative and its creative interaction with argument shows the danger of an exclusive reliance on argumentative criticism. Critics should also attend to the level of narrative and critically test presidential stories about the world stage and the characters within it when appropriate. This will indeed require traditional argumentative tests of ideological argument, as well as analyses of the

underlying narrative. We must test both the justifications as well as the embedded stories in policy discourse, even in a policy document such as the NSS.

Chapter 4: “A question unanswered”: Obama and American exceptionalism.

Early judgments about Barack Obama’s approach to foreign policy are somewhat puzzling. A dominant interpretation among many foreign policy scholars and experts is that Obama has largely maintained the approach taken by George W. Bush. Although there is always some gap between the campaign trail and the actual policy record, Feaver and Popescu (2012) argue that few Presidents have transitioned from campaign promises to maintaining the outgoing administration’s policies “as dramatically as has...Obama” (para. 5). While some overlap in policies between different administrations is not very surprising, the real puzzle lies in the insistence of many of these experts that the two fundamentally share the same attitudes and world-view. A growing chorus believes Obama’s overarching strategy is indistinguishable from Bush’s. Feaver (2010b) brands Obama’s approach as “Bush Lite” (para. 1) while Thayer (2009) goes so far as to claim that he is even “out-Bushing Bush” at times (p. 3). Lindsay (2010) argues that Obama fundamentally “echoes Bush’s world-view” (para. 3) while Mead (2010) believes that his administration “shares the neoconservative belief that the world is ready to be fundamentally reshaped under U.S. leadership” (para. 1). Walt (2010) similarly believes that Obama’s world-view is no different than Bush’s “you’re with us, or against us” mentality; it is simply “a lot more long-winded” (para. 10).

Such reactions are even more puzzling because of how these experts arrived at their conclusion. Many of these judgments were in response to the release of Obama’s first (and thus far, only) NSS document, NSS 2010. The responses offered were almost always comparative; NSS 2010 was held up against Bush’s two NSS documents: NSS 2002 and 2006. Although many of these foreign policy experts style themselves as “realists” who believe that words and ideas matter very little in American foreign policy (as chapter 1 demonstrated), it is odd that they

would conclude the world-view embedded in these documents is essentially the same. Bush and Obama's philosophic outlooks are very different. Bush is regarded as a strongly principled thinker who sharply delineates between good and bad (Cannon & Cannon, 2008), whereas Obama is regarded as a cautious pragmatist (Terrill, 2009; Danisch, 2012). That cautious pragmatism was quite evident in NSS 2010 (Obama, 2010a, p. ii). However, the document was read overwhelmingly as a continuation of the more controversial elements of the "Bush Doctrine" and the War on Terrorism that were laid out in chapter 3. A constant theme in most reactions was that NSS 2010 differed from NSS 2002 and NSS 2006 only in tone. Gray (2011) argues that "overall, the most obvious difference between the Bush National Security Strategies and that of President Obama is one of tone" (p. 40). Heathcote (2010) contends that changes to the War on Terrorism have been "in name only" (p. 277). Feaver (2010b) goes so far as to conclude that NSS 2010 is nearly identical to Bush's in the areas of multilateralism, the role of values in foreign policy, the use of unilateral military force, and the approach towards terrorism and WMD proliferation.

The answer to this confusing situation revolves around the mythos of American exceptionalism that underwrites both presidents' approach to foreign policy. While both Bush and Obama appeal to the myth throughout their NSS documents, the content of their respective myths (and what that implies for policy choices) diverge significantly. In this chapter, I argue NSS 2010 organizes the global scene and America's role within it around the key terms of "rights" and "responsibilities." These terms enable Obama to recast the traditional mythos of American exceptionalism in a way that avoids the worst excesses of unilateral American power and provides multilateral institutions with a greater role in solving global threats. This chapter poses several implications. First, it reveals that the dominant interpretation of NSS 2010 was

greatly influenced by overlaps in the myth between Bush and Obama and the contextual factors that shaped NSS 2010's reception. Second, it shows that there is a strong contrast in the foreign policy visions of Obama and Bush that translate into significant differences on policy issues such as the use of force and multilateralism. Third, this analysis helps to clarify the evolving debate over Obama's world-view.

I reach this conclusion in five sections. First, I argue that NSS 2010 offers crucial insight into understanding Obama's foreign policy, both in terms of his outlook and how he may differ from Bush because of several contextual factors the 2010 document responds to. Moreover, such contextual factors help explain why the host of experts cited above turned to NSS 2010 for relevant answers. Second, I demonstrate how Obama centers his strategy on the key terms of "rights" and "responsibilities." These terms reveal that Obama's foreign policy is motivated by two common elements of the American exceptionalism myth: an embrace of individual freedom and a unique role for American leadership. Third, I argue that the contingent nature of the global scene that NSS 2010 expresses significantly reconfigures the myth of American exceptionalism, despite surface-level similarities. In the fourth section, I argue this recasting directly implicates policy questions concerning the use of military force and multilateral cooperation. Finally, I conclude with the implications this analysis has for understanding the differences between Bush and Obama's foreign policy and the broader rhetorical trajectory of the Obama administration.

NSS 2010 & Bush's Legacy

The rhetorically centered approach outlined in chapter 1 promises to yield many of the same insights about Obama's world-view and its implications on foreign policy that chapters 2 and 3 have about Reagan and Bush. A puzzle remains, however. Why were expert reactions almost explicitly comparative in nature instead of assessing the propriety of Obama's strategy for

dealing with global challenges on its own terms? The answer to both of these questions revolves around the contextual factors that ensured NSS 2010 would emerge as a key interpretive site for foreign policy experts to shape their judgments about Obama's foreign policy. First, although the economic meltdown may have been the decisive factor that pushed Obama into office (Michelitch, Morales, Owen & Tucker, 2012), one central point of stasis throughout most of the election was how Obama differed from the Bush administration (and McCain) on the Iraq War. Bostdorff (2009) argues that the debate over how opposition or support to the Iraq war implicated Obama and McCain's judgment even carried over into debates after the focus shifted from foreign policy to the economy. The repeated theme of splitting from Bush created anticipation among several audiences to see what exactly Obama's grand strategy would be. Second, the controversial policies of the "Bush Doctrine" pushed many experts to find answers within NSS 2010 about how Obama would differ from Bush. I explore each of these contextual factors in this section.

NSS 2010 was heavily anticipated as the first definitive statement of foreign policy by Obama after assuming office (Stark, 2011, p. 46). Given the tone that Obama had set in the primaries, it was anticipated by some that he would use the opportunity to cement a clear split between himself and the policies of the Bush Doctrine (Parmar, 2011; Homolar-Riechmann, 2009). Others expected NSS 2010 to officially signal an end to campaign rhetoric and restate familiar principles of American foreign policy, including several that overlapped with the Bush administration. Robert Lieber argued "every presidency starts off defining itself by trumpeting the opposite of whatever its predecessor did, and that's been true in spades going from George W. Bush to Obama...But at a certain point that gets old, and we're at a point where the overplayed "we're not Bush" mantra is raising anxieties among friends and allies in Asia and the

Middle East” (LaFranchi, 2010, para. 8, quotations in original). Still others thought that Obama’s attitude towards the Bush Doctrine had been ambiguous during his first year and expected NSS 2010 to provide final clarity on the subject. As Roston (2010) argued “when Obama at last reveals his National Security Strategy, we’re supposed to have a clearer picture of whether or not he believes in the right of anticipatory self-defense” (para. 4). The anticipation only grew as the document became severely delayed due to intensive consultations during drafting and a series of domestic and international crises (Rogin, 2010). A source close to Ben Rhodes, Obama’s chief speech-writer and the lead drafter on NSS 2010, said he was forced to revisit several sections after initially finishing in June 2009: “the economic situation demanded corrections... We were forced as well to allow for the earthquake in Haiti, election in Iran, nuclear tests in North Korea, and strengthening of Al-Qaeda's positions in Yemen and Somalia” (Belyaninov, 2010, para. 2).

Beyond the immediate political context, NSS 2010’s reception was shaped by the rhetorical legacy of the Bush administration, especially as espoused by NSS 2002 and 2006. Multiple commentators invoked the precedent established by NSS 2002 in offering their reaction of the Obama document. As Boyle (2010) suggested, NSS documents “get noticed only when they introduce something disastrous, such as President Bush's embrace of preventive war in his 2002 strategy statement” (para. 3). Faber (2011) concurred: “some national security strategies or defense white papers are shockingly honest and to-the-point. The Bush Administration’s infamous 2002 NSS is a case in point.” (para. 3) For many, NSS 2002 expressed a radical policy of preventive military violence and forcible regime change that threatened global stability; Zarefsky (2014) went so far as to argue the approach was the entelechial “end of the line” for the myth American exceptionalism; Bush’s foreign policy vision was goaded on by the belief that the United States could easily flex its military muscles and unilaterally reshape the world (p.

174). Given that NSS 2002 was regarded by many as a “revolution in foreign policy” (Daalder & Lindsay, 2003, p. 13), it altered the interpretive landscape for subsequent NSS strategy documents (despite the supposed reversal of NSS 2006 that I explored in chapter 3). NSS 2010 emerged as a touchstone for determining the future of American leadership in a post-9/11 world *and* post-Bush world. Many experts turned to NSS 2010 to find answers to the question of how Obama would relate to the policies of the “Bush Doctrine.” As Traub (2010) points out, “Bush 2002 was a response to 9/11; Obama 2010 is a response to the failure of that response” (para. 9).

Comments from senior Obama officials confirm that they viewed NSS 2010 as a situational opportunity to respond to this contextual challenge. Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg explained that NSS 2010 was an opportunity to communicate the future direction of U.S. leadership to the world: “most of the world recognizes the need for more concerted cooperative action, and they are looking for leadership. But they want leadership that is not focused narrowly just on U.S. interests but rather is working for the common good” (Kitfield, 2010, para. 6). Rhodes viewed the document as an instance of “strategic communication” capable of reaching key audiences as far as the tribal areas of Pakistan (Ackerman, 2010b, para. 17). His perspective indicates how seriously the administration took the NSS as key piece of rhetoric; “Rhodes speaks from a unique vantage point [as]... one of President Obamas closest and most influential foreign policy advisers. He’s been with Obama since the beginning of his presidential campaign, helping shape and explain the contours of Obamas foreign policy” (Ackerman, 2010b, para. 2).

As indicated at the start of this chapter, the dominant interpretation that emerged from this context was that Obama’s vision was largely congruent with Bush. Upon a closer examination of the document’s key terms, a different picture emerges. In the next section, I

explore NSS 2010's key terms of "rights" and "responsibilities", showing that the document offers a substantially different view of the world than the Bush administration, with major implications for the exercise of American leadership.

Rights, Responsibilities and the Global Scene

Obama anchors NSS 2010 to a symbolic structure that revolves around the relationship between two pivotal terms: "rights" and "responsibilities." He does so by casting the international scene as a diverse terrain of rights-holders and a host of different agents who have responsibilities *to* those rights-holders. In this section, I argue that the terminology of "rights" posits the core enlightenment values of individualism as the terminal orienting principle of the entire international system. Obama's articulation of "responsibilities" in turn reflects his pragmatic view of a global landscape that is constantly in flux, imposing different burdens on global agents (including the United States). However, Obama explicitly calls upon the myth of American exceptionalism in order to warrant a unique responsibility for the United States to maintain global leadership.

Obama's characterization of the international scene strongly diverges from Bush and that divergence has important implications for the role of the United States in the world. NSS 2010 rhetorically characterizes the international scene as one that is constantly in flux: "We live in a time of sweeping change. The success of free nations, open markets, and social progress in recent decades has accelerated globalization on an unprecedented scale" (Obama, 2010a, p. i). Globalization itself is an ambivalent process; it creates economic opportunity while also changing the face of threats (and intensifying them in some instances). Thus, the two decades that have followed the Cold War have been as much about the success of American leadership as they have been about new challenges:

The circle of peaceful democracies has expanded; the specter of nuclear war has lifted; major powers are at peace; the global economy has grown; commerce has stitched the fate of nations together; and more individuals can determine their own destiny. Yet these advances have been accompanied by persistent problems. Wars over ideology have given way to wars over religious, ethnic, and tribal identity; nuclear dangers have proliferated; inequality and economic instability have intensified; damage to our environment, food insecurity, and dangers to public health are increasingly shared; and the same tools that empower individuals to build enable them to destroy. (Obama, 2010a, p. 1)

This global scene diverges greatly from that offered in the narratives of NSS 2002 and NSS 2006. As chapter 3 demonstrated, NSS 2002 asserted that the “great struggle” was over and the world was on the precipice of a new era of global peace, while NSS 2006 believed the United States was immersed in a primordial battle between democracy and tyranny. For the Obama administration, the contrast could not be clearer. As Deputy Secretary Steinberg (2010) made clear in an interview, there is no “end of history where conflicts disappear;” the threats the world faces are simply “different kinds of challenges” (para. 12). However, it is not simply the terrain of the scene that is in flux according to NSS 2010.

The agents that populate the international environment are increasingly diverse. Many are recurring characters of any NSS document: American allies, other major world powers, and the United States itself. However, the network of relevant actors is growing increasingly diffuse; “more actors exert power and influence” (Obama, 2010a, p. 8). An integrated European Union is becoming more influential, as are the alternative centers of power like India and Brazil. International institutions such as the G20 are growing increasingly powerful while the United

Nations and NATO are as influential as ever. The capacity for global agency is also taking forms beyond the traditional nation-state; “meanwhile, individuals, corporations, and civil society play an increasingly important role in shaping events around the world” (Obama, 2010a, p. 8). In this globalized world, publics the world over are able to exert more influence and can become agents themselves. Obama (2010a) thus calls for more direct engagement and communication with global publics: “We must ... do a better job understanding the attitudes, opinions, grievances, and concerns of peoples—not just elites—around the world. Doing so allows us to...develop effective plans, while better understanding how our actions will be perceived” (p. 16). The world-view that NSS 2010 posits is thus one of constant flux and change, both in terms of threats and challenges, but also among the different actors (states, alliances, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, etc.) that populate that world.

NSS 2010 grounds this reconfigured scene to the key terms of “rights” and “responsibilities.” These two terms are introduced as the underlying principles that bind nearly all individuals and nations together in a global community (Obama, 2010a, p. 35). According to Obama, the governing norms of international rights consists of recognizing “both the *rights and responsibilities* of all sovereign nations” (p. 11, emphasis added). These terms are particularly significant because of their outsize influence on the arguments within the document and their enormous implications for understanding the nature of Obama’s foreign policy. Appealing to a right immediately invokes two questions: who is the holder of the right and what obligations does that right impose on others? NSS 2010 answers both of these questions:

Our engagement will underpin a just and sustainable international order—just, because it advances mutual interests, protects the rights of all, and holds accountable those who refuse to meet their responsibilities; sustainable because it

is based on broadly shared norms and fosters collective action to address common challenges. (Obama, 2010a, p. 12)

The relationship between rights and responsibilities thus establishes a dialectic between a central motivating principle (a just order that respects the rights of all) and the pragmatic means by which to achieve it (marshalling collective action to uphold collective responsibility). The twin terms thus work to ground human action in the service of clear values while assigning the many agents of the world a particular role in discharging their obligations.

The rights that are due to all, according to Obama, are the values of liberal individualism. Such values are durable and unchanging; they represent human universals. Unsurprisingly, many of these are the classic negative liberties enshrined in the American Bill of Rights: “these include an individual’s freedom to speak their mind, assemble without fear, worship... and choose their own leaders; they also include dignity, tolerance, and equality...and the fair and equitable administration of justice” (Obama, 2010a, p. 35). Obama also makes it clear he views such values as foundational principles and strongly repudiates relativists who might contend such values are cultural constructions of the West: “in some cultures, these values are being equated with the ugly face of modernity and are seen to encroach upon cherished identities” (p. 35). Furthermore, the pursuit of these values is the motivating principle for American action at home and abroad and that no security can be found if the world abandons them in favor of relativism: “In all that we do, we will advocate for and advance the basic rights upon which our Nation was founded... and we reject the notion that lasting security and prosperity can be found by turning away from universal rights” (p. ii).

While the key term of “rights” is expressed as a universal principle, “responsibility” is a contingent term, determined by context and the relative strengths of a government or

organization. According to NSS 2010, agents of influence (whether they are states, institutions or otherwise) are bound by a responsibility to promote the capacity to fulfill these universal rights. However, responsibility under the document's terms is not equivalent to a categorical duty or universal obligation imposed on all states equally. Instead, responsibility is determined according to both function and context. Functionally, those states which are capable of promoting a just world have a greater burden to bear; Obama (2010a) seeks "a division of labor" based on "effectiveness, competency, and long-term reliability" (p. 46). Contextually, responsibility is determined by the nature of the problem and shifts in capabilities. Obama (2010a) subtly recasts the traditional concept of "balance of power" into one that encompasses responsibility: "To solve problems, we will pursue modes of cooperation that reflect evolving distributions of *power and responsibility*" (p. 46, emphasis added). Although the exact parameters over which state has what responsibility is pegged to changes in a fluid landscape, there is one actor that stands apart: the United States.

Obama directly appeals to the myth of American exceptionalism to warrant special responsibility for the United States. Among all international actors, the United States alone has a mission to lead. This is a mission that Obama (2010a) celebrates: "Furthermore, we embrace America's unique responsibility to promote international security—a responsibility that flows from our commitments to allies, our leading role in supporting a just and sustainable international order, and our unmatched military capabilities" (p. 17). The text makes it clear that it is the full panoply of American power and influence, not just military might, that makes it the indispensable nation:

Our national security depends upon America's ability to leverage our unique national attributes, just as global security depends upon strong and responsible

American leadership. That includes our military might, economic competitiveness, moral leadership, global engagement, and efforts to shape an international system that serves the mutual interests of nations and peoples.

(Obama, 2010a, p. 7)

The ultimate source of all these advantages is the exceptional moral characteristics of the American people and the genius of the founding fathers: “We would not have achieved our position of leadership in the world without the extraordinary strength of our founding documents and the capability and courage of generations of Americans who gave life to those values...”

(Obama, 2010a, p. 52). Moreover, the United States has remained exceptional and “retains the strengths that have enabled our leadership for many decades,” despite the massive changes that have occurred because of globalization (p. 9). Clearly, NSS 2010 embraces central tenets of American exceptionalism.

If the analysis were to end here, it might be easy to conclude that Obama and Bush are motivated by a similar set of principles and only disagree on the specific mix of threats that populate the world. However, the concepts of “rights” and “responsibilities” cannot be understood apart from the general flux of the global scene. In the next section, I argue that the overall set of symbolic terms in NSS 2010 reconfigures the nature of universal rights and the limits of American leadership in ways that fundamentally redefine the content of the exceptionalist myth from that found in the Bush administration documents.

Recasting American Exceptionalism

A surface-level reading suggests substantial continuity between Obama and Bush’s assumptions about American exceptionalism. Both agree that the United States has a unique obligation to be a world leader and that core values of individualism must be protected both at

home and abroad. However, a full reading of NSS 2010 reveals that there are degrees of contingency and cosmopolitanism within the universal values of individualism and America's claim to exceptionalism. Obama thus reconfigures the United States' mission in the world. NSS 2010 moves the United States from being morally *apart* from the world (with an unqualified license to remake the world in its image) into a country that is *a part* of the world (with an unqualified obligation to help solve global problems).

Beginning with "rights," some may be tempted to conclude that Bush and Obama's outlook on values echo the same neoconservative tradition (Homolar-Riechmann, 2009). However, NSS 2010 adds a unique cosmopolitan tint to the concept of universal values. Obama's specific casting of individualist values is attuned to cultural differences. He notes that "different cultures and traditions give life to these values in distinct ways" (Obama, 2010a, p. 36). Thus, "America believes that democracy and individual empowerment need not come at the expense of cherished identities" (p. ii). Obama (2010a) goes even further than simply admitting that "difference" in how values are practiced exists; he argues that diversity and difference in experience are a foundation of American strength:

The United States has benefited throughout our history when we have drawn strength from our diversity... America stands as an example of how people from different backgrounds can be united through their commitment to shared values.
(p. 37)

It is the "openness and moral imagination" of American society that allows individuals from different cultures to discover these shared values (Obama, 2010a, p. 51). Thus, Obama gives a cosmopolitan cast to values that are normally silent on differences in culture or experience.

