Bush’s Rhetorical Handling of Power:  
An Analysis of “War against Terrorism” after 9.11

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In the field of political argumentation, few rhetoric has been more controversial than President Bush’s handling of issues after the September 11th. Since the terrorist attacks, the Bush administration has attempted to make a paradigm shift from the Just War doctrine of war as the last resort to the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive self-defense.

After his