Obama also articulates “responsibility” as a contingent term subject to circumstance and context. By doing so, he subtly transforms the very meaning of American exceptionalism. On the one hand, NSS 2010 partially echoes Bush’s understanding of the world by highlighting 9/11 as a transformational moment; “the dark side of this globalized world came to the forefront for the American people on September 11, 2001” (Obama, 2010a, p. 1). Globalization has also restructured economic and political structures so that “the lives of our citizens— their safety and prosperity—are more bound than ever to events beyond our borders” (p. 7). However, NSS 2010 conjoins opportunity with danger. The inherent flux of the international system is not to be feared but taken advantage of: “the very fluidity within the international system that breeds new challenges must be approached as an opportunity to forge new international cooperation... We must seize on the opportunities afforded by the world’s interconnection, while responding effectively and comprehensively to its dangers” (Obama, 2010a, p. 9). The parallel structure and antithesis rhetorically underscore globalization’s dialectic of opportunity and danger. Effective leadership will require a re-balancing of priorities to align with this truth.

The dialectic between opportunity and danger is not something historically unique to the present moment, however. Obama believes that it characterizes America’s relationship with the world. While the global landscape is constantly in flux, America’s history is a story of constant adaptation to productively shape those changes:

In the past, the United States has thrived when both our nation and our national security policy have adapted to shape change instead of being shaped by it...[As] the industrial revolution took hold, America transformed our economy and our role in the world. When the world was confronted by fascism, America prepared itself to win a war and to shape the peace that followed. When the United States

encountered an ideological, economic, and military threat from communism, we shaped our practices and institutions at home—and policies abroad—to meet this challenge. (Obama, 2010a, p. 9)

After recounting these historical episodes of rising to shape change, Obama concludes with a call for the United States to once again assume the role of leadership to harness the opportunities of globalization while proactively managing its unique threats. Present circumstances converge to define *both* the challenges America presently faces and the essence of American exceptionalism:

In 2010, America is hardened by wars, and inspired by the servicemen and women who fight them. We are disciplined by a devastating economic crisis, and determined to see that its legacy is a new foundation for prosperity; and we are bound by a creed that has guided us at home, and served as a beacon to the world. *America's greatness is not assured*—each generation's place in history is *a question unanswered*. (Obama, 2010a, p. iii, emphasis added)

The dialectic of opportunity and danger, again expressed in parallel antithesis, redefines America's greatness as provisional and contingent. This stands in sharp contrast to other expressions of the myth that are triumphalist in tone, asserting American greatness as an unfettered license for international action (Zarefsky, 2007, pp. 169-170).

Obama's (2010a) version of exceptionalism necessitates global leadership for two reasons. First, the United States is uniquely suited to lead in a globalized world because America *itself* is built on the ethic of globalization; it is a nation “whose people trace their roots to every country on the face of the Earth” and its “institutions are designed to prepare individuals to succeed in a competitive world” (p. ii). Thus, exceptionalism and a leadership role for the United States is warranted; “no nation should be better positioned to lead in an era of globalization than

America” (Obama, 2010a, p. ii). Obama (2010a) goes so far as to claim globalization as America’s own phenomenon; “globalization is in part a product of American leadership and the ingenuity of the American people. We are uniquely suited to seize its promise” (p. 6).

In addition to the globalized nature of the American people, Obama (2010a) argues that the core of American exceptionalism comes from our foundational focus on seeking a more perfect union: “America’s influence comes not from perfection, but from our striving to overcome our imperfections. The constant struggle to perfect our union is what makes the American story inspiring” (p. 10). If America’s license to lead was entirely conditional in Obama’s view, the excesses of the previous 8 years were surely sufficient to suspend it. One might expect his “strategy of renewal” to advocate retrenchment and isolation from global affairs. However, by locating American exceptionalism within the drive to overcome imperfection, Obama is able to reconcile the excesses the of the Bush administration with a new call to lead:

Yet over the years, some methods employed in pursuit of our security have compromised our fidelity to the values that we promote, and our leadership on their behalf...That is why we will lead on behalf of our values by living them. Our struggle to stay true to our values and Constitution has always been a lodestar, both to the American people and to those who share our aspiration for human dignity. (Obama, 2010a, p. 10)

By grounding an approach to national security in the values of the American people, he is confident that renewed American leadership “can build a world of greater peace, prosperity, and human dignity” (Obama, 2010a, p. 6). Thus, Obama reinforces the central premise that American leadership is indispensable to global peace and prosperity.

Ultimately, Obama's world-view gives the principles of individual freedom a cosmopolitan tint and makes the responsibility to protect those values a blend of circumstance, history, and the ability to adapt to change. This redefines the essential relationship between the United States and the rest of world that is at the heart of the mythos of American exceptionalism. Far from being separate from global affairs (either geographically or morally), NSS 2010 grounds the United States "in the world;" its prosperity and strength are products of the world's cultures and peoples coming together and cooperatively building a better future. While the United States is far from perfect and holds no monopoly on virtue, Obama holds that a renewal in leadership is the best chance for achieving a just and sustainable international order.

Foreign Policy Implications

Viewed holistically, NSS 2010 presents a world-view that significantly departs from the Bush administration documents. It does so even while retaining some of the same assumptions of Bush's documents. By reconfiguring the underlying myth of exceptionalism, Obama appeals to the universality of individual freedom very much like Bush did, while dramatically altering the role the United States plays in the world. This is only half of the picture, however. It is one thing to establish a difference in outlook and entirely another to prove a difference in policies. In this section, I argue that Obama diverges from Bush in policy content as well as outlook.

Specifically, the rhetorical world-view of NSS 2010 offers a corrective to the two most controversial aspects of the "Bush Doctrine:" American unilateralism and the use of force.

NSS 2010 approaches the issue of multilateralism and international institutions differently than the Bush documents. NSS 2006, which supposedly reflected Bush's "multilateral turn," argues that institutions are outmoded and that "coalitions of the willing" are preferable (Bush, 2006a, p. 48). Obama argues that such an ad hoc approach is unsustainable. Instead, the

United States has done best when it has pursued its “interests within multilateral forums like the United Nations—not outside of them” (Obama, 2010a, p. 12). In his view, such institutions are an “indispensable vehicle for pooling international resources and enforcing international norms” (p. 12). Far from constraining American power, Obama (2010a) unequivocally states that “the sum of our actions is *always greater* than if we act alone” (p. 41, emphasis added). Moreover, multilateral institutions are a crucial site for forging common interests; cooperation creates shared values and a common history between states. Cooperation is thus valuable “in its own right” because “without such an international order, the forces of instability and disorder will undermine global security. And ...challenges that recognize no borders...will persist and potentially spread” (Obama, 2010a, p. 40).

The terminology of “responsibility” also reveals a much different attitude towards multilateral cooperation than in the Bush administration, despite both administrations criticizing international institutions for lacking relevance and credibility. First, Obama believes that international institutions are outmoded in circumstance, not principle. “Forged in the wake of World War II,” the existing order is “buckling under the weight of new threats, making us less able to seize new opportunities” (Obama, 2010a, p. 40). Institutions are no longer calibrated to the challenges of the day and need to be revitalized to “reflect evolving distributions of power and responsibility” (p. 46). There are also some problems that are simply beyond the reach of an institutional setting, requiring “sustained outreach to foreign governments, political leaderships, and other critical constituencies” outside of institutional contexts at times (p. 41).

Second, if the international order lacks effective enforcement, the solution is to give it sufficient teeth to enforce violations of global norms. NSS 2010 thus argues for reforms to the international order that are capable of punishing those states willing to flaunt international

norms. Such states must “be denied the incentives that come with greater integration and collaboration with the international community” (Obama, 2010a, p. 40). Obama acknowledges that institutions and multilateral cooperation are not a cure-all because threats and problems are permanent features of human life. However, comprehensive engagement with institutions, allies, emerging centers of power and even rogue states is necessary: “if we recognize these challenges, embrace America’s responsibility to confront them with its partners, and forge new cooperative approaches to get others to join us...then the international order of a globalized age can better advance...the common interests of nations and peoples everywhere” (Obama, 2010a, p. 13). Obama (2010a) notes that achieving a perfect balance of “rights and responsibilities will remain elusive” and “force will sometimes be necessary to confront threats” (p. 13). However, by grounding American foreign policy in engagement with others around the globe, the world can be made better, even if imperfect.

While both Obama and Bush argue that American action must sometimes step outside of formal institutions, the attitude conveyed in NSS 2010 is very different from the 2 NSSs produced during the Bush administration. Bush (2006a) believed that American action alone would be sufficient to create a “follow-on international response” and that “the United States *must* lead the effort to reform existing institutions and create new ones” (p. 48). Underpinning both assertions is the assumption that American leadership both can and should construct an international order in its image. Although Obama (2010a) still believes the United States *should* lead, he believes there are clear limits to what can be accomplished unilaterally; “no one nation—no matter how powerful—can meet global challenges alone” (p. 1). Because institutions and cooperative arrangements are only effective if they reflect the challenges of the day, the primary role for the United States is to pursue a “broader and more inclusive engagement” with

rising centers of power and influence (Obama, 2010a, p. 33). This in turn encourages institutional buy-in and greater “responsibility” among different countries. Obama (2010a) sees the dangers of a crumbling international order as an opportunity; “it would be destructive to...global security if the United States used the...shortcomings of the international system as a reason to walk away from it. Instead, we must focus American engagement on strengthening international institutions and galvanizing...collective action” (p. 3). Ultimately, the Obama administration envisions cooperative engagement as a means to “broaden the circle of responsibility” by bringing other actors to the table, listening to their perspective, and transforming them into responsible stake-holders (Ackerman, 2010b, para. 7). In sum, the NSS documents of Bush and Obama both recognized the current limitations of international institutions yet drew substantially different conclusions. For Obama, the problems of the status quo demanded the United States reinvest in the international order, not walk away from it in the hopes that the world would follow.

The overall terms of NSS 2010 also approach the use of military force differently than the Bush administration. It is true that Obama (2010a) acknowledges that violence may be unavoidable and that “the United States must reserve the right to act unilaterally if necessary to defend our nation and our interests” (p. 22). Additionally, NSS 2010’s discussion of when the use of force is appropriate is similar to NSS 2002 and NSS 2006. Should force become necessary, Obama (2010a) argues that he will attempt to work with the U.N. and NATO, “exhaust other options before war whenever we can, and carefully weigh the costs and risks of action against the costs and risks of inaction” (p. 22). Should war still result, he will “adhere to standards that govern the use of force” and outline clear objectives (p. 22). On the surface, these conditions strongly resemble the standards Bush outlined in 2002 and reiterated in 2006;

anticipatory self-defense is a right states possess but unilateral strikes often impose their own costs and the decision to use force should thoroughly consider the costs and benefits of action and inaction (Bush, 2002b, pp. 15-16; Bush, 2006a, p. 23). However, the controversial aspect of the “Bush Doctrine” was not the asserted right to preemptive self-defense or unilateral force; such a concept is established under international law and has been claimed by every president (Daalder, 2002).

What separates Obama from Bush on the use of force is the divergence in their world-view; the competing myths of American exceptionalism that underwrite their policies implicate how each approaches military action. The triumphalist core of the Bush administration’s world-view was deeply flawed and failed to balance risk and realism, as I argued in chapter 3. By grossly overvaluing the strengths of American power and systematically underestimating its limits, the Bush doctrine transformed the principles of democracy promotion into an all-out symbolic war against any vestige of tyranny.

The overall world-view of Obama imposes constraints on the use of military action. An international landscape that is constantly in flux modifies the risk calculus that is used to determine the appropriateness and scope of force. While the United States must focus on immediate threats and challenges, “our national strategy must take a longer view” that seeks to “better shape the outcomes that are most fundamental to our people in the 21st century” (Obama, 2010a, p. 7). At the same time, globalization has created interconnections that have changed the face of security threats while subjecting any American response to public scrutiny throughout the world: “in a world of greater interconnection—a world in which our prosperity is inextricably linked to global prosperity, our security can be directly challenged by developments across an ocean, and our actions are scrutinized as never before” (Obama, 2010a, p. 2). A successful

strategy in Obama's view requires a calculus that can effectively address the immediate threat without sacrificing the positive values that make American leadership appealing to publics around the world. Obama (2010a) argues that "as we fight the wars *in front of us*, we must see the horizon beyond them—a world in which America is stronger, more secure, and is able to overcome our challenges while appealing to the aspirations of people around the world" (p. i, emphasis added). As a result, any decision to use force must also account for how it will be perceived by foreign audiences around the globe. While Obama (2010a) recognizes that Al Qaeda is a serious threat, military solutions can easily become self-defeating: "overreacting in a way that creates fissures between America and certain regions or religions will undercut our leadership and make us less safe" (p. 22). Additionally, Obama's articulation of responsibility requires that the United States seriously pursue alternatives to military force. Even if the United States possesses the military capabilities to defeat any threat, "long-term security will not come from our ability to instill fear in other peoples, but through our capacity to speak to their hopes" (Obama, 2010a, pp. ii-iii). This calls for a rebalancing of priorities and a stronger focus on domestic renewal and global cooperation.

Conclusion & Implications

NSS 2010 is a crucial site for understanding the scope of President Obama's foreign policy strategy. Unfortunately, the dominant interpretation that has emerged tells us more about the troubled legacy of the "Bush Doctrine" than the qualities of Obama's approach. There are three major implications for this analysis: it explains why many experts see continuity between Bush and Obama while suggesting several limits to that interpretation; it underscores the importance of analyzing rhetoric in order to study policy choices; and it clarifies the evolving debate among rhetoricians about Obama's core world-view.

The missteps of Bush's foreign policy, the dismal experience of the Iraq war, the 2009 economic recession and a host of international crises produced a climate of extreme uncertainty about Obama's vision for American leadership. Zarefsky (2014) has argued that Obama faced the "contextual burden" of advancing a foreign policy vision that could come to grips with the shortcomings of Bush's version of American exceptionalism (pp. 167-168). The flipside of that "contextual burden" seems to have been that an influential audience of experts found the answers for their uncertainty in NSS 2010. For better or worse, the document was looked at, in Drezner's (2011) words, to "fill the vacuum of interpretation" (para. 5).

This analysis underscores an important limit to any of these experts' assumptions. Concluding that two presidents are identical after finding similar themes or individual policy arguments present in their guidance documents is an unsophisticated means of evaluating foreign policy. As I argued in chapter 1, all presidencies could be considered the same so long as American policy capabilities remain constant. Moreover, many of the variables that go into a strategic calculus (geography, relative distribution of power, enduring threats) are relatively constant. Yet presidencies respond to similar challenges differently, in ways not reducible to party affiliation or personality. Approaching a document like the NSS as if it were an inventory of goals and tools undermines public policy judgments because it does not shed light on the priorities or risk analysis in play at any particular moment. Such a narrow focus on capabilities undercuts the quality of public argument about competing policy perspectives by obscuring the role that the underlying terministic screen of a presidency plays in policy selection. Therefore, a rhetorical lens can help clarify the differences between Obama and Bush by illuminating the relationship between their rhetorical motives and likely policy choices. This in turn can facilitate clearer decision-making about what form American leadership should take in the 21st century.

This analysis of NSS 2010 also contributes to rhetoricians' understanding of Obama more broadly. Contrary to those rhetorical scholars cited in chapter 1, I contend that Obama's approach to foreign policy is motivated by a mythos of American exceptionalism, albeit one that is different than Bush's in both tenor and substance. First, this analysis shows that this mythos is more robust than the "democratic exceptionalism" that Ivie and Giner (2009a, pp. 361-362), and Edwards (2014) identify. Obama (2010a) is not shy about drawing a strong contrast between American values and those who disagree with his foundational principles; he reiterates the promise from his first inaugural that he "will not apologize for our way of life" (p. 17) and will always "[speak] out for universal rights" (p. 36). But he is open to critical self-reflection and correction; "that is why acknowledging our past shortcomings—and highlighting our efforts to remedy them—is a means of promoting our values" (p. 36). Second, it challenges Ivie and Giner's (2009a) claim that Obama's foreign policy is held in tense balance between its two terms: "Exceptionalism tugs on the national impulse to supremacy, ascendancy, and dominion. Democracy pushes in the opposite direction to promote equality and solidarity" (p. 371). What makes America exceptional is not its "supremacy," but rather its will to gradually overcome its imperfections and the struggle to remain true to the American promise.

In this chapter, I have shown that Obama's world-view (and thus his strategic approach) is a complex blend of principles that are influenced by a keen contextual awareness of the challenges and threats of a globalized world. Thus, Obama's foreign policy simultaneously reflects his rootedness in American political culture and his multicultural social experience. Far from being a pragmatist "all the way down," Obama is strongly anchored to both traditional principles of American political culture (promoting individual freedom, faith in constitutional

rule of law, and belief in American exceptionalism) and several other principles unique to Obama (promoting cosmopolitan shared interests, a belief in diversity as a source of strength).

Chapter 5: An Axis of One: The Problem of Evil in Bush's Iran Strategy.

As I have demonstrated in the previous two chapters, there are important differences between the world-views espoused in NSSs 2002, 2006, and 2010. Those differences also logically imply different policy outcomes in American foreign policy. However, it would be much too hasty to conclude that a difference in world-view necessarily implies an empirical difference in the conduct of foreign policy. After all, many of the political scientists and IR experts cited in the first chapter could be correct even if the symbolic terrain of each NSS document varies; it remains to be seen whether differences between NSSs translate into differences in policy performance. This is a significant theoretical puzzle: what is the relationship between the parameters of strategy and symbolic action in NSS documents, a president's public rhetoric and diplomacy, and empirical policy performance? In the next two chapters, I address this question through extended case studies of Bush (chapter 5) and Obama's (chapter 6) treatment of the Iranian nuclear program. Thus, I depart from the internal textual focus of the first three chapters. Tacking back and forth between what Bush and Obama's NSS documents offer as Iran policy, their public rhetoric on Iran, and the historic policy record can reveal the relationship, boundaries, and limits between rhetoric, public strategy formation, and policy performance on the ground.

George W. Bush's foreign policy legacy is incredibly polarizing. The interpretive split between the praise of NSS 2006 and the condemnation of NSS 2002 that I explored in chapter 3 is reflected in a host of judgments from scholars, experts and journalists who have sought to characterize the Bush administration's legacy. Many have argued for a "tale of two administrations"; the first term was unilateralist and emphasized military force while the second was multilateral and pursued diplomacy (Brose, 2009; Crook; 2010; LaFranchi, 2009; Kreps,

2009; Radson, 2010; Wroe & Herbert, 2009). Nowhere was this shift more evident than with policy towards Iran. In the first term, Bush (2002a) famously branded Iran as a member of the “axis of evil” (para. 20) and their regime seemed a likely target for the controversial strategy of preemption established in NSS 2002. Later, “in its dealings on... Iran... the Bush administration was “multilateral to a fault” in its second term” (Kreps, 2009, p. 632, quotations in original).

This “tale of two administrations” is both appealing and confusing. It is appealing because it makes sense in light of Bush’s cabinet reshuffling at the start of the second term (Crist, 2012; Sanger, 2009). On Iran specifically, the Bush administration undeniably pursued multilateral diplomatic efforts such as supporting Britain, France, and Germany’s (EU-3) diplomatic efforts. After those talks failed in 2005, the Bush administration helped lead an effort to refer Iran to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) which resulted in several successful UNSC resolutions and sanctions. However, the thesis is strange in light of the findings in chapter 3. Bush also declared Iran an “enemy of civilization” throughout the second term (Bush, 2006, para. 44) and whether the administration allowed diplomacy to take its full course in either the EU-3 or UNSC efforts is disputed (El Baradei, 2011). Taken together, these facts do not add up to a complete turnaround between the first and second terms.

The answer to this confusing situation lies in a close reading that traces the development of the Bush administration’s policies on Iran at three different levels: Bush’s public rhetoric, the guiding documents of NSS 2002 and 2006, and the record of the administration’s diplomatic interactions with Iran throughout both terms. Such a reading confirms that there were significant changes in the administration’s thinking about the Iranian nuclear issue that pushed the administration in the direction of diplomacy with Iran. In this chapter I argue that, despite those changes, the key principle of evil that Bush used to frame the War on Terrorism immediately

after 9/11 was only transformed in the second term, never abolished. By defining the Iranian regime as a force of evil very early in the first term (and prior to the formation of any real Iran policy), Bush established a frame that severely curtailed his options on Iran, destroyed several windows of opportunity to improve relations, and made a future solution to Iran's nuclear program more difficult to achieve.

There are several implications for this analysis. First, the stand-off between the United States and Iran persists to this day. Over 30 years of mutual ignorance and hostility has created a potentially explosive situation. In such an environment, "the threat of miscalculation is great and the military consequences can be grave" (Crist, 2012, p. 5). A clearer picture of how Iran responded to the Bush administration's various faces can reveal policy solutions and illuminate constraints and opportunities generated by Bush's legacy. This is even more crucial given the emerging consensus that President Obama is pursuing roughly the same foreign policies as Bush (as chapter 4 indicated). Second, it highlights the crucial role that presidential rhetoric plays in shaping outcomes, *especially* when dealing with isolated regimes such as Iran. This chapter thus challenges the view that speeches and public documents like the NSS play no role in affecting foreign policy outcomes. Finally, tracking the evolution of the Bush administration's Iran policy over the two terms clarifies the dominant thesis that Bush radically altered his foreign policy halfway through his presidency. While there were significant changes to his cabinet and Bush's thinking that pushed him in different directions in the second term, his prior rhetorical commitments proved to be quite durable.

I reach this conclusion in four sections. First, I demonstrate that existing research on Bush's foreign policy rhetoric (while extensive) has ignored both the second term of his administration and his rhetoric towards Iran. I then argue that Bush's approach to Iran's nuclear

program over both terms functions as a “representative anecdote” for understanding the relationship between the first and second term’s approach to foreign policy. In the next two sections, I address the relationship between Bush’s strategy documents, major public addresses, and the historical policy record; section two covers NSS 2002 and the first term while section three addresses the second term and NSS 2006. Finally, I conclude with several implications.

Beyond Iraq: Iran as the Representative Anecdote

Bush’s foreign policy is most remembered for the first term, notably the beginning of the War on Terrorism and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. While these early events have justly received ample attention from rhetorical scholars, there are two gaps in the literature. First, the rhetoric of Bush’s second term has been largely ignored. Second, what research does exist has focused almost exclusively on the Iraq war. As a result, the research that studies Bush’s rhetoric and policies towards Iran is very small and somewhat limited. In this section, I review the existing literature and highlight the need for critical attention on how Bush’s strategy towards Iran evolved throughout his 8 years. Drawing on Burke, I argue that a close reading of Bush’s rhetoric, strategy documents, and the historical policy record can function as a “representative anecdote” for understanding both Bush’s Iran strategy and the nature of his presidency across both terms.

Current rhetorical research on Bush’s foreign policy is extensive, yet suffers from a lack of breadth. As I demonstrated in chapter 1, rhetorical studies of Bush have clustered around the themes of evil, the Iraq war, and NSS 2002. The existing literature specific to Bush’s Iran strategy is paltry in comparison. There are only a handful of articles and one book dedicated to Bush and Iran. Richiardi (2008), Umansky (2008), and Hodges (2008) all explore the relationship between the administration and the media on Iran’s nuclear program or their proxy

involvement in the Iraq war. Stokes (2010) performs a rhetorical criticism of a public letter Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sent to Bush in 2006, arguing for a cross-cultural rhetoric to explore diplomatic solutions with Iran. Jones (2011) is the only person who has attempted to take a comprehensive look at Bush's "rhetorical construction of Iran as a nuclear threat" throughout his two terms (p. 1). The present chapter may thus have value simply because it contributes a new perspective on Bush's Iran policies and rhetoric.

There are also important contextual limits to the existing research on Iran within the field of rhetoric. Each publication, with the exception of Stokes, was either published or prepared during the final years of Bush's tenure and was shaped by one major event: the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), which concluded that Iran had suspended its nuclear weaponization programs back in 2003. While I discuss the full implications of NIE 2007 later, a popular interpretation of the document at the time was that it proved Bush was lying about Iran's nuclear program. This premise is foundational to the arguments of Richiardi (2008, p. 36), Umansky (2008, p. 26), and Jones (2011, p. 18). Hodges' (2008) research focuses on how the Bush administration rhetorically shaped the allegations that Iran was supplying advanced explosives to insurgent groups in Iraq. While it does not address the NIE, the article does share the premise that the Bush administration was distorting Iran's involvement to the press in late 2007.

A developed case study of Bush's rhetoric, strategy, and historical policy rhetoric can help close the gap in the field's knowledge and illuminate the full implications of Bush's foreign policy legacy. Leaving the rhetorical study of Bush at the level of the Iraq war is unsatisfactory. Although understanding how such a "mistake of monumental proportions" came to pass is important (Simons, 2007, p. 177), a shift to Bush's approach with Iran is long overdue. First, Bush's policy on Iran can function as a "representative anecdote" for understanding the

constraints that *both* the rhetoric of evil and the Iraq invasion imposed (and continue to impose) on American efforts to deal with hostile or intransigent regimes (Burke, 1969, p. 59). As Burke (1969) argues, any critical study should possess enough complexity and “scope” to be representative while maintaining enough “simplicity” to draw useful lessons from (p. 60). The Iranian problem sits squarely at the center of the key themes that characterized Bush’s rhetoric and policies after 9/11, such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, democracy promotion, and Middle East strategy.

Second, the case study highlights what can happen when the rhetoric of evil *does not* culminate in violence. Bush never referred to the “axis of evil” after 2002 and considerable evidence suggests a military invasion was never seriously considered by Bush himself (Crist, 2012; Sanger, 2009). However, the initial terms (such as evil) that are posited in a world-view or strategy are often remarkably durable. Once the initial term is posited, “many implications ‘necessarily’ follow” (Burke, 1966, p. 46, quotations in original). Looking at how discourses of evil impacted relations with Iran can reveal how such rhetoric implicates the pursuit of *diplomacy* in addition to the field’s established focus on war. Understanding Bush’s approach to Iran requires tracing the evolution of rhetoric, strategy, and policy from the initial “axis of evil” speech through his last year in office even though Bush abandoned the phrase early on.

The Axis of Evil

The iconic phrase of Bush’s first term, “axis of evil,” was applied (and just as quickly abandoned) to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea in the 2002 State of the Union Address. While the implications this label had for American policy towards Iraq are now well known, it is much less clear why the other two countries were ever included in the first place. In this section, I sketch

the trajectory of the Bush administration's Iran foreign policy through Bush's public rhetoric, NSS 2002, and the diplomatic record with Iran during the first term.

"9/11 changed everything." Although this commonplace can seem trite, it is surprisingly salient in the case of the Bush administration's foreign policy. After a divisive election that centered on domestic matters, the "foreign policy agenda of the administration... was deliberately modest" (Zelikow, 2011, p. 96). As a foreign policy novice, Bush surrounded himself with several experienced hands including Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, and Condoleezza Rice. Together these three represented decades of experience in the military, Department of Defense, and State department and were heralded by many as the "realist dream team" (Crist, 2012, p. 416). Although Cheney is now remembered for very hawkish views, his selection as Vice President was initially taken as an indication that Bush would pursue the "least adventurous and least sensational course possible" in foreign policy (Zelikow, 2011, p. 98). Furthermore, the neoconservatives in the administration who are most closely associated with the decision to invade Iraq were serving in second and third order positions (Seliktar, 2012).

The administration's early strategy on Iran (when it was not being placed on the back-burner) was rather divided. The promising "dialogue of civilizations" that had been occurring between President Clinton and Iranian President Mohammad Khatami ground to a halt due to disagreements within the new administration. Powell and Richard Haass in the state department pushed for continuing engagement and relaxing existing sanctions (Crist, 2012; Seliktar, 2012), but a consensus could not be forged. Although John Bolton lobbied for an aggressive strategy, Iran was viewed as weak and internally divided by most (Crist, 2012). Before a full strategy could be generated, the intra-administration debate on Iran came to an end with the 9/11 attacks.

It is difficult to overstate the impact 9/11 had on Bush's divided and unfocused foreign policy team. The attacks and the ensuing cacophony of threats and alarms created a terrifying environment of fear where the Bush administration struggled to gain a clear view of the events and determine if and when another attack was coming. "Cold War doomsday scenarios... now seemed real" (Zelikow, 2011, p. 104). This toxic atmosphere hardened the outlook of many conservative hawks and gave more credence to neoconservative voices (Baker, 2013). In the aftermath of 9/11, neoconservatives such as Paul Wolfowitz, Doug Feith, and Richard Perle pushed for military action against a number of targets; Wolfowitz imagined a global strike campaign that began with Iraq; "the U.S. military would defeat one, withdraw quickly... and then swiftly move to attack the next country" (Crist, 2012, p. 426). Although Bush rejected attacking Iraq in favor of Afghanistan, "Wolfowitz had laid down the marker for what would follow" (Crist, 2012, p. 426). Bush's War on Terror began early in October of 2001 and found startling success with the rapid overthrow of the Taliban regime. The relative ease of the initial invasion fostered a dangerous level of optimism within Bush:

In late 2001, and for more than a year after that, Afghanistan appeared to be a remarkable success... It was quite a combination, the wartime atmosphere of decisiveness and initial successes against such an evanescent and potentially catastrophic threat. It was a potent compound of anxiety mixed with a measure of growing hubris. A stimulant to action, the atmosphere also loosened inhibitions about experiments with new ideas. Bush saw the war as a historic, even a providential, calling. He had come to office to tackle big ideas, not to play "small ball." (Zelikow, 2011, pp. 106-107, quotations in original).

Thus, the administration's post-9/11 outlook began to crystallize in late 2001; policy congealed "as ideology merged with power politics" and Bush embraced Wolfowitz's vision; "he viewed the coming war against terrorism with a Wilsonian grandeur" (Crist, 2012, p. 427). As 2001 came to a close, Bush set about introducing this new war in his 2002 State of the Union address.

On January 29, 2002, President Bush publicly laid out the framework for his global war on terrorism to the nation. The defining framework would be a battle of good versus evil. The inescapable lesson of the 9/11 attacks was that evil exists: "We've come to know truths that we will never question: evil is real, and it must be opposed" (Bush, 2002a, para. 61). The enemy embraced "tyranny and death as a cause and a creed," while America and its allies "choose freedom and the dignity of every life" (Bush, 2002a, para. 63). Although this Manichean dualism between good and evil is a familiar theme of Bush's war rhetoric, the speech helps to explain the thinking that shaped NSS 2002 and the subsequent approach to Iran for the next six years. Bush articulated two distinct dimensions to the war on terrorism:

Our nation will continue to be steadfast and patient and persistent in the pursuit of two great objectives. First, we will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And, second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world. (Bush, 2002a, para. 12)

Both of these threats were imminent dangers. Individual terrorist cells were pervasive and could strike at any time; "thousands of dangerous killers... are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning" (Bush, 2002a, para. 13). Similarly, the regimes of Iran, North Korea, and Iraq "pose a grave and growing danger;" they could use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to attack or blackmail America and its allies or provide the

weapons to terrorists (Bush, 2002a, para. 20). Bush (2002a) argued that “time is not on our side” and that he would “not wait on events while dangers gather” (para. 22).

Within the overall terms of the speech, Iran seemed to be a poor fit. Three aspects in particular stick out. First, remarkably little was said about Iran (as well as North Korea). A single sentence describes the policy towards the entire country: “Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom” (Bush, 2002a, para. 18). Instead, Bush offered far more detail and evidence about Iraq. Second, Bush conceived of his strategy strictly in military terms; his budget targeted “three great goals for America: We will win this war; we'll protect our homeland and we will revive our economy” (Bush, 2002a, para. 25). Thus, the specific policy tools he laid out were limited to offensive and defensive elements of war-fighting and prevention, including “the largest increase in defense spending in two decades” (Bush, 2002a, para. 28). However, Iran was not considered a good fit for military action within the administration at the time. According to Feith “the United States had not tried to pressure the Iranians in a meaningful way using economic and political tools. Military force *was not a serious alternative* in 2001 and 2002” (Crist, 2012, p. 426, emphasis added). Third, Bush (2002a) assumed that the international balance of power had congealed around a common interest of eliminating terrorism and the “axis” regimes: “in this moment of opportunity, a common danger is erasing old rivalries. America is working with Russia and China and India, in ways we have never before, to achieve peace and prosperity” (para. 60). While Iraq had been subject to crippling sanctions, a no-fly zone, and multiple UNSC resolutions throughout the 90's, Iran had extensive commercial and political ties with Russia, China, and the European Union. Viewed from the perspective of Iraq, these three aspects suggest

that the real purpose of Bush's speech was to begin the public push for invading Iraq. So how did Iran come to be included as an "axis" member in a war strategy meant for Iraq?

The decision to use the phrase "axis of evil" and to subsequently include Iran within it may be the "perfect" example of rhetoric's relationship to policy-making, at least in the Burkean sense of the word (Burke, 1966, p. 17). In late December of 2001, Bush's chief speech writer Michael Gerson approached David Frum and asked "Can you sum up in a sentence or two our best case for going after Iraq?" (Borger, 2003, para. 9) After Frum proposed "axis of hatred," he and Gerson finally settled on "axis of evil" because it sounded "more 'theological'" (Borger, 2003, para. 12, quotes in original). Frum thought the phrase was "terrific" because "it was the sort of language President Bush used" (Borger, 2003, para. 13). As Crist (2012) argues:

It had originally been intended to be a few lines warning of the danger of Saddam Hussein, but Frum liked the term "axis" as a throwback to the great crusade of the Second World War. North Korea and Iran were *more of an afterthought*, as they were both state sponsors of terrorism and you could not have an axis of just one country. (p. 441, emphasis added)

The speech was eventually vetted by administration officials, but it is unclear whether the line was included in some of the earlier drafts (Sanger, 2009). Among senior staff, the only person who objected to the language was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Richard Meyers; however, "the president liked it...so the line stayed" (Crist, 2012, p. 441).

Why did Bush sign off on the inclusion of Iran, even if he was drawn to the phrase? In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, had condemned the acts (BBC, 2001) and Iran's Shia regime was ideologically opposed to Al Qaeda's radical Sunni dogma. Furthermore, Iran and the United States had made significant diplomatic progress

by cooperating on the Afghanistan invasion and the formation of the new Afghani government (Dobbins, 2010). On January 3, 2002, a shipment of Iranian arms bound for the Gaza Strip aboard the ship *Karine A* was seized by the Israeli government. The incident convinced Bush that the Iranians were not serious about diplomacy, ultimately paving the way for their inclusion in the State of the Union speech (Seliktar, 2012; Crist, 2012; Sanger, 2009). Regardless of Iran's seriousness in its cooperation with Afghanistan, "Iran and Iraq were now inextricably linked to an overall Bush administration national security strategy which fixated on regional transformation (i.e., regime change) in the Middle East" (Ritter, 2006, p. xxi).

The fallout from including Iran in the "axis of evil" was rapid, but not decisive. Oppositional and moderate voices within Iranian government and society were significantly undermined while the conservatives gained power (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007). According to Iranian presidential advisor Hossein Mousavian, the "comments stunned everyone in the government" (Crist, 2012, p. 441). Prior to the speech, diplomatic engagement with Iran had been making important progress with the Iranians proposing to broaden diplomatic engagement beyond Afghanistan. Special envoy to Afghanistan and chief diplomat James Dobbins (2010) believed Iran's willingness to discuss "all of the issues that divided the two countries" was genuine (p. 155). However, the only response Iran received to the offer was the State of the Union speech; there was no private backchannel to respond to the offer (Dobbins, 2010). Even after being publicly rebuffed, President Khatami was still interested in expanding cooperation with the United States and was even "prepared to do so publicly" (Dobbins, 2010, p. 156). The Bush administration never responded. Instead, hardliners and neoconservatives within the administration pushed to transform the Geneva talks over Afghanistan into a forum for making ultimatums, believing that a hardline approach could spark a youth revolt and collapse the

regime (Crist, 2012). Meanwhile, efforts at formulating an Iran policy were hampered by internal division; Powell and Rice sought limited engagement with Iran while hardliners and neoconservatives favored regime change. The stalemate persisted throughout 2002, even after the public disclosure of Iran's nuclear program by dissident groups in August. As the "lead-up to invading Iraq consumed all the officials' energy," the Bush administration elected to revisit Iran after the Iraq invasion (Crist, 2012, p. 454). Thus, despite branding Iran as a regime of evil on the highest public stage, the Bush administration went through the first half of 2002 without a clear Iran policy.

The Bush administration published NSS 2002 in September 2002 and formally cemented the broad themes of the 2002 State of the Union into the country's official grand strategy. Prior to 9/11, Rice had created an initial draft of an NSS but the document was substantially revised after the attacks (Zelikow, 2011). Powell and Haass prepared a new draft but Rice "thought the Bush administration needed something bolder, something that would represent a more dramatic break with the ideas of the past" and tasked Phillip Zelikow with preparing what would become NSS 2002 (Mann, 2004, p. 316).

The drafting of NSS 2002 was guided by three factors, according to Zelikow (2011): a belief in the transformational impact of 9/11; confidence in American military prowess after the initial successes in Afghanistan; and Bush's hardening resolve to take action against Iraq. The final product established the controversial policy of preemption: "to forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively" (Bush, 2002b, p. 15). The document itself contained no mention of Iran, other than a brief reference to Iraq's use of chemical weapons against them during their 8 year war. However, the broader strategy established a set of policy coordinates that simultaneously conflated the danger of *all*

WMD with the devastating effects of nuclear war, undermined international standards of “imminence” and evidence of WMD activity, and dramatically underestimated the costs of military action (Goodnight, 2006). The document established a terminology that suggested the ultimate solution to the problem of evil—and by extension Iran—was to eventually crush the regimes identified with evil, through force or otherwise. As 2002 gave way to 2003 however, it was Iraq and not Iran that moved squarely into the cross-hairs.

By January 2003, the Bush administration’s effort at obtaining international approval for the invasion of Iraq was in full swing. In the State of the Union address, Bush (2003) reiterated the basic framework of the War on Terror, stating that “the gravest danger in the war on terror, the gravest danger facing America and the world, is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons” (para. 51). While he did not use the “axis of evil” phrase, Bush (2003) underscored the moral dimensions of the conflict:

This threat is new; America's duty is familiar. Throughout the 20th century, small groups of men seized control of great nations... In each case, the ambitions of Hitlerism, militarism, and communism were defeated by the will of free peoples, by the strength of great alliances, and by the might of the United States of America. (para. 52)

Only America’s moral qualities of “courage and compassion” in the present moment could help “confound the designs of evil men” (Bush, 2003, para. 35). In addressing Iran, North Korea, and Iraq, Bush argued that “different threats require different strategies” (Bush 2003, para. 56). However, no policy for Iran was even hinted at. Instead, Bush quickly glossed over Iran to discuss North Korea and Iraq (the latter being the chief focus). Much like the 2002 speech, it seemed Iran’s presence in the text was only to complete a rhetorical form by filling out the

“axis.” In closing out his discussion of the axis countries, Bush (2003) made it clear which member he was speaking to: “let there be no misunderstanding: If Saddam Hussein does not fully disarm, for the safety of our people and for the peace of the world, we will lead a coalition to disarm him” (para. 76). Scarcely 3 months later, Bush stood on the USS *Abraham Lincoln* declaring his mission in Iraq accomplished.

May 2003 was both the high water mark for the Bush Doctrine and a major opening for resolving several issues with Iran. After the rapid dismantling of Iraq’s military and the ouster of Hussein, Iranian leadership made the decision to immediately cease their nuclear weapons research program (Ottolenghi, 2010; Crist, 2012). The Iranians, with authorization from Supreme Leader Khamenei, sent a proposal for a comprehensive “grand bargain” through the Swiss foreign ministry. The proposed deal including freezing their nuclear program and establishing full transparency, ceasing their support for Hamas, and demilitarizing Hezbollah. In return they sought a guarantee against regime change, turning over members of the terrorist group Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), American recognition of Iran’s security concerns, and a public statement that Iran was *not* a member of the “axis of evil.” Khamenei indicated that he concurred with “80 to 95 percent” of the goals that were laid out and that “everything can be negotiated” (Crist, 2012, p. 477). Haass over in the State Department favored pursuing the offer to see whether it was genuine, but Powell and Rice dismissed it entirely unaware that it had been authorized by Khamenei. Unfortunately, Bush and the hardliners were in no mood to talk. Much of the administration inferred the wrong lesson from their success in Iraq; “even the truest believers in the Bush White House identify that week as the beginning of a dangerous era of triumphalism” (Sanger, 2009, p. 47). Smelling weakness in Iran and believing them to be on the edge of internal collapse, the offer was “vigorously rejected” (Sanger, 2009, p. 49).

The triumphalism of early 2003 soon faded and the opening with Iran went with it. As I argued in chapter 3, a series of disastrous outcomes and crises derailed Bush's strategy despite the rapid initial success. Dobbins (2010) summarizes the impact this had on Iran:

U.S. officials have never explained in any detail why they ignored the Iranian overtures of 2002 and 2003, but the logic seems apparent: the United States was on a roll. Its position was constantly strengthening, while Tehran's was steadily declining. ... Why not wait a while longer before responding? That is not what happened, of course. Afghanistan and Iraq descended into civil war... Throughout the remainder of the Bush administration, the U.S. geopolitical position weakened while Tehran's strengthened. (p. 158)

During the first term of the administration, Bush's strategy was beset by a paradox. His public rhetoric and the strategic terms of NSS 2002 pulled Iran into the War on Terror while the specific policies his team crafted behind the scenes were intended only for Iraq. Alarmed and fearful, Iran had extended its hand. In response, the Bush administration "failed to develop any cohesive response ... other than a policy that paid lip service to regime change in Iran" (Crist, 2012, p. 460).

While Iran may have been included in the "axis of evil" in order to round out the rhetorical form of a struggle against evil, the disastrous mix of policy decisions the Bush administration pursued placed the United States and Iran on a collision course for the second term. The Bush administration set about to recasting the nature of War on Terror and pursuing more diplomatic policies with Iran. However, the principle of evil that figured so prominently in the first term could only be transformed, not abolished.

The Freedom Agenda

The second term of the Bush administration saw major changes in rhetoric, policy, and organization. Many of these changes were due to the numerous difficulties that plagued the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns; the cosmic frame of triumphalism had begun to crack (Zarefsky, 2014). Gone was any reference to an “axis of evil.” In its place stood the “freedom agenda,” a new vision that emphasized the positive powers of democracy, multilateralism, and American leadership. In this section, I continue sketching the arc of Bush’s Iran foreign policy, beginning with the start of the “freedom agenda” in his second inaugural address and concluding with the 2007 NIE. Even though Bush and his team took a more pragmatic approach in its dealings with Iran, the overall terms of the “freedom agenda” (present in the second inaugural and NSS 2006) and the underlying frame of evil proved remarkably persistent, confounding efforts at cooperative diplomacy with Iran.

President Bush’s second term began with two significant transformations in foreign policy, the first organizational and the second rhetorical. Organizationally, Bush reshuffled his cabinet and key positions of influence changed hands. The administration lost both moderates (Powell and Haass left the State Department) and several of the more aggressive neoconservatives (Wolfowitz and Bolton were appointed to non-policy positions at the World Bank and U.N respectively and Feith left entirely). Rice also shifted from National Security Advisor (NSA) to Secretary of State. Scholars predicted a dramatic change of direction in foreign policy as early as 2005 (Klarevas, 2005; Gaddis, 2005). Rice’s move was by far the most significant. Many regarded her time as National Security Advisor as a failure largely due to her management style; she viewed her role as handling Bush’s mood and refused to voice her objections to Cheney or Rumsfeld’s views (Sanger, 2009). She also suppressed disagreements

within the cabinet from Bush's view to the detriment of finding the best policy (Crist, 2012). Rice thrived as Secretary of State, however. In the second term, her influence was unquestioned; John Bolton remarked that there was "only one voice in American foreign policy in the second term" and it was Rice's (Crist, 2012, p. 487). With a reputation as a diplomatic realist who was "sensible and pragmatic" (El Baradei, 2011), the effect she had is not surprising. However, Rice was fiercely loyal to Bush; Rumsfeld and Cheney also still had influence throughout the second term (although Rumsfeld departed after 2006).

Rhetorically, Bush recast his foreign policy as the "freedom agenda" in his second inaugural address (Lindsay, 2011, pp. 769-770). In the speech, Bush (2005) established the defining goal: "it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with *the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world*" (para. 7, emphasis added). The overall terms of the speech differed from the 2002 State of the Union in a few notable ways. First, there was no mention of any of the previous axis members (including Iraq). In fact, no country besides the United States is mentioned other than a passing reference to "our allies" (Bush, 2005, para. 19). Second, Bush (2005) broadened the frame beyond war or military action by acknowledging that freedom demanded more than force:

This is not primarily the task of arms, though we will defend ourselves and our friends by force of arms when necessary. Freedom, by its nature, must be chosen, and defended by citizens, and sustained by the rule of law and the protection of minorities....America will not impose our own style of government on the unwilling. Our goal instead is to help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom, and make their own way. (para. 8)

Third, Bush abandoned the assumption that the effort would be easy. Instead, “the great objective of ending tyranny *is the concentrated work of generations*. The difficulty of the task is no excuse for avoiding it” (Bush, 2005, para. 9, emphasis added). By refusing to single out individual states, calling for policies beyond the use of force, and acknowledging the difficulty of progress, the second inaugural seemed to correct many of the excesses of the 2002 speech.

None of these correctives could change the symbolic trajectory towards Iran that had been established in the “axis of evil” speech, however. Bush’s second inaugural simply displaced the showdown between the United States and Iran into the broader struggle of democracy versus the evils of tyranny. Bush (2005) explicitly identified national security with the eradication of tyranny *anywhere*:

We have seen our vulnerability - and we have seen its deepest source. For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny ... violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat. There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants...and that is the force of human freedom. (para. 4)

Although drawing contrasts between democracy and tyranny are familiar themes of American foreign policy rhetoric, Bush (2005) dissolved national interest into democratic ideals; “America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one” (para. 6). This condensation demanded that the United States publicly and vocally reiterate the central division between democracy and tyranny at every turn; “we will persistently clarify the choice *before every ruler and every nation*: The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right” (Bush, 2005, para. 11, emphasis added). Thus, every interaction

between the United States and a country identified with tyranny must bear the mark of the broader conflict between democracy and tyranny. As a result, the Iranian regime must be vigorously confronted and challenged at every turn even if they were not directly named in the speech; “the rulers of outlaw regimes can know that we still believe as Abraham Lincoln did: “Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and, under the rule of a just God, cannot long retain it”” (Bush, 2005, para. 17).

Bush’s “freedom agenda” established the symbolic foundation for the subsequent NSS 2006, released in March. The new overarching goal of “ending tyranny in our world” (Bush, 2006a, p. 1) did not escape some commentators. Stark (2011) argued that NSS 2006 espoused an “almost religious level faith in democracy” (p. 42). Cossa (2006) noted that “the promotion of democracy is viewed as the cure to all the world’s maladies” (p. 1). Iran was also prominently featured in NSS 2006, a substantial change from the 2002 version: “we may face no greater challenge from a single country” (Bush, 2006a, p. 20). Iran’s nuclear program threatened regional security, but was itself part of the broader moral struggle between democracy and tyranny:

As important as are these nuclear issues, the United States has broader concerns regarding Iran. The Iranian regime sponsors terrorism; threatens Israel; seeks to thwart Middle East peace; disrupts democracy in Iraq; and denies the aspirations of its people for freedom. The nuclear issue and our other concerns can ultimately be resolved only if the Iranian regime makes the strategic decision to change these policies, open up its political system, and afford freedom to its people. (Bush, 2006a, p. 20)

Thus, without qualitative change in the character of the regime, the threat of Iran would not abate. Within the logic of the strategy, the problem with Iran was not its pursuit of destructive technology, but the regime itself.

The identification of Iran with the evil of tyranny had major implications for Bush's specific policies. Even though he asserted in the above quotation that Iran could make the "strategic decision" to change (seemingly ruling out forcible regime change by the United States), the symbolic terms automatically ruled out any concerted effort at diplomacy or confidence-building measures; the imputed character of their rulers precluded trust or good faith. Instead, their "true intentions are clearly revealed by the regime's refusal to negotiate in good faith" (Bush, 2006a, p. 20). Additionally, diplomacy or cooperation was *a priori* ruled out by the document's insistence that there was "no distinction between those who commit acts of terror and those who support and harbor them... Any government that chooses to be an ally of terror, such as... Iran, has chosen to be an *enemy of freedom, justice and peace*" (Bush, 2006a, p. 12, emphasis added). The identification of the Iranian regime as an enemy of freedom also altered the possibilities for Iran to make a "strategic choice." Enemies of freedom are guilty of a contractual breach that demands justice; "The world must hold those regimes *to account*" (Bush, 2006a, p. 12, emphasis added). The approach to Iran in NSS 2006 is thus beset with an ironic contradiction: "diplomatic [efforts] must succeed if confrontation is to be avoided" (Bush, 2006a, p. 20). Despite being the only means of avoiding conflict, diplomacy was predetermined to fail.

The symbolic terms of the second inaugural and NSS 2006 clarify the nature of Bush's diplomatic efforts throughout the first half of the second term. Iran was the center of the administration's focus throughout 2005. At Rice's insistence, the United States agreed to support the EU-3 negotiations, including offering carrots by the way of providing civilian airplane parts,

dropping opposition to Iran's World Trade Organization application, and dispatching senior diplomat Nicholas Burns to the talks (Crist, 2012). Bush used this new push to help heal the breach in U.S./European relations after the Iraq invasion. Speaking to allies in Brussels, he appealed to look beyond the damage of the first term: "as past debates fade, as great duties become clear, let us begin a new era of transatlantic unity" (Bush, 2005b, para. 5). He also pledged to work "closely with Britain, France and Germany as they oppose Iran's nuclear ambitions, and as they insist that Tehran comply with international law" (Bush, 2005b, para. 19).

While this may have represented a pivot towards multilateral cooperation with European allies, the behavior directed towards Iran reflected the broader terms of NSS 2006 in several ways. First, the Bush administration forged an Iran strategy that translated neoconservative talking points into policy. The end result that Bush signed off on was a strategy of regime change by all means except force; it focused on trying to "drive a wedge between the Iranian people and its government" (Crist, 2012, p. 496). Although the strategy argued for diplomacy, the underlying assumption ruled out any direct talks; "any official contact with the Islamic Republic only strengthened its claim to legitimacy and undercut the morale of dissidents and democrats within Iran" (Crist, 2012, p. 493). Second, although Burns sat in on the EU-3 negotiations, the administration established that all uranium enrichment activities must be suspended by Iran as a precondition to direct American participation (Crist, 2012, El Baradei, 2011). Additionally, American pressure on French nuclear companies weakened the attractiveness of the carrots offered to Iran by the Europeans; "the United States refused to give the green light...so the Europeans' offer simply made a vague statement about giving Iran access to foreign nuclear technology markets" (El Baradei, 2011, p. 144). Although the EU's offer was flawed in its own ways, Mohamed El Baradei (the IAEA chief inspector at the time) believed the American

pressure most contributed to the failure of the EU-3 talks; the Iranians only received an offer “made of hot air” (2011, p. 277).

Although the strategy that emerged at this time was vastly preferable to a military invasion of Iran, it boiled down to two “simplistic mantras”: “not one centrifuge” and “Iran will buckle” (El Baradei, 2011, p. 195). The rhetorical coordinates of the “freedom agenda” and the tools of policy cohered; direct engagement and genuine diplomacy with Iran were ruled out. Without a channel for the United States and Iran to speak and understand the motivations of the other, extremist assumptions about each other took hold in Washington and Teheran as 2006 wore on (El Baradei, 2011). Throughout late 2006 and into 2007, Bush took an increasingly aggressive stance with Iran in his rhetoric even while claiming his team’s support for negotiations (subject to the precondition of suspending enrichment, of course). In seeking to maintain public and international support for pressure on Iran, Bush addressed the Military Officers Association of America on September 5, 2006.

Bush utilized two strategies to define the Iranian threat in the speech. First, his chief mode of proof was quoting the words and documents of Al Qaeda, the Taliban, Hezbollah, and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Although this chapter focuses only on Iran, what Bush says about the first three are crucial to understanding his definition of the Iranian threat. According to Bush (2006b), the nature of the threat resides in the words of the enemy: “we know what the terrorists intend to do because they've told us – and we need to take their words seriously. So today I'm going to describe, in the terrorists' own words, what they believe, what they hope to accomplish, and how they intend to accomplish it” (para. 9). Second, Bush (2006b) established each independent issue as a single front in the broader “global war against an enemy that threatens all civilized nations” (para. 2). Under these terms:

The Shia and Sunni extremists represent different faces of *the same threat*. They draw inspiration from different sources, but both seek to impose a dark vision of violent Islamic radicalism across the Middle East. They oppose the advance of freedom, and they want to gain control of weapons of mass destruction. (Bush, 2006b, para. 36, emphasis added)

A nuclear Iran would be an intolerable outcome; they would “blackmail the free world, and spread their ideologies of hate, and raise a *mortal threat* to the American people” (Bush, 2006b, para. 37, emphasis added).

These two aspects are crucial to understand exactly how Bush defined Iran as a threat. In order to explain what the speech says about the danger of Iran, one must first see what it says about Al Qaeda. Bush (2006b) elaborated in exacting detail the nature of the Sunni Al Qaeda threat in the first half of the speech:

The terrorists who attacked us on September the 11th, 2001, are men without conscience –but they're not madmen. These al Qaeda terrorists and those who share their ideology are violent Sunni extremists...They hope to establish a violent political utopia across the Middle East. (para. 10)

This utopia, or “caliphate”, “would be a totalitarian Islamic empire encompassing all current and former Muslim lands...” (Bush, 2006b, para. 11). The extremist Sunni threat conformed perfectly with the moral register of good versus evil. Having “declared their uncompromising hostility to freedom,” the United States was all that stood in the way of them realizing their vision (Bush, 2006b, para. 14). Given their extreme nature and violent utopian goals, “it is foolish to think that you can *negotiate with them*” (Bush, 2006b, para. 14, emphasis added). One must understand how Bush characterized Al Qaeda because the linked terms of the speech meant

that he was also characterizing Iran. Ultimately, the threat of Al Qaeda was so dire because of their proven capacity for destruction and stated unwillingness to compromise or negotiate. They were truly a force of evil, according to Bush.

The Shia extremism of Iran posed a threat equivalent to Al Qaeda. The painstaking care and detail that Bush dedicated to describing Al Qaeda's murderous aims in the first half of the speech thus spoke to Iran's motives: "this Shia strain of Islamic radicalism is *just as* dangerous, and *just as* hostile to America, and *just as* determined to establish its brand of hegemony across the broader Middle East" (Bush, 2006b, para. 30, emphasis added). However, the Iranian threat was somewhat unique; "the Shia extremists have achieved something that al Qaeda has so far failed to do: In 1979, they took control of a major power, the nation of Iran, subjugating its proud people to a regime of tyranny, and using that nation's resources to fund the spread of terror and pursue their radical agenda" (Bush, 2006b, para. 30). This same regime was now pursuing nuclear weapons, raising a "mortal threat" to the United States. The complete picture of Iran thus emerges; Bush conjoined two very different and distinct threats and substituted terms in the overall equation as he saw fit. Sunni/Al Qaeda extremism was more deadly because an enormous body of evidence proved they would stop at nothing but total destruction and did not fear death. At the same time, Shia/Iran extremism was more deadly because they wielded the power of a large, resource-rich state with a large population. When the equation was ultimately condensed, Bush had posited an enemy that could not be negotiated with, had considerable material power, and sought nuclear weapons as a tool to carry out a deadly utopian goal.

Bush consistently pushed this rhetorical hardline on Iran throughout late 2006 and 2007, leading many to believe that a public campaign for war was underway. Bush's rhetorical trajectory reached its apogee in October 2007. During a news conference detailing his efforts to

get Russia behind a new round of UN sanctions, Bush starkly outlined the threat: “If Iran had a nuclear weapon, it’d be a dangerous threat to world peace... So I told people that if you’re interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon” (New York Times, 2007, para. 4). Outside of the administration, a chorus of prominent neoconservatives had been laying out the case for a war with Iran (Inbar, 2006; Herman, 2006; Taheri, 2006; Podhoretz, 2007 & 2008). Seymour Hersh (2006) touched off a flurry of media speculation that an attack was imminent when he reported that the Pentagon was updating contingency plans; such speculation often dominated the daily news cycle in 2006 and 2007 (Sanger, 2009). In truth, Bush never viewed preventive military strikes as a live option. Rice certainly agreed, reportedly telling Bush “I don’t think you can invade another Muslim country during this administration, *even for the best of reasons*” (Sanger, 2009, p. 69, emphasis added). Even Cheney, who pushed hard for military action in the second term, only envisioned limited strikes against conventional weapons manufacturing sites in retaliation for Iranian involvement in Iraq (Crist, 2012). Bush’s rhetorical push to characterize Iran as a dire, global threat was part of a concerted push to achieve consensus at the UN Security Council, thus ratcheting up sanctions and isolating Iran. That effort was dealt a serious blow in December of 2007.

On December 3, the White House published a portion of NIE 2007; the document judged “with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program” (NIE, 2007, p. 5). Domestically, the NIE was taken as definitive proof that the Bush administration had been exaggerating the threat of Iran’s nuclear program (Seliktar, 2012). As Sanger (2009) noted, it “seemed clear that Bush and Cheney were paying the price for twisting the intelligence on Iraq” (p. 4-5). The day after releasing the NIE, Bush sought to guide the public debate on what the

document signified. First, he argued that Iran was just as dangerous as ever: “if Iran were to develop the knowledge that they could transfer to a clandestine program it would create a danger for the world. And so I view this report as a warning signal that they had the program, they halted the program. And the reason why it's a warning signal is that they could restart it” (Bush, 2007b, para. 10). Second, Bush (2007b) repeatedly characterized the NIE as evidence for the success of his diplomacy; the lesson the world should take from the document was that “it's diplomatic pressure that caused them to change their mind” (para. 33). Specifically, it validated “how a carrot-and-stick approach can work” and affirmed “on the one hand, we should exert pressure, and on the other hand, we should provide the Iranians a way forward” (Bush, 2007b, para. 35). Going forward, Bush (2007b) underscored the need to keep up the “international pressure on Iran” because the “best diplomacy... is one of which all options are on the table” (para. 12).

The consequences of NIE 2007 for Bush's Iran strategy were disastrous. The document killed the credibility of “keeping all options on the table.” Even though Bush never viewed attacking Iran as a viable option, he needed the ability to build a public case for force to both pressure Iran to stay in negotiations and in case the security situation changed rapidly. As Bush (2011) lamented later:

The NIE didn't just undermine diplomacy. It also tied my hands on the military side. There were many reasons I was concerned about undertaking a military strike on Iran, including its uncertain effectiveness and the serious problems it would create for Iraq's fragile young democracy. But after the NIE, how could I possibly explain using the military to destroy the nuclear facilities of a country the intelligence community said had no active nuclear weapons program? (p. 211)

Ahmadinejad sensed his new latitude of freedom and consolidated his political power and control over Iran's nuclear program (Seliktar, 2012). The international sanctions regime that had emerged quickly dissolved; European partners were highly annoyed after years of pressure from the administration while China and Russia welcomed the NIE as "a godsend" and quickly resumed normal business relations with Iran (Seliktar, 2012, p. 156). As international pressure on Iran dissipated, the Iranians opted to keep a low profile and wait out the final year of the Bush administration (Seliktar, 2012). Meanwhile, thousands more enrichment centrifuges were quietly installed.

NIE 2007 is a helpful prism through which to view the overall trajectory of Bush's Iran policies. The lessons are doubly ironic. First, the catalyst that caused Iran to suspend its nascent weaponization research program was not diplomacy (despite Bush's insistence). The likely cause was the startling ease with which the United States overthrew Saddam Hussein in 2003 (Ottolenghi, 2010). The United States had accomplished in 3 months what Iran had failed to do over 8 years. Such rapid success underscored for the Iranians what it meant to "have all options on the table" and they were reticent to be caught with an active nuclear weapons research program. However, military success closed the diplomatic opening it created as the Bush administration opted to keep pushing its hand and weaken Iran further. Second, NIE 2007 definitively proved that Iran had done extensive research on developing a nuclear weapons capability, yet it was taken for an opposite conclusion; "by suspending the military part of the program—and getting caught suspending it—[Iran] had eviscerated five years of efforts by the United States and its allies to build momentum for confronting Teheran" (Sanger, 2009, p. 24). Bush's 8 years came to a close with little to show for on Iran. American credibility in nuclear diplomacy was weakened, Iranian politics and society had gradually hardened against the United

States, and the world was increasingly divided about what to do with Iran's nuclear program. Meanwhile, more and more centrifuges were installed and began to spin.

Conclusion & Implications

In this chapter, I traced the evolution of Bush's foreign policy towards Iran through a close reading of his public rhetoric, the NSS 2002 and 2006 strategy documents, and the historical record of his administration's diplomatic interactions with Iran. In many ways, foreign policy scholars and intellectuals are right to notice major differences in cabinet organization and policy-thinking that translated into substantial differences in rhetoric and policy in Bush's second term versus his first. However, this analysis challenges whether a complete reversal ever occurred (or if it was even possible). By highlighting the "problem of evil" in Bush's rhetoric towards Iran, I suggest that the principle of evil persisted in framing the administration's policy even as they sought to alter their rhetoric and pursue more diplomatic policies. This conclusion has several implications.

First, it clarifies the difference between the Bush administration's first and second terms. There was indeed a significant change in objectives when it came to Iran. However, that shift was far more complex and qualified than the current literature (especially in rhetorical studies) reflects. Rice's shift from NSA to Secretary of State was particularly notable. In the second term, she orchestrated a strategy of carrot-and-stick diplomacy, offering to "meet the Iranians at any time and any place" so long as Iran was willing to first suspend its enrichment activities (Crist, 2012, p. 505). Such a move would not have been possible without her close relationship with Bush (Sanger, 2009), and it represented a "radical shift in U.S. public rhetoric" (El Baradei, 2011, p. 195). However, the insistence on meeting preconditions ensured that such diplomacy could never materialize because it kept alive the antagonistic frame of the first term. Supreme

Leader Khamenei “objected to the dictatorial tone of the proposal: stop enrichment or else” (Crist, 2012, p. 506). Furthermore, Bush had already written off the utility of direct face-to-face talks. As he explained in a 2007 press conference, “if I thought we could achieve success, I would sit down. But I don't think we can achieve success right now... Look, this is a world in which ...people say, meet – sit down and meet. And my answer is, if it yields results; that's what I'm interested in” (Bush, 2007a, para. 165-166). The broader parameters of Bush's rhetorical world-view already told him that nothing would be accomplished through direct diplomacy with Iran.

This analysis challenges those who see the break with the first term as complete or decisive. Views that emphasize a “shift from ideology to pragmatism, from unilateral zeal to multilateral diplomacy” (LaFranchi, 2009, para. 5) in the second term fail to emphasize how Bush's first term established the context (and thus many of the constraints) for the second. Although Bush became more diplomatic and multilateral in the second term, such efforts were primarily directed at creating a coalition of states *against* Iran, rather than negotiating *with* Iran. When the Bush administration came closest to reaching out, it simultaneously held itself back by demanding preconditions that were impossible for Iran to meet (El Baradei, 2011). Thus, the Bush administration's diplomatic efforts in the second term sought to isolate Iran on the assumption that such isolation would either crush the regime and foster democratic revolutions or convince Iran to simply give up, rather than an effort to bring Iran to the table in search of a diplomatic solution.

Second, this analysis reveals a great deal about the relationship between presidential rhetoric, NSS strategy documents, and policy implementation on the ground. The dominant perspective of many policy experts subordinates rhetoric to policy; the former is used to sell or

justify the latter. In the case of the Bush administration's Iran strategy, rhetoric *preceded* the formation of policy by several years. In electing to brand Iran as an agent of evil, Bush made the decision about what policies were needed well in advance of any serious attempt at creating strategy. Additionally, there was a strong relationship between the world-view that Bush articulated in foundational speeches (e.g. the 2002 State of the Union or second inaugural), the strategy documents born out of those speeches, and the selection of policy tools on the ground. Labeling Iran as a force of evil and enemy of freedom early on established the parameters for what could be accomplished with direct diplomacy or negotiations.

Finally, this chapter suggests a relationship between foreign policy and several of Burke's (1968; 1973) observations regarding the power of form. By many accounts, the decision to use the phrase "axis of evil" seemed like an accident, an afterthought, or a "speechwriter's conceit" (Borger, 2003, para. 16). However, the line was "satisfying" in two regards (Burke, 1968, p. 31). "Axis" was appealing because it resonated with the belief that the unfolding War on Terror was a moral struggle. In turn, Iran's inclusion satisfied the formal demands of the selected term; there could be no "axis" of one, after all. Yet, the formal properties of language are very powerful. As Burke (1968) argues:

But is not every sentence a "periodic" sentence? If one, for instance, enters a room and says simply, "The man..." unless the auditor knows enough about the man to finish the sentence in his own thoughts, his spontaneous rejoinder will be, "The man what?" *A naming must be completed by a doing, either explicit or implicit.* (1968, p. 140, emphasis added)

Even though Bush quickly abandoned the phrase "axis of evil" in referring to Iran, the terms of the challenge had already been laid down. Identifying evil demanded actions appropriate to the

name. As limitations to American power surfaced in Iraq and Afghanistan, Bush (and Rice) began to look for diplomatic openings to resolve issues with Iran. However, the principle of evil in Bush's world-view had not been abolished. Rather, the showdown with Iran was condensed into a larger inter-generational struggle between democracy and tyranny. Thus, the world saw the United States and Iran pushed towards an increasingly violent reckoning, despite Bush's more diplomatic and multilateral tone. *The New York Times*' Elaine Sciolino (2002) identified the central rhetorical appeal of the "axis of evil" label: "it can be a policy that directs future military action or it can be an advertising slogan. That's the beauty of a throwaway line like that. It never has to be rescinded" (para. 34, emphasis added). This chapter reveals an ironic upshot of her logic. For Bush's Iran strategy, it was a line that could not be rescinded.

Chapter 6: “An Open Door”: Comedic Responsibility in Obama’s Iran Foreign Policy

Barack Obama inherited an explosive standoff with the Islamic Republic of Iran over the latter’s nuclear program. As chapter 5 demonstrated, the Bush administration’s policies swung from threatening regime change to multilateral diplomacy while Iran’s program continued to grow in size and complexity. While Obama entered office firmly committed to direct engagement with Iran’s leaders without preconditions, decades of hostility, Iranian and American domestic politics, and foreign alliances all pushed against a fundamental change in U.S./Iran relations. The behavior of the Iranian regime itself presented an enormous obstacle, especially after the regime’s violent crack-down on protestors following the June 2009 presidential elections. Despite these barriers to diplomacy, only a peaceful negotiated settlement could avert violent tragedy, either from regional arms racing or preventive American or Israeli military strikes. A successful American strategy would need to accomplish 3 goals: first, bring Iran to the negotiating table; second, buy enough time to diffuse the risk of war; and third, be realistic about the regime’s poor behavior and the historical antagonism that kept the United States and Iran apart.

In pursuing such a solution, Obama utilized many of the same policy tools as the Bush administration during his first 5 years in office, including: economic sanctions, multilateral diplomacy through the United Nations (UN), threats of military force, and covert sabotage. Despite similar approaches, the outcomes have been dramatically different. While Bush failed to slow down enrichment activity or maintain a united international front on Iran, Obama achieved a diplomatic breakthrough in late 2013. A deal reached in November committed Iran to a 6 month, verifiable freeze of all enrichment and weapons activity in exchange for limited sanctions

relief (Borger, 2013). While the agreement is only the first step towards a more difficult, comprehensive framework, Obama accomplished something that evaded Bush for 8 years: a verifiable suspension of all uranium enrichment activity. Although this broad sketch omits some details, it is nevertheless puzzling that only one president was able to achieve a breakthrough despite both using largely the same policy tools.

Continuing with my examination of the relationship between strategy, rhetoric, and policy performance, I shift critical attention from the level of policy to rhetoric to resolve this confusion. In this chapter, I argue that Obama responded to the challenge of Iran's nuclear program by drawing on the key term of responsibility in a comic fashion. Obama shifted the obligation to resolve the standoff peacefully onto both Iran *and* the United States; each country had to reconcile and transcend the tragic past that they shared. Although this shared responsibility was not equivalent, Obama articulated three distinct American obligations: a dedication to exhausting diplomacy, living up to its own nuclear nonproliferation commitments, and recognizing the Iranian regime's rights and needs. A crucial aspect of this rhetorical strategy was that it presented the Iranian regime with the option of rejoining the global community (albeit on restricted terms). While responsibility is traditionally used to displace American culpability onto a scapegoated enemy, Obama presents a hybrid of Burke's tragic and comic frames that chastises the Iranian regime for dangerous behavior while acknowledging American guilt, error, and responsibility for bringing the nuclear stand-off to a peaceful end.

There are several implications of this analysis. First, it clarifies the role that comic correctives can play in the context of extreme political conflict. Frames of international conflict which are purely tragic or comic risk collapse into violent scapegoating or relativist passivity. A hybrid view that emphasizes shared responsibility and shared guilt can ameliorate the most

violent forms of scapegoating while still enabling one to resist or contest an adversary. Second, this analysis reveals important differences between Obama and Bush's foreign policies on Iran. While both used the same tools and strategies, critical analysis of the frame shows the primary difference: Bush's frame emphasized change of *regime* while Obama's emphasized change of *behavior*. Finally, this analysis suggests Obama's strategy of engaging Iran has been largely consistent, challenging those who believe he dropped the policy soon after the 2009 protests in Iran.

I reach this conclusion through five sections of analysis. First, I explore Burke's theory of tragic and comic frames and argue that a hybrid "tragic/comic" form which emphasizes shared responsibilities can explain both Obama's framing of Iran's nuclear program and address limitations of comedy and tragedy in their pure forms. In the second section, I address Obama's contextual burden in regards to Iran, arguing that the situation demanded diplomacy while contextual factors made a diplomatic solution nearly impossible to obtain. Third, I argue that Obama used the terminology of "responsibility" discussed in chapter 4 to frame international relations as a balance of responsibilities that states commonly hold. In the context of Iran, this translated into a shared obligation of the United States and Iran to reconcile and transcend the tragedies of their past. In the fourth section, I explore the specific obligations the United States held in peacefully resolving the standoff. Finally, I conclude by considering implications of this analysis.

Tragedy, Comedy, and Hybridity

Burke's theory of symbolic frames can be used to highlight the relationship between presidential rhetoric and the execution of foreign policy. Frames influence both the formation of policies and public acceptance of them. As Burke (1984) argues, frames are the "more or less

organized system of meanings by which [one] gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation” to that situation (p. 5). Framing a situation as either tragic or comic affects subsequent policies because either mode implies a different course of action; frames “suggest *how* you shall be for or against. Call a man a villain, and you have the choice of either attacking or cringing. Call him mistaken, and you invite yourself to...setting him right” (Burke, 1984, p. 4, italics in original). In foreign policy, deciding whether to pursue diplomacy or prepare for war can hinge on how policymakers frame a problem area. In this section, I examine the literature on Burke’s frames in American foreign policy and uncover the deficiencies in either purely tragic or comic framings.

American foreign policy rhetoric has often emphasized the tragic frame, at least in the context of war. In order to sustain public support for military actions, presidents have characterized adversaries as “savages,” absolving Americans of guilt for resorting to violence (Ivie, 1974; Ivie, 1980; Wander, 1984). Violence against enemies is ultimately justified because they alone are responsible; “hostile governments are assigned *ultimate responsibility* for crisis-producing actions motivated by the ends they affirm, the methods they employ, or the environmental pressures to which they succumb” (Ivie, 1974, p. 343). Contemporary research has shown the tragic frame dominates post-9/11 foreign policy discourse as well. Bush’s melodramatic framing that accentuated the struggle between good and evil, as documented in chapters 3 and 5, is well noted by rhetoricians (Anker, 2005; Ivie, 2004; Gunn, 2004). Reeves and May (2013) have also recently argued that Obama shares in this tradition by espousing a doctrine of “just war” that displaces American responsibility and demands “retributive” violence (p. 639). The conclusion of such research is not optimistic; so long as American “guilt” for

engaging in war is displaced onto an enemy by assigning them “responsibility” for violence (scapegoating), war and destruction will persist.

Fearing the destructive power of the tragic frame, Burke (1984) proposed the comic perspective: the “methodic view of human antics as a comedy...ever on the verge of the most disastrous tragedy” (p. 3). By shifting the emphasis of a dramatic act from “*crime to stupidity*,” the comedic perspective serves to ameliorate the destructive tendencies of tragedy by picturing people “not as *vicious*, but as *mistaken*” (Burke, 1984, p. 41, italics in original). This capacity for “discounting” enables the comic frame to avoid “the dangers of euphemism that go with the more heroic frames of epic and tragedy” (Burke, 1984, p. 106). Rhetorical scholars concur with Burke that the comic perspective can reign in the dangers of tragic thinking. Comic discourses can correct rather than banish antagonists, emphasizing inclusion within a community rather than exclusion (Brummett, 1984; Appel, 1997; Smith & Windes, 1975). The tragic capacity for scapegoating is also curtailed; rather than exiling offenders, censures for bad behavior become temporary (Kerr, 1985; Duncan, 1962).

Some critics have challenged the comic frame’s usefulness for dealing with extreme conflict or war by raising the problem of relativism. Simons (2009) has argued that the comic goes too far in reducing the totality of human action to “mistakenness;” “how do you warrant outrage of the people whose actions you object to are foolish rather than vicious? And if you don’t generate outrage, how can you mobilize people for action against Evil and in behalf of the Good?” (para. 12). From a purely comic perspective, Simons (2009) believes that “you can’t” (para. 12). Relativism also undercuts rhetorical efficacy. Schwarze (2006) has argued that the melodramatic frame can be highly useful at producing moral indignation where passivity exists.

If one confronts an adversary who is truly dangerous or perverse, melodramatic framing can facilitate public identification against the threat.

Desilet and Appel (2011) offer a compelling solution to the drawbacks of a purely comic perspective. Their answer resides in Burke's (1984) distinction between "factional" and "universal" tragedy. Both modes involve scapegoating, but with very different implications:

In universal tragedy, the stylistically dignified scapegoat represents everyman. In his offence, he takes upon himself the guilt of all—and *his* punishment is *mankind's* chastening... The "factional" scapegoat, on the other hand, is...revealed in its lowest form, the psychology of war, where each camp "projects" its sadism upon the other camp... Since "universal" tragedy accuses all men in the lump and absolves them in the lump, it cancels to zero... Hence, it calls for "contemplation." The "factional" tragedy, on the other hand, attributes the evil, not to *all* men, but to *some* (the other faction). (Burke, 1984, p. 188-189, quotations and italics in original)

Factional tragedy thus demands a "program of action" to punish or weaken the enemy; one "must act to weaken the other faction" (Burke, 1984, p. 189). Universal tragedy differs in the placement of evil: "the faction of evil resides in an inner part of the self rather than entirely in an outward other" (Desilet & Appel, 2011, p. 349). By recognizing that evil is a part of the community, universal tragedy begins to function comically. In what amounts to the "exclusion of exclusions" (the scapegoating of scapegoating), this hybrid "tragic/comic framing" places the annihilation or total destruction of an enemy off-limits while not precluding "resisting, opposing, and rendering harmless the other who acts from within factional framing divorced from comic framing" (Desilet & Appel, 2011, p. 352-353). Desilet and Appel thus reconcile the comic with

the tragic, providing a warrant for Burke's (1973) "warrantable outrage" towards Hitler in his famous essay, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle." However, most adversaries the United States faces are not on par with Nazi Germany (the exhortations of pundits and politicians notwithstanding).

Obama's framing of the Iranian nuclear issue can help explore the implications of tragic, comic, and mixed modes of framing. The relationship between the United States and Iran is ambiguous. The two have not had institutional diplomatic ties since 1979, yet a record of back-channel diplomacy stretches from Reagan to Obama. David Crist (2012), the senior historian for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argues:

Twilight is an accurate metaphor for the current state of affairs between the United States and Iran... For three decades, the two nations have been suspended *between* war and peace. A various times, relations have moved from the light of peace to the darkness of war. But in the end, [the present] still looks remarkably like 1979, with the two nations still at loggerheads. (pp. 4-5, emphasis added)

In twilight, knowing the actions and intentions of the other is a fraught enterprise. Are the United States and Iran enemies, adversaries, or something else entirely?

I argue that a close reading of Obama's rhetoric reveals a hybrid frame of tragedy and comedy which enables the President to criticize and resist the Iranian regime's dangerous behavior while committing the United States to exhausting diplomatic options. The hybrid frame accomplishes this goal by creating a shared "responsibility" between the United States and Iran. In making this argument, I utilize a similar method as the previous chapter, engaging in a close reading of the key term of "responsibility" in NSS 2010 and the texts of Obama's public addresses or statements that significantly featured discussions of Iran, U.S./Muslim relations, or

nuclear weapons. However, before turning to the textual evidence of Obama's frame, I must foreground the contextual burdens Obama faced in pursuing a strategy of engagement with Iran.

Obama's Iranian Inheritance

Obama assumed the office of president amidst profound uncertainty about the future of American foreign policy in the Middle East. Upon taking oath, he "inherited [the] accumulated traumas" of several decades, ranging from the 1956 Suez Crisis to the two Iraq wars (Allin & Simon, 2010, p. 3). In the context of Iran, the President faced a seemingly intractable dilemma. On the one hand, failure to halt Iran's uranium enrichment and weaponization activities risked triggering a Middle East nuclear arms race or Israeli military strike. On the other, political dynamics and a tragic history between the United States and Iran meant the odds of diplomatic success could not be worse. A long (yet fresh) history of antagonism and complex internal politics in Tehran and Washington all pushed against Obama's engagement efforts from the start. Events quickly turned towards the worse in June 2009 when protests and reactionary violence erupted following Iran's presidential election. In this section, I first detail the dangers of a nuclear Iran, arguing that diplomacy is the only feasible solution that avoids catastrophic dangers. I then demonstrate that history, politics, and Iran's violent behavior all erected significant contextual barriers to Obama's pursuit of diplomacy.

The security implications of Iran's nuclear program add up to one conclusion: only a verifiable diplomatic solution can minimize the dangers of conflict. Should Iran acquire the capability to rapidly develop nuclear weapons, the consequences would be dire. In making this claim, it is important to separate the more fanciful scenarios that have been floated from those which are more likely. The fears that Iran would attempt to decapitate Israel, knowingly transfer weapons to terrorist groups, or attempt to blackmail American allies are gross exaggerations of

the danger (Posen, 2006; Pollack, 2013; Kamp, 2012). It is also unclear whether Iran has any intent to develop *actual* weapons, though the expert consensus is they at least seek the capability to develop weapons quickly (Ottolenghi, 2010; Sanger, 2009; Pollack, 2013; Crist, 2012). Such a “break-out” capacity would require reliable access to highly enriched fissile material (either uranium or plutonium), warhead and weaponization designs, and delivery vehicles (such as ballistic missiles). The regime’s goal in developing such a capability is likely for the purposes of preserving the regime’s control, achieving deterrence against invasion, and enabling Iran to attain regional hegemony (Pollack, 2013; Krause & Mallory, 2012).

There are several catastrophic risks that accompany a nuclear Iran. Even if they did not field a physical arsenal, a break-out capability could stimulate a regional arms race in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey would be hard-pressed to avoid developing their own capabilities despite American security guarantees (Pollack, 2013; Ford, 2012). Further proliferation also exacerbates the danger of unauthorized diversions or thefts by terrorists, even if the Iranian regime would never knowingly transfer weapons (Sagan, 2007). Iran would also be the first state to develop a nuclear capability while being a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which could be a fatal blow to the international non-proliferation regime (Huntley, 2006; Kitrie, 2007). The greatest danger to peace from a nuclear Iran comes from a preventive Israeli military strike:

[Such strikes] could ignite a general war between Israel and Iran that would suck in the United States; ... reinvigorate the terrorist jihad; destroy the Israel-Palestine peace process; and decisively end America’s attempt to restore its moral footing... And the painful irony is that they would probably not stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons anyway. (Allin & Simon, 2010, p. 5)

Despite the immense costs and the likely failure of a strike to eliminate Iran's nuclear program, Israel could still calculate that the odds are more appealing than an Iran that possesses nuclear weapons. As Allin and Simon (2010) argue, "to do what needs to be done, and then ride out the reaction, can seem a reasonable approach in a hostile world" (p. 5). Thus, although the most apocalyptic scenarios of an Iranian bomb are exceedingly improbable, there is no reason to be sanguine either.

The danger of a Middle East arms race or a war erupting between Iran and Israeli underscores that *only* a diplomatic solution can effectively resolve the dangers of a nuclear Iran. While some have speculated that the United States and its allies would be able to successfully deter and contain a nuclear Iran (Goldman & Rapp-Hooper, 2014), it is unlikely that either Saudi Arabia or Israel could be persuaded to accept such an outcome despite American security assistance (McInnis, 2005). Additionally, an American military campaign against Iran carries all of the risks of an Israeli strike with no discernible benefits (Kahl, 2012; Debs & Monteiro, 2012). This is not to suggest that a diplomatic solution to the stand-off is not without its downsides. Iran has an established track record of evasion, misleading the IAEA, and using negotiations as a stall tactic (Seliktar, 2012; Delpach, 2012). Thus, any sustainable solution must be accompanied by intrusive inspections and verification procedures. Despite the difficulty, diplomacy is still the least bad alternative.

Obama thus confronted a situation that demanded diplomacy; any other response risked spiraling into the worst forms of tragedy and violence. Yet the president faced three enormous obstacles. First, the exiting Bush administration had left American leadership in the region in shambles. While Bush hardly created the anti-Americanism that pervaded the region, his Manichean descriptions of the "war on terror" and subsequent invasion of Iraq "fed into a pre-

established narrative of hostility and mistrust” (Allin & Simon, 2011, p. 22-23). Additionally, Bush’s strategy for resolving Iran’s nuclear program largely failed. The diplomatic momentum his team pulled together in the second term quickly unraveled after the publication of the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate which concluded Iran suspended weaponization efforts in 2003 (Sanger, 2009; Crist, 2012). Efforts at a peaceful solution were also hampered by the administration’s refusal to talk directly with the Iranians unless they met preconditions to freeze uranium enrichment (El Baradei, 2011).

Second, Obama inherited a long history of antagonism between the United States and Iran. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, relations between the United States and Iran have ranged from non-existent to just short of all-out war. Parsi (2012) has termed this arrangement “an *institutionalized enmity*” (p. 223, italics in original). The original sins included the U.S. supported 1953 coup and the 1979 hostage crisis, events that loom large in any encounter between the two sides. According to former American diplomat and hostage John Limbert (2009), “however either side rationalizes its actions, these two events continue to cast long shadows,” providing each side with “the assumption and certainty of the other’s enmity” (Limbert, 2009, pp. 183-184). Thus, “persistent stereotypes, rhetoric, mythology and misconceptions have ensnared Iran and the US in a tangle of mutual demonization, insults and recriminations” wherein “each side has constructed a mythology and an image of *absolute evil* in the other as a result” (p. 9, emphasis added).

Third, the new president faced domestic political environments in both Iran and the United States that worked against an easy diplomatic solution. Iranian politics are incredibly complex, often pulled between the competing impulses of Islamism, repressive state power, and republicanism (Dobbins, 2010). Institutional authority is dispersed through a political structure

that is “Byzantine, fragmented, and counterintuitive”; leaders often “line up in ways that seem incomprehensible to outsiders” (Pollack, 2013, p. 5). Although final decisions pass through Supreme Leader Khamenei, his decision-making process is incredibly opaque (Pollack, 2013). While institutions are chaotically organized, Iranian public culture is surprisingly open and flexible, having adapted time and again to outside influences (Limbert, 2009). Iranian society is not open to every influence, however: “popular opinion mixes desire for a more open society and some pro-American sentiment, on the one hand, with nationalist pride and wounded memories of US intervention on the other” (Allin & Simon, 2011, p. 25). American politics are equally complex when it comes to Iran; space for diplomatic maneuvering is constrained by “pressures from Congress, Israel, and some of Washington’s Arab allies” (Parsi, 2012, p. ix). The “common sense” on Iran within Beltway circles has often been that Iran is irrational, the government is unstable, and that further isolation will cause the regime to fall (Leverett & Leverett, 2013). Iran and the United States’ domestic politics are only compounded by the suspicion they share. Mohammed El Baradei (2011), the former chief inspector of the IAEA has argued that the “domestic use, in both Tehran and Washington, of the other nation’s supposed ill will” is a “hallmark” of the nuclear stand-off (p. 135). Such behavior strongly evokes the tragic frame; such a “genie, once decanted, [is] hard to contain” (El Baradei, 2011, p. 135).

Finally, the greatest barrier to diplomatic engagement that Obama faced came from the behavior of the Iranian regime itself. Throughout the 2008 campaign, Obama urged direct engagement with Iran, attacking Bush’s preconditions: “demanding that a country meets all your conditions before you meet with them” is “just naive, wishful thinking” (New York Times, 2008, para. 16). He also drew comparisons to Reagan, noting that “strong presidents talk to their adversaries... That's what Reagan did with Gorbachev” (para. 10-11). In his first inaugural ,

Obama pushed for a new framework of relations with the Muslim world based upon “mutual interest and mutual respect,” noting that “we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist” (Obama, 2009a, para. 22). The latter term of “mutual respect” was meant for Iran; the term was “so critical to Iran that the Iranians even included it in their 2003 negotiation offer to the Bush administration” (Parsi, 2012, p. 10). Once in office, the president sent direct messages to Supreme Leader Khamenei, then-Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the Iranian public (Crist, 2012). Although this “extended hand” was a “major departure” from the Bush administration’s approach (Akbarzadeh, 2011, p. 163), it was all but ignored. Khamenei argued that the Americans “have only changed their slogan...Change must be real” (Crist, 2012, p. 543).

Prospects for engaging with Iran took a sharp turn for the worse after Iranian election results were announced in June 2009. Suspecting electoral fraud on the part of Ahmadinejad and his conservative power base, protests erupted throughout Tehran and other major cities. The regime responded brutally, using mass arrests and pro-government militias to break up the protests, killing dozens in the process. In what amounted to a “putsch by the military/security apparatuses of the state,” Iranian politics significantly hardened as moderate or pragmatic voices within the government were pushed out or marginalized (Seliktar, 2012, p. 163). The Iranian election and subsequent crack-down created a lose-lose solution for Obama. Strongly weighing in on the side of the protestors would be tantamount to a “kiss of death”; pro-government supporters would use an endorsement as evidence that the United States sought regime change and unravel any prospects for diplomacy (Crist, 2012).

Such concerns were clearly on the President’s mind when he finally weighed in. Responding to those who suggested he was too passive in condemning the protests, he argued “the last thing that I want to do is to have the United States be a foil for those forces inside Iran

who would love nothing better than to make this an argument about the United States” (Obama, 2009h, para. 7). All the United States could do was “bear witness” to the violence (para. 8). Meanwhile, Obama stayed the diplomatic course. In August, Iran and the P5 +1 group (the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany) agreed in principle on a fuel-swap plan wherein Iran would export its unenriched nuclear fuel to an external site (such as Russia or France) for enrichment. The agreement offered Iran a robust nuclear power program and assuaged concerns about Iran developing a break-out weapons capability. The deal unraveled over details on how fuel was to be exchanged, the revelation of a new underground enrichment facility in the city of Qom, and Obama’s growing belief that Iran was using diplomacy as a stall tactic (Crist, 2012). As 2009 wore on, Obama’s tone hardened. In November, he outlined Iran’s choice. Obama argued that the United States had done more than enough to extend the hand: “We do not interfere in Iran’s internal affairs. We have condemned terrorist attacks against Iran. We have recognized Iran’s international right to peaceful nuclear power” (Obama, 2009i, para. 2). Thus, “Iran must choose. We have heard for thirty years what the Iranian government is against; the question, now, is what kind of future it is for” (para. 3).

In the aftermath of the election protests and the collapsed fuel-swap deal, the United States succeeded in erecting an onerous and painful sanctions regime that targeted missile technology, the economic holdings of Iran’s security forces, the Iranian Central Bank, and the Iranian energy sector. The new sanctions were far more stringent than previous attempts. The fact that Obama’s extended hand had been slapped away persuaded even those countries with substantial involvement in Iran’s energy sector to participate (Akbarzadeh, 2011; Seliktar, 2012).

Several policy experts and commentators interpreted Obama’s pursuit of sanctions as a repudiation of engagement; many argued the President tried diplomacy but abandoned it in favor

of pressure and sanctions (Drezner, 2011; Parsi, 2012; Allin and Simon, 2010). Seliktar (2012) argued that “Obama was forced to go back to some of the tactics of his predecessor” (p. 172). Parsi (2012) claimed that diplomacy was “abandoned at the first hurdle” (p. 222). Some have cynically argued that engagement was *only* ever a rhetorical tactic geared towards obtaining new sanctions (Akbarzadeh, 2011; Leverett & Leverett, 2013; El Khawas, 2012). Former diplomat Nicholas Burns praised Obama’s “extended hand” for this very reason: “because of it, the United States had significantly greater cordiality to take advantage of Iran’s mendacity and to lead an international coalition toward comprehensive sanctions should talks fail” (Crist, 2012, p. 561).

The conclusion that Obama abandoned engagement in late 2009 may be premature, however. In May of 2010, the administration doubled-down on the strategy of engagement, selecting it as the cornerstone of NSS 2010. Obama (2010a) committed to “pursue engagement with hostile nations to test their intentions, give their governments the opportunity to change course, reach out to their people, and mobilize international coalitions” (p. 3) and explicitly flagged Iran as a target for such engagement (p. 26). Yet how could engagement overcome the history of antagonism between the two countries and the renewed domestic opposition (both in Iran and the United States) to diplomacy after June 2009? To reassure foreign allies and Congress, Obama needed to acknowledge the Iranian regime’s poor behavior and safeguard against cheating in the future. Meanwhile, Obama needed to provide the regime some degree of assurance that the United States (or its allies) would not prematurely resort to violence, recognize Iran’s rights to peaceful nuclear energy, and acknowledge Iran’s grievances over past American behavior. Obama responded to this contextualist burden through a rhetoric of responsibility. Responsibility in Obama’s view entailed reciprocal obligations; both the United States and Iran bore responsibility for peacefully resolving the conflict. In the next two sections, I turn to

Obama's rhetoric in NSS 2010 and other significant addresses on the subject of Iran's nuclear program. After detailing Obama's general framework of "responsibility" and the common obligations Iran and the United States share within it, I move on to describe the specific obligations that Obama imposed upon the United States in order to avert the dangers of a nuclear Iran.

Responsibility and Transcendence

NSS 2010 was released in May 2010, a full 11 months past deadline. Initially completed in early 2009, the document was revised in the wake of North Korea's nuclear test, the fallout from the Iranian elections, the earthquake in Haiti, and the worsening economic crisis (Belyaniov, 2010). The delay makes it an important text for understanding Obama's view of the Iran crisis because of the nature of NSS documents (as previously noted) and the fact that it sought to bridge Obama's beginning philosophy with the difficulties he encountered in the first year of office. In this section, I begin with the text of NSS 2010 and elaborate on the pivotal term of "responsibility" established in chapter 4. While that chapter charted the general implications of an evolving "balance of responsibility" for orienting American leadership, I focus here on those obligations that implicate the standoff with Iran. Specifically, NSS 2010 establishes that states have an obligation to cooperate and honor their international commitments. Next, I shift from the general framework in NSS 2010 to Obama's public rhetoric on Iran. I argue that the universal obligation to cooperate established in NSS 2010 translates into a shared responsibility between the United States and Iran to acknowledge and transcend their tragic past.

As chapter 4 demonstrated, the terms of NSS 2010 establish some variation in responsibilities among states (some shoulder a heavier burden than others). However, two obligations are shared by all. First, Obama argues that there is an obligation to cooperate and find

common ground. This obligation emerges from transformations in the international environment, a scene that is constantly in flux throughout NSS 2010. In the face of globalization's dangers, states must cooperate: "the very fluidity within the international system that breeds new challenges must be approached as an opportunity to forge new international cooperation... We must seize on the opportunities afforded by the world's interconnection, while responding effectively and comprehensively to its dangers" (Obama, 2010a, p. 9). Thus, cooperation itself is a general responsibility; the international order "must facilitate cooperation capable of addressing the problems of our time. This international order will support our interests, but it is also an end that we seek *in its own right*" (Obama, 2010a, p. 5, emphasis added). Otherwise "the forces of instability and disorder will undermine global security. And ...challenges that recognize no borders...will persist and potentially spread" (p. 40).

Second, states are responsible for honoring their international commitments. Failing to follow through on international treaties and obligations threatens the entire order. If an international order is to have substance, "rules of the road must be followed, and there must be consequences for those nations that break the rules—whether they are nonproliferation obligations, trade agreements, or human rights commitments" (Obama, 2010a, p. 3). The challenge, according to Obama, is give the international order sufficient teeth to enforce its norms; "those nations that defy international norms or fail to meet their sovereign responsibilities will be denied the incentives that come with greater integration and collaboration with the international community" (p. 40). Thus, NSS 2010 presents "adversarial governments" (such as Iran or North Korea) a "clear choice: abide by international norms, and achieve the political and economic benefits that come with greater integration with the international community; or refuse to accept this pathway, and bear the consequences of that decision, including greater isolation"

(Obama, 2010a, p. 11). Although punishing “adversarial” states is nothing new, Obama’s notion of a “pathway” is significant because it implies reversability. If regimes uphold their responsibilities and follow through with their commitments, they may rejoin the international community and reverse their isolation. This is dramatically different than the approach taken in Bush’s 2006 NSS document, which sought to eliminate such regimes entirely (Cram, 2011).

NSS 2010 thus frames foreign policy in a comic register. States are not destined to compete or clash, but can discover common interest through cooperative endeavor. Additionally, Obama’s insistence that America was constantly striving to overcome its imperfections (as I argued in chapter 4) meant that not even the exceptional United States was beyond the capacity for error or misjudgment. Yet the frame is not purely comic. Those who break the rules or act violently are denied the benefits of cooperation and isolated from the international community. Isolation is not tantamount to scapegoating or expulsion, however. The fact that such states can, in time, rejoin the international political order underscores the hybrid tragic/comic nature of Obama’s frame.

Moving from NSS 2010 to Obama’s public rhetoric, his central goal with Iran emerges. Iran and the United States share a common responsibility to acknowledge the tragedies of the past and commit to transcending those wrongs. Obama (2009i) argued that Iran and the United States have been locked in a tragic struggle since the days of the hostage crisis; that “event helped set the United States and Iran on a path of sustained suspicion, mistrust, and confrontation” (para. 2). In his famous Cairo address, Obama (2009g) emphasized the joint nature of responsibility for creating the antagonism: “in the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically-elected Iranian government. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S.

troops and civilians” (para. 43). He also acknowledged America’s capacity to err, noting that the “enormous trauma” of 9/11 led the United States to “act contrary to our ideals” at times (para. 27). Although responsibility is shared, it is not equivalent for Obama. Speaking to the UN in September 2013, he acknowledged American responsibility while emphasizing Iran’s more extensive list of offenses: “Iranians have long complained of a history of U.S. interference in their affairs ... On the other hand, Americans see an Iranian government that has declared the United States an enemy and ... taken American hostages, killed U.S. troops and civilians, and threatened our ally Israel with destruction” (Obama, 2013a, para. 30).

Acknowledging responsibility for antagonism is only half of the equation for Obama; both must commit to transcendence. Although America and Iran’s history is “well known,” the world must not remain “trapped in the past” (Obama, 2009g, para. 43). Obama (2009f) recognized the foibles of human activity, but refused to accept that such errors must end in tragedy: “human endeavor is *by its nature imperfect*. History is often tragic, but unresolved, it can be a heavy weight” (para. 24, emphasis added). Thus, “each country must work through its past. And reckoning with the past can help us seize a better future” (Obama, 2009f, para. 24). Obama acknowledged the difficulty of transcendence. Speaking to a French audience in Strasbourg, he argued that it is “perhaps the most difficult work of all to resolve age-old conflicts,” yet “just because it's difficult ... does not absolve us from trying” (Obama, 2009d, para. 38). The obligation to transcend past conflicts itself stems from the common responsibility to cooperate. At Cairo, the president argued:

All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort – a sustained effort – to find common ground, to focus on

the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings.

(Obama, 2009g, para. 71)

Peace evades so long as relationships are “defined by our differences”; the “cycle of suspicion and discord must end” (Obama, 2009g, para. 4). Although choosing to move beyond the past is difficult, it is not impossible. In front of the UN, Obama (2013a) underscored that “time and again, nations and people have shown our capacity to change...to choose our better history” (para. 61).

Obama acknowledged the difficulty of cooperating with Iran well before the June election crisis. During a March 2009 press conference where he defended diplomacy, he noted that “some people said, “Well, they did not immediately say they were eliminating nuclear weapons and stop funding terrorism.” Well, we didn’t expect that. We expect that we’re going to make steady progress on this front” (Obama 2009c, para. 194, quotations in original). Rather than fast results, Obama (2009c) appealed to sheer persistence: “if you stick to it, if you are persistent, then – then these problems can be dealt with... That whole philosophy of persistence ... is one that I’m going to be emphasizing ... as long as I am in this office” (paras. 190-191). Obama (2010h) amplified persistence and difficulty in Cairo; he recognized that “change cannot happen overnight. No single speech can eradicate years of mistrust, nor can I answer in the time that I have all the complex questions that brought us to this point” (para. 6).

Obama’s appeal for the United States or Iran to transcend their tragic past should not be confused with a desire to forget their differences. Although they “must not be prisoners” of their history, it “does not mean we should ignore sources of tension. Indeed, it suggests the opposite: we must face these tensions squarely” (Obama, 2009g, paras. 17-18). For transcendence to occur, “we must say openly the things we hold in our hearts, and that too often are said only behind

closed doors” (Obama, 2009g, para. 6). Only by talking openly will avenues for cooperation be revealed: “it is important for us to be willing to talk to Iran, to express very clearly where our differences are, but where there are potential avenues for progress” (Obama, 2009b, para. 57).

Obama also makes it clear that discussing differences involves drawing lines and saying no. A nuclear capable Iran is one such instance: “we are willing to move forward without preconditions on the basis of mutual respect. But it is clear to all concerned that when it comes to nuclear weapons, *we have reached a decisive point*. This is not simply about America's interests. It is about preventing a nuclear arms race in the Middle East that could lead this region and the world down a hugely dangerous path” (Obama, 2009g, para. 44, emphasis added). Additionally, transcendence did not entail *accepting* the Iranian regime’s behavior. The President’s willingness to harshly describe the regime was on display in a 2010 interview with Persian television: “obviously outrageous, disgusting statements of the sort that Mr. Ahmadinejad just made makes the American people understandably wary of any dealings with the Iranian government. But ... there should be a way for us to change the dynamic that has been in place since 1979... And it turns out that so far, at least, the Iranian regime has been unwilling to change its orientation” (Obama, 2010d, para. 18). By September 2013, Obama (2013a) had grown increasingly skeptical whether Iran was willing to change course: “I don't believe this difficult history can be overcome overnight – the suspicions run too deep” (para. 31). Despite his growing doubt, Obama still signaled hope for change: “but I do believe that if we can resolve the issue of Iran's nuclear program, that can serve as a major step down a long road towards a different relationship, one based on mutual interests and mutual respect” (para. 31). Thus, despite a pattern of Iranian intransigence throughout his first term, Obama still believed a diplomatic solution on the nuclear program could start the long, difficult process of transcendence.

In this section, I have established the hybrid frame of responsibility in Obama's rhetoric that creates a common obligation to transcend the wrongs of the past and seek cooperation. If transcending decades of institutionalized enmity was so difficult, what would it take to get down that path? Moreover, what could distinguish Obama's appeals to move beyond the past from any previous president's appeal for Iran to forget the traumas of the past? I answer these questions in the next section by looking at the specific obligations Obama's frame placed on American foreign policy.

Upholding American Responsibilities

The fact that Obama made demands on the Iranian regime to cease their enrichment and weaponization activities by appealing to their responsibilities under the NPT is hardly surprising. President Bush pursued those very same goals. The hybrid frame that organized Obama's foreign policy also imposed responsibilities on the United States, however. Throughout his rhetoric, three specific obligations emerge. Obama demanded that the United States exhaust diplomacy, follow through on its own NPT commitments, and provide the Iranian regime a dignified opportunity to rejoin the international community. I detail each of these responsibilities in turn.

The first central responsibility of the United States was to exhaust diplomacy. This may seem odd to those who believe Obama took a much harder stance after mid-2009. Obama (2012a) himself underscored that "when it comes to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, I will take no options off the table, and I mean what I say" (para. 36). Speaking to the influential and staunchly pro-Israel American Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC), the President asserted he would "not hesitate to use force when it is necessary to defend the United States and its interests" (Obama, 2012a, para. 37). However, responsibility cut two ways; one

must seriously consider violence *as well as* alternatives to it. Cavalierly threatening military action was itself irresponsible:

Moving forward, I would ask that we all remember the weightiness of these issues, the stakes involved for Israel, for America, and for the world. Already, there is too much loose talk of war... For the sake of Israel's security, America's security and the peace and security of the world, now is not the time for bluster ... Now is the time to heed the timeless advice from Teddy Roosevelt: Speak softly; carry a big stick. (Obama, 2012a, para. 38)

Obama also chastised those who used Iran's record of misdeeds to dismiss the need for any diplomacy. Speaking before the UN, Obama (2013a) argued that "we live in a world of imperfect choices," but "if we don't want to choose between inaction and war, we must get better – all of us – at the policies that prevent the breakdown of basic order" (paras. 56-57). That required a commitment to "dogged diplomacy that resolves the root causes of conflict, not merely its aftermath" (Obama, 2013a, para. 57). Serious diplomacy in turn demanded a degree of realism. Policy decisions over Iran were "not the choice between this deal and the ideal, but the choice between this deal and other alternatives" (Obama 2013c, para. 26-27). Barring an option "in which Iran eliminated every single nut and bolt of their nuclear program, and foreswore the possibility of ever having a nuclear program," one must find "given the options available...the best way for us to assure that Iran does not get a nuclear weapon" (Obama, 2013c, paras. 27-29).

Obama's threat calculus established a delicate balance. On the one hand, the "bottom line" must be to "prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon" (Obama, 2013c, para. 30). On the other, diplomacy was not simply the "most optimal" solution, but the *only* one. Speaking to AIPAC, Obama (2012a) argued that "both Israel and the United States have an interest in seeing

this challenge resolved diplomatically” and that it was “the *only way* to truly solve this problem” (para. 33, emphasis added). Upon announcing the diplomatic breakthrough that was achieved in late 2013, Obama (2013b) stressed that “ultimately, only diplomacy can bring about a *durable solution* to the challenge posed by Iran’s nuclear program” (para. 14, emphasis added). American responsibility to exhaust diplomacy demanded that the November 2013 deal be treated as a “real opportunity” that must be tested (Obama, 2013b, para. 14).

Obama’s faith in diplomacy was not absolute, however. Willingness to negotiate had an expiration date. Addressing the UN in 2012, Obama (2012b) argued that although “America wants to resolve this issue through diplomacy,” that “time is not unlimited” because a “nuclear-armed Iran is not a challenge that can be contained” (para. 50). Nor did the diplomatic breakthroughs of 2013 dissolve Obama’s distrust of Iran. Although he was “encouraged” by newly elected President Hassan Rouhani’s “commitment to reach an agreement,” Obama (2013a) tempered any enthusiasm: “the roadblocks may prove to be too great, but I firmly believe the diplomatic path must be tested” (paras. 35-36). The November agreement also did not mean “we should trust him or anybody else inside of Iran. This is a regime that came to power swearing opposition to the United States, to Israel, and to many of the values that we hold dear” (Obama, 2013c, para. 16). Yet even as he refused to “take any options off the table,” Obama still committed the United States to test “the possibility that we can resolve this issue diplomatically” (para. 16).

Second, the United States was obligated to uphold its own international commitments. In the context of Iran, this meant following through with its nuclear disarmament commitments under the NPT. In his April 2009 Prague address, Obama (2009e) boldly committed to this obligation, declaring “clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and

security of a world without nuclear weapons” (para. 27). During the Cold War, “generations lived with the knowledge that their world could be erased in a single flash of light” (Obama, 2009e, para. 22). Yet the end of the Cold War only altered that danger: “the threat of global nuclear war has gone down, but the risk of a nuclear attack has gone up” (para. 23). Massive arsenals remained, fissile material risked being diverted into terrorist hands, and states such as Iran were on the verge of new arsenals. There is a small window of opportunity to decrease nuclear dangers: “our efforts to contain these dangers are centered on a global non-proliferation regime, but as more people and nations break the rules, we could reach the point where the center cannot hold” (Obama, 2009e, para. 24). Although the NPT is stressed and near the breaking point, it offers the best hope for Obama; he believes “the basic bargain is sound,” yet there needs to be “real and immediate consequences for countries caught breaking the rules or trying to leave the treaty without cause” (Obama, 2009e, para. 33). Unless all parties to the NPT could hold each other accountable, the regime itself was at risk: “rules must be binding. Violations must be punished. Words must mean something ... All nations must come together to build a stronger, global regime” (para. 37).

Although Obama’s desire to hold Iran accountable for their obligations is not surprising, the fact that he committed the United States to a world with zero nuclear weapons is unique. Not since Reagan has an American president resolutely declared American nuclear disarmament as a goal. Obama’s decision to pursue reductions cannot be separated from his goal of denuclearizing Iran. For him, the United States possessed a unique obligation to be the first to act: “as a nuclear power, as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a *moral responsibility to act*. We cannot succeed in this endeavor alone, but we can lead it, *we can start it*” (Obama, 2009e, para. 26, emphases added). In NSS 2010, Obama further committed to a

world of zero nuclear weapons and outlined several policy steps his administration was pursuing, including a nuclear reduction treaty with Russia (New START), reducing the role of nuclear weapons in security planning, and providing a “negative security assurance not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons” against NPT compliant states (Obama, 2010a, p. 23). Having the United States take the first step established the credibility needed to hold Iran accountable. In announcing UN sanctions against Iran in 2010, he argued:

There is no double standard at play here. We’ve made it clear, time and again, that we respect Iran’s right... to access peaceful nuclear energy... embedded in the NPT... That NPT treaty was signed by all the parties involved, and it is a treaty that the United States has sought to strengthen from the day I took office, including through our own commitments to reduce America’s nuclear arsenal.

(Obama, 2010b, para. 4)

During his Cairo address, Obama (2009g) acknowledged that “no single nation” gets to “pick and choose which nations hold nuclear weapons. That is why I strongly reaffirmed America's commitment to seek a world in which no nations hold nuclear weapons” (para. 45). Thus, Obama’s aggressive pursuit of the New START treaty was as much about minimizing the danger of Cold War stockpiles and improving relations with Russia as it was about holding Iran to their NPT obligations. As Obama (2009d) noted while negotiating the treaty in early 2009, “reducing our nuclear stockpiles... will then give us greater moral authority to say to Iran, don't develop a nuclear weapon” (para. 56). A year later in NSS 2010, Obama underscored the nature of responsibility involved with pressuring Iran: “this is not about singling out nations—it is about the responsibilities of all nations and the success of the nonproliferation regime” (para. 23-24).

Unless the United States embraced its own responsibility under the NPT first, such an appeal to fairness would ring hollow.

The final responsibility the United States held was to readmit the Iranian regime into the international community should they abide by their obligations. Accepting such a responsibility was no easy task in light of the extreme opposition towards engaging Iran, especially after the 2009 elections. However, during the third 2012 presidential election debate, Obama made it clear that he was willing to do just that: “there is a deal to be had, and that is that they abide by the rules that have already been established; they convince the international community they are not pursuing a nuclear program; there are inspections that are very intrusive. But over time, what they can do is regain credibility” (Obama, 2012c, para. 203). At the 2013 Saban forum, an annual dialogue between American and Israeli leaders hosted by the Brookings Institution, Obama (2013c) amplified the need to welcome Iran back to the international community *if* they abided by a diplomatic agreement:

[The Iranians] are going to have to have a path in which they feel that there is a dignified resolution to this issue. That’s a political requirement of theirs, and that... runs across the political spectrum. And so for us to present a door that serves our goals and our purposes but also gives them the opportunity to, in a dignified fashion, reenter the international community and change the approach that they’ve taken – at least on this narrow issue, but one that is of extraordinary importance to all of us – is *an opportunity that we should grant them*. (para. 122, emphasis added)

Clearly there were limits to the Iranian regime’s return in Obama’s view; all sins would not be immediately forgiven. Iran would be subjected to restrictions warranted by their past behavior:

“because of its record of violating its obligations, Iran must accept strict limitations on its nuclear program that make it impossible to develop a nuclear weapon” (Obama, 2013b, para. 8). In defining the 2013 nuclear agreement, Obama argued it was Iran’s acceptance of such limitations that made the deal possible at all. Strongly echoing Ronald Reagan’s arms control rhetoric, Obama asserted that the deal was “not based on trust” but on “what we can verify” (Obama, 2013c, para. 46). Finally, Obama (2013b) assigned the burden of proof to Iran: “in these negotiations, nothing will be agreed to unless everything is agreed to. The burden is on Iran to prove to the world that its nuclear program will be exclusively for peaceful purposes” (para. 9). Obama thus stayed true to the end he sought when announcing aggressive sanctions back in 2010: “I would like nothing more than to reach the day when the Iranian government fulfills its international obligations — a day when these sanctions are lifted, previous sanctions are lifted, and the Iranian people can finally fulfill the greatness of the Iranian nation” (2010b, para. 8).

The obligation to recognize Iran’s rights was a corollary of America’s responsibility to allow the Iranian regime back into the international community. Although their flaunting of NPT obligations justified denying them the benefits of cooperation, the regime would be due certain rights should they reenter the community. Speaking to a Persian television audience in 2010, Obama (2010d) emphasized that “the Iranian government has ... a right to peaceful nuclear programs and peaceful nuclear power. That is a right that all NPT members have” (Obama, 2010d, para. 24). If the Iranian regime could “act responsibly,” Obama (2010d) acknowledged “that would remove the sanctions and would allow them to fully enter the international community in a way that would tremendously benefit the Iranian people” (para. 9). Honoring Iran’s rights would require more from the international community than simply removing sanctions, however. Obama (2013a) made it clear that he was open to a future with the Iranian

regime in it: “we are not seeking regime change and we respect the right of the Iranian people to access peaceful nuclear energy” (para. 32). Providing Iran the dignity of reentering the community would require the most extreme arguments “that say we can’t accept any enrichment on Iranian soil” be dropped (Obama, 2013c, para. 99). At the Saban Forum, Obama (2013c) dismissed such arguments as absurd: “One can envision an ideal world in which Iran said, we’ll destroy every element and facility and you name it, it’s all gone. I can envision a world in which Congress passed every one of my bills that I put forward” (para. 99). Instead, a sustainable solution must accommodate both Iran and America’s concerns: “we can envision an end state that gives us an assurance that even if they have some modest enrichment capability, it is so constrained and the inspections are so intrusive that they, as a practical matter, do not have breakout capacity” (Obama, 2013c, para. 100). To be clear, Obama did not believe that the November 2013 agreement was close to that “end state” or that it was even possible; he remarked that “if you asked me what is the likelihood that we’re able to arrive at the end state that I was just describing ... I wouldn’t say that it’s more than 50/50. But we have to try” (para. 110). The fact that Obama was committed to trying was crucial; if the tragedy of history was to be transcended, the world would have to “not constantly assume that it’s not possible for Iran, like any country, to change over time” (para. 110).

This final responsibility highlights the essentially comic nature of Obama’s approach to the nuclear standoff. Although the President’s strategy hardened after the fallout of 2009, the use of sanctions, tough rhetoric, or pressure were never intended to destroy the regime or force them to capitulate. At the Saban Forum, Obama contrasted his approach with hardliners such as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In Obama’s (2013c) view, hardliners perceive that “if we just kept on turning up the pressure – new sanctions, more sanctions, more military threats, et

cetera – that eventually Iran would cave” (para. 120). The President distinguished his approach by making two points:

One is that the reason the sanctions have been so effective ... is because other countries had confidence that we were not imposing sanctions just for the sake of sanctions, but we were imposing sanctions for the sake of trying to actually get Iran to the table and resolve the issue... And point number two... The idea that Iran, given everything we know about their history, would just continue to get more and more nervous about more sanctions and military threats, and ultimately just say, okay, we give in – I think does not reflect an honest understanding of the Iranian people or the Iranian regime. (Obama, 2013c, para. 120-121)

Hardline tactics were thus a means to a vastly different end than what the Bush administration had in mind. When Bush sought to isolate the regime, the intended goal was to either crush them and foster a democratic revolution or simply force them to capitulate (Crist, 2012; El Baradei, 2011). However, Obama viewed sanctions, pressure, and isolation as a means to bring Iran back to the negotiating table and start taking diplomacy seriously.

Conclusion and Implications

In this chapter, I explored the relationship between tragedy and comedy in President Obama’s Iran policies and rhetoric. The central conclusion is that Obama used a rhetoric of responsibility that operated within a hybrid tragic/comic framing to help balance between the contextual barriers to successful diplomacy and the dangers of a nuclear Iran. Although it is premature to evaluate the success of this strategy, the diplomatic agreement of November 2013 is encouraging. This analysis poses several implications for understanding the relationship between tragic and comic framings and the nature of Obama’s foreign policy of engagement.

First, this analysis can help reconcile several of the criticisms that have been leveled against the desirability of the comic frame. Building on Desilet and Appel's analysis, it seems that the relativist depiction of the comic frame only describes a "factional" form of comedy that reduces human life to a series of dueling comedies, all of which are equally mistaken. A "universal" understanding of the comic would take Burke (1984) at his word when he describes it as the "attitude of attitudes" (p. iii). It becomes a "meta-perspective" for "exposing meta-error" (Desilet & Appel, 2011, p. 350). From this "meta-perspective," provisional, factional judgments about an adversary can be passed through a "comic-filter" (Desilet & Appel, 2011, p. 352). Thus, the function of universal tragedy and high comedy are rather congruent: admitting that "people are *necessarily* mistaken" completes "the comic circle, returning again to the lesson of humility that underlies great tragedy...The audience... thus seeing from two angles at once [is] chastened by dramatic irony" (Burke, 1984, p. 41). Universal tragedy and the comic frame thus "offer similar experiences of humble irony" (Desilet & Appel, 2011, p. 349). In other words, dealing with an adversary may warrant violence, but not *righteousness*. Coercion and war thus chasten all; each party to a conflict shares responsibility for that violence.

Second, this analysis helps expose a central difference between Obama and Bush's foreign policies in the context of "adversarial" or "rogue" regimes. Each president used the same policy tools (carrot-and-stick diplomacy, economic sanctions, threats of military force) but with vastly different ends in mind. While the Bush administration sought to either upend the regime or force capitulation, Obama focused on changing their behavior. Such an approach required the president to forego the "satisfying purity" of moral indignation, even though he found the Iranian regime's character and behavior offensive. This strategy demands that policy actors assume an ironic double-vision that views problems from multiple angles. Such a strategy was the central

theme of Obama's 2009 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech (Terrill, 2011). One particular moment of that address reinforces this dual perspective in regards to Iran:

I know that engagement with repressive regimes lacks the satisfying purity of indignation. But I also know that *sanctions without outreach – condemnation without discussion* – can carry forward only a crippling status quo. No repressive regime can move down a new path unless it *has the choice of an open door*.

(Obama, 2009j, para. 41, emphases added)

Adversarial regimes may offend American standards and values, but the paired antitheses underscore the need for a dual perspective. For Obama, sanctions fail if they are a push out the door rather than a pull towards opening it. Harsh rhetoric and pressure satisfy righteousness, but they do not foster cooperation or provide regimes the ability to walk back through the door and into the community. Certainly, differences on human rights and individual freedom would have to be resolved in time, but for the president there was “no simple formula here” other than to “balance isolation and engagement, pressure and incentives, so that human rights and dignity are advanced over time” (Obama, 2009j, para. 42). Ultimately, Obama emphasized regime *behavior* over regime *change*. Paraphrasing Burke, the policy tools Obama and Bush pursued with Iran may have been the same *motions*, but they were not the same *action*. The distinction between “behavior change versus regime change” is far from being a matter of tone; such “unresolved tension over the objective of U.S. policy towards rogue states... frustrates the effective integration of force and diplomacy” in American foreign policy (Litwak, 2007, p. 10).

Finally, this chapter challenges the interpretation that the Obama administration abandoned engagement after 2009 for several reasons. First, the administration recommitted to the original grand strategy of engagement in NSS 2010, despite revising the document prior to its

release *because* of the turmoil in Iran. Second, such an interpretation cannot explain Obama's repeated insistence for diplomacy even after it became clear that the Iranian regime had no interest in engagement. This is underscored by Obama's insistence on the need for diplomacy even as he announced the pivot towards sanctions. Announcing new UN sanctions in June of 2010, he urged the need to keep talking: "I want to be clear: These sanctions do not close the door on diplomacy" (Obama, 2010b, para. 8). "The door to diplomacy remains open," he reiterated upon signing the Iran Sanctions Act in July (Obama, 2010c, para. 13). Lastly, the notion that Obama repudiated engagement with sanctions cannot account for a persistent theme in his rhetoric: "Iran's choice." Time and again, Obama underscored that the Iranian regime had an opportunity to turn from the events of the past and pursue a new future. In outlining "Iran's choice" back in November of 2009, Obama argued the regime needed to "decide whether it wants to focus on the past, or whether it will make the choices that will open the door to greater opportunity, prosperity, and justice" (Obama, 2009i, para. 3). Later in 2010, Obama (2010b) made it clear he "would like nothing more than to reach the day when ... sanctions are lifted, and the Iranian people can finally fulfill the greatness of the Iranian nation" (para. 8). In the face of Iranian intransigence and repressive violence, Obama recommitted himself to a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear stand-off, even if the individual tools he used to facilitate that diplomacy changed.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The formulation of grand strategy in American foreign policy has become an increasingly public enterprise, largely due to the requirement that presidents publish a National Security Strategy (NSS). The documents have been roundly criticized by several scholars of political science and international relations for being little more than “mere rhetoric,” occupying the “realm of public relations rather than [policy] analysis” (Traub, 2010, para. 2). Such a view undersells the value of critically analyzing NSS documents for several reasons. By approaching NSS documents as “rhetoric” (the very grounds that policy experts use to disqualify them) as I have done in this dissertation, several important insights emerge.

In this final chapter, I elaborate two major implications of this study. First, NSS documents are extremely helpful at facilitating comparative judgments of foreign policies between (and within) presidencies. Such insights are of interest to scholars of history, presidential studies, and rhetoric. Second, I suggest that there is a complex relationship between the NSS process, public rhetoric, and actual policy formation and execution. There are several aspects to this. The rhetorical study of NSS documents reveals a great deal of congruence between different theoretical models of the presidency, at least in foreign policy. Additionally, chapters 3 and 4 suggest that the supporting myths and stories that sustain American leadership overseas are not static, immutable structures. Rather, such rhetorical resources are simultaneously reinforced and transformed as presidencies adapt to changing situations, forge a common understanding of the world throughout an administration, and seek public identification with that world-view. Lastly, this analysis demonstrates that a significant relationship exists between the rhetorical function of NSS documents as elements of public diplomacy and empirical policy performance. Thus, NSS documents play a significant (albeit not determinative)

role in shaping foreign policy outcomes empirically and are thus important sites of focus for public arguments about grand strategy. After outlining these implications, I conclude by considering possible directions for research going forward.

Interpreting Presidential Legacies

The first major implication is that NSS documents are a rich resource for understanding the strategic world-view of different American presidents. The NSS thus has significant heuristic value in facilitating comparative judgments between different presidencies. Moreover, NSS documents are excellent touchstones for understanding how changes in an administration (due to shifts in context or personnel) translate into different strategic thinking. In the first chapter I highlighted several important historical and scholarly debates concerning the foreign policies of Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Obama. In this section, I briefly return to such interpretive debates and synthesize my historical findings.

Beginning with Reagan, the central question concerns the mix of pragmatism and principle in foreign policy throughout his presidency. The interconnections between policies and rationales highlighted in chapter 2 challenges the view that Reagan abruptly changed policy towards the Soviets halfway through his tenure. Diggins (2007) for example has argued that the administration's strategy initially sought to produce Soviet "restraint, responsibility, and reciprocity" by orchestrating a massive arms build-up and rolling back their influence throughout Eurasia (p. 352). However, Diggins believes that Reagan later dramatically changed his priorities in the second term, emphasizing a reduction in nuclear dangers, dialogue, and de-escalation (p. 354), thus placing the need to prevent a nuclear war ahead of winning the ideas of the Cold War. As I have shown, the principles of "realism, strength, and dialogue" that are espoused in NSS 1987 and 1988 are in fact a complex blend of both of the Reagans that Diggins sees. Winning the

ideas of the Cold War and maintaining the nuclear peace were both transcendent goals; one could not be subordinated to the other.

Reagan's "both/and" orientation toward the world also clarifies the differences between him, Bush, and Obama. First, Obama's insistence on engaging with different political regimes (even those judged as brutal or distasteful) and his belief in verifiable arms control strongly echo Reagan's thinking. Second, this analysis questions the interpretation that Bush was a 21st century incarnation of Reagan (at least in foreign policy). The differences between each's approach to foreign policy are simply too great and are reflected in their respective NSSs. Reagan was intensely involved in the National Security Council (NSC) process and worked to translate his vision into policy. However, "paradoxically, what made his policy victories possible was his willingness, when faced with political reality, to make pragmatic compromises without seeming to abandon his ideals" (Pfiffner, 2013, p. 81). Bush on the other hand "showed little interest in second-guessing his policy decrees" and "wanted his subordinates to form a consensus on foreign policy and then present the decider with a single course of action" (Crist, 2012, p. 421). Moreover, chapter 3 suggests that Reagan and Bush's attitudes towards military force were starkly different. Whereas caution, pragmatism and an aversion to force were constant themes in Reagan's world-view (Rowland 2011, p. 3), the same cannot be said for the Bush administration, especially during the triumphalism of the first term.

Second, this analysis revises accounts that the Bush administration dramatically reversed course after the failures of the first term and embraced cautious multilateralism. Chapters 3 and 5 both suggest that the perceived shift in Bush's approach was far more qualified and incomplete than many acknowledge. The subtle shifts in narrative that occurred between NSS 2002 and NSS 2006 actually reinforced several of the Bush Doctrine's riskier elements, including a

commitment to forcibly eradicating those governments deemed sufficiently “undemocratic.” Instead of fundamental change, activating a more palatable and familiar narrative that explained America’s role in the world diffused public criticism from several high profile experts during the second term. Moreover, the departure of several neoconservative voices ameliorated some of the administration’s more extreme tendencies and Condoleezza Rice’s move to Secretary of State significantly altered the approach to diplomacy. Despite these changes, Chapter 5 suggests that (at least with Iran) the stark moral terms of good and evil continued to hamper diplomatic progress while pushing the United States and Iran closer to confrontation. In fact, the triumphalism and neoconservative world-view that reigned during the first term spoiled innumerable opportunities for a diplomatic breakthrough with Iran and built up lasting barriers to cooperation in the second.

Third, the chapters on both Bush and Obama help to shape the ongoing interpretation of the latter’s approach to foreign policy. By far the most common response from policy scholars has been that Obama’s grand strategy is largely identical to his predecessor’s. The analysis of NSS 2010 in chapter 4 reveals that both Bush and Obama share a belief in American exceptionalism and the virtues of individual freedom. However, there are significant differences at the level of mythos in the world-views of Bush and Obama. Obama’s version of exceptionalism stresses an American identity that is *a part* of the world while Bush’s stressed being *apart*. This in turn affected how each framed the challenges of globalization in a post-9/11 era. For Bush, the challenge was to make the world safe for America by purging tyranny entirely. For Obama, it was to build new institutions and patterns of cooperation for collectively addressing security threats that exceeded the grasp of any one state. The case studies of Iran in chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate how this difference in world-view translated into divergent

approaches to a common security problem. Using Burke's (1984) distinction between factional and universal scapegoating, I have shown that Bush's approach (by emphasizing the destruction of the Iranian regime) aligned with the former, while Obama's (by emphasizing cooperation and a return to the international community) identified with the latter.

There are certainly areas of overlap between Bush and Obama's assumptions about American foreign policy. Both presidents envisioned a strategy of robust leadership and sought (or are seeking) to perpetuate American strategic hegemony and unipolar ascendancy, something both have been criticized for (Layne, 2006 & 2012; Walt, 2010). Moreover, it must be acknowledged that Obama has continued several controversial policies begun under the Bush administration, such as targeted killings and drone strikes, electronic surveillance and wiretapping, and preventive executive detentions (Goldsmith, 2012). The present study will likely not satisfy those critics who call for an immediate end to counter-terrorism operations or a shift to a radically different grand strategy, such as off-shore balancing (Layne, 1997; Layne, 2006; Mearsheimer, 2008).

Assessing the viability and desirability of alternative models of grand strategy compared to the status quo is well beyond the parameters of the present work. However, the present analysis can contribute perspective to such ongoing debates by revealing the significance of context and rhetoric. Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate that individual policy tools cannot be understood in isolation, especially when it comes to public diplomacy. The credibility and effectiveness of multilateral coordination often hinges on how allies or partners perceive American intentions. For example, without Obama's willingness to accept the political risks of reaching out to Iran even after the June 2009 protests, it is difficult to imagine Russia, China, or the European Union getting behind more powerful economic sanctions on Iran. For Bush, it is

worth asking if international momentum on pressuring Iran would have unraveled so quickly after the 2007 NIE was released if there had not been such a large gap between the president's public rhetoric and that report's conclusions. It is worth considering Drezner's (2011) analysis in a new light:

For grand strategies to matter, they have to indicate a change in policy. And trying to alter a state's foreign policy trajectory is like trying to make an aircraft carrier do a U-turn: it happens slowly at best. The tyranny of the status quo often renders grand strategy a constant rather than a variable, despite each administration's determined efforts at intellectual differentiation and rebranding. (para. 7)

The present study does not disprove such an insight as much as it provides a new perspective for viewing it. The broad parameters of American grand strategy are surely slow to change. The central motivating values within the NSS documents studied here are relatively consistent from Reagan through Obama. However, the specific mix of rhetoric, personal world-view, managerial styles, and shifts in the global scene alter the overall texture and content of American foreign policy. Using Drezner's metaphor, an aircraft carrier may not be capable of a U-turn, but it is capable of many course corrections along the way to different harbors. Simply reducing the difference between Bush and Obama's foreign policies to a matter of "rebranding" (Drezner) or tone (Feaver, 2010b) overlooks the important ways that such "intellectual differentiation" can significantly alter policy outcomes, especially in the case of American public diplomacy with Iran.

The comparative judgments this section highlights are significant in their own right. In a post-9/11 era, strategists and experts are still grasping for a durable account of American power (Leffler & Legro, 2011). Public arguments about grand strategy often rely on comparative

judgments between presidential legacies in order to warrant claims about which policies should be pursued or not. A rhetorical study of NSS documents provides critics and citizens an accessible way into the foreign policy visions of different presidencies. Thus there is heuristic value in their study even if one disagrees with my particular evaluations about whether a given policy was effective or not. By revealing how different policy pieces fit together (or at least how a given president *sees* the pieces fitting together), the rhetorical criticism of public strategy documents can aid scholars of rhetoric, history, and politics in critically evaluating the future of American foreign policy.

NSSs, Public Diplomacy, and the Executive

At the outset, I identified a broad goal of understanding the relationship between rhetoric, NSS documents, and empirical policy performance. The findings from this analysis are mixed, yet point in the direction of the significance of using rhetorical tools and perspectives to study American foreign policy. In this section, I argue that NSS documents both influence foreign policy performance and are an important area for study for any scholars interested in critically understanding and evaluating American foreign policy.

First, this analysis helps to bridge competing theoretical models of the executive. As Beasley (2010) argues, the field of presidential studies is dominated by two different models which are often held as mutually exclusive: the “rhetorical presidency” and the “unitary executive.” Beasley believes it is “imperative that rhetorical critics interested in the U.S. presidency in general and public policy rhetoric in particular find ways to incorporate both models into our analyses” (2010, p. 31). The present study demonstrates the significance of rhetoric within the executive branch in a number of ways. First, it highlights the importance of private, micro-level debates within the NSC for forging a common picture of the world and a

suitable strategy to respond to that imagined world. Chapter 2's discussion of Reagan's intense involvement in developing strategy to deal with the threat of the Soviets and the danger of nuclear weapons illustrates this. Second, I have highlighted a few ways that rhetoric can create its own context and constraints for policy implementation. Chapter 5's discussion of the Bush administration reveals how prior rhetorical choices and identifications can deflect certain policies from consideration even as policymakers attempt to adapt to changing circumstances.

Second, this analysis demonstrates that the underlying symbolic supports of American foreign policy, such as the mythos of exceptionalism, are neither immutable nor solely an ideological cover for American power. In Burke's (1969) terms, NSS documents are highly "scenic" discourses; the terrain and character of the international environment heavily influenced the overall world-view and subsequent policy analyses. As a result, central myths such as American exceptionalism are constantly shifting as different executives alter the parameters of the myth to fit the situation (Zarefsky, 2014). The significant shift in mythos that occurred between Bush and Obama (as discussed in chapter 4) suggests that discourses of American exceptionalism can be strategically adapted to reign in the excesses of American power and prepare the public for a future world with a more multipolar balance of power. Rather than seeking to lock in American ascendancy, such discourses can "prompt humility, not hubris" and "motivate people to meet their responsibilities" (Zarefsky, 2014, p. 187). Several scholars of rhetoric have suggested that President Obama has sought to do such a thing (Edwards, 2014; Ivie & Giner, 2009a & 2009b; Zarefsky, 2014). Certainly, Obama has met stiff resistance in doing so; the common theme among conservative voices that he seeks to "apologize" for the United States is but one example. He has also been criticized for reaffirming American dominance and militarism (Engels & Saas, 2013; Reeves & May, 2013; Gray, 2010). However, even if the shift

towards a “democratic exceptionalism” is a “not yet realized rhetorical potential” (Ivie & Giner, 2009a, p. 372), the capacity for change and transformation in the rich symbolic resources that make up the cosmic frame of American foreign policy has been shown to exist.

Third, the significance of NSS documents is primarily symbolic, though far from the pejorative sense of term used by several of the political scientists cited in chapter 1. The rhetorical dimensions of NSSs affect the public aspects of American diplomacy. Especially after the controversy created by NSS 2002, these strategy statements are taken as a sign of a president’s intentions, motives, and attitudes by a wide variety of audiences around the globe. Additionally, the wide uptake of Obama’s NSS 2010 by these audiences suggests that the messages of such documents are reaching important publics even if the average American citizen is highly unlikely to ever read an NSS statement cover to cover. My discussion of Bush and Obama’s NSS documents and subsequent performance with Iran demonstrated a great deal of continuity between the world-view espoused in their NSSs and their public rhetoric in significant speeches such as state of the unions and inaugurals. For better or worse, NSS documents are where different audiences of varying influence are turning to make sense of American foreign policy. They are thus a crucial tool administrations utilize to achieve identification (or acquiescence) with a particular world-view, as well as the specific policy entailments that accompany such identification.

Public diplomacy is especially significant in figuring how other leaders and foreign audiences that have relatively *poor* ties with the United States make sense of American foreign policy. The case studies on Iran’s nuclear program bear this conclusion out. The United States and Iran have a long history of using extreme rhetoric towards each other while using secret, backchannel dialogue to address immediate security concerns (the 1979 hostage crisis, the

Iran/Contra scandal, the 2001 Afghanistan negotiations, etc.). However, such a model is increasingly untenable in an age of digitally connected publics. Even a government such as Iran's is accountable to its people insofar as the regime's continued rule depends on sufficient levels of acquiescence by the public. While quid-pro-quo, secret diplomacy can work in some situations, its utility is questionable in the context of a controversy like the nuclear issue. The Iranian nuclear program evokes problems of national sovereignty, cultural pride, intrusive inspections and verification, and countless stakeholders beyond the United States and Iran. Had the Iranian regime acquiesced to Bush's demands to suspend enrichment, the country might have politically imploded given the perception that the regime was caving in to an American president who believed they were evil (El Baradei, 2011). In the context of Obama, the mix of pressure, engagement and the rhetorical recognition of the regime's grievances was crucial at multiple levels. Without the gesture of engagement (the outstretched hand) it would have been difficult to keep reluctant European allies on board for tougher sanctions and nearly impossible to persuade China and Russia to abide by them as well. Backing off of regime change rhetoric and emphasizing the ability for the Iranian regime to rejoin the political community had two effects. First, it made public participation in talks and a six month suspension of enrichment activities politically viable for the Iranian regime. Additionally, Obama has sought to hold off additional pressure from Congress that could thwart the prospects of a diplomatic breakthrough by insisting that Iran be able to return to the community of nations with enough time and good behavior (albeit under strict supervision). These findings contribute to a growing body of literature that recognizes the significant role that rhetoric in foreign policy plays as an instrument of public diplomacy (Gerber, 2008; Mitchell, 2009; Sheffer, 2014).

Ultimately, NSS documents are significant as a site for public argument beyond their direct influence as instruments of public diplomacy. The documents are one of the few common texts where members of global publics, foreign policy experts, public intellectuals, and rhetorical scholars converge to discuss the evolution and direction of American foreign policy. Moreover, because the texts provide a holistic “image” of the world and America’s role within it, NSS documents are an excellent means of finding evidence of policy change and adaptations in thinking. Charting such changes is crucial to understand how policymakers in Washington are adapting to a world that is increasingly more globalized, chaotic, and multipolar in its balance of power. Thus, even if the NSS does not serve as a “blueprint” for predicting policy outcomes, it is an important rhetorical site for bridging the realms of foreign policy and the public sphere, potentially facilitating better deliberation about the future of American leadership.

Future Directions for Research

The present study has been both a rewarding and challenging endeavor. Although extensive in some ways, it is nevertheless incomplete. I would like to conclude by highlighting future directions of research that can help to build on the insights of this dissertation. Such directions include examinations of other NSS documents, in depth case studies of the NSS and the historic policy record, additional public strategy documents, as well as the intellectual community of strategic studies itself.

The immediate step beyond the present project would be to expand the scope of study to include the NSS documents of Presidents George H.W. Bush (NSSs 1990, 1991, 1993) and Bill Clinton (NSSs 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000). Several potential research questions suggest themselves. First, how did President Bush adapt his strategic vision or view of the world after significant events such as the breakup of the Soviet Union or the decisive victory of the first

Gulf War? Second, how does the vision of American foreign policy change with the international balance of power? Charting transformations between eras of bipolar confrontation (the Cold War), undisputed unipolar primacy (the 1990s), and an era of increasingly contested power and emergent multipolarity (post-9/11) could be aided by including the Bush and Clinton documents. Additionally, there are potentially many fruitful comparative questions to be considered. G.H.W. Bush and Obama are widely regarded as foreign policy pragmatists; Obama routinely draws parallels between himself and the first Bush. Investigating the relationship between pragmatism and values (similar to the second chapter's treatment of Reagan) could be helpful at understanding a broader tradition of pragmatism in American foreign policy. Finally, Clinton and Obama have both labeled their grand strategies as "engagement strategies;" a rhetorical analysis could generate comparative insights into policies of engagement, something increasingly relevant in today's international environment (Kupchan, 2010 & 2012).

Beyond simply including more NSS documents, additional case studies modeled on chapters 5 and 6 of this analysis could help build support for many of the theoretical implications discussed above. Given that the disagreements between the fields of rhetoric, foreign policy, and presidential studies often come down to the role that public rhetoric plays in affecting outcomes, in depth studies that trace the relationship between public rhetoric, strategy documents, and empirical policy performance can foster interdisciplinary conversations and challenge all fields to question their assumptions and learn from each other. Such endeavors can also help check against misapplications, misunderstandings, and over-claimings that often occur when fields clustered around the presidency borrow from one another (Jacobs, 2013).

The relationship between the NSS and other similar policy and strategy documents could also be explored. The NSS sits at the head of a large group of similar documents, such as the

National Defense Strategy, the Quadrennial Defense Review, and the National Military Strategy. This group of documents may also exhibit some of the same rhetorical attributes that characterize the NSS. As one moves away from the NSS and towards these subsidiary documents, more and more policy detail and specificity occurs. A close study of the linkages among these security documents may further illuminate the dynamic boundary between policy-making and rhetoric.

Finally, the rhetorical study of grand strategies can turn to the intellectual community that is responsible for many of the ideas and discourses from which documents like the NSS are often built. For example, organizations such as the Princeton Project on National Security have sought to “develop a sustainable and effective national security strategy for the United States of America” by bringing together a bipartisan group of former policymakers and intellectuals (Ikenberry & Slaughter, 2006, p. 1). Such efforts seek to establish a new “national security narrative” to deal with “a time of rapid and universal change” (Slaughter, 2011, p. 2). Members of this intellectual community circulate back and forth between formal political institutions in Washington and the academy. Studying how this community has sought to craft a new narrative or world-view for American foreign policy has the potential to illuminate the evolving political imaginary of this influential public and shed further light on the relationship between ideas, values, stories, discourse, and the foreign policy of the United States.

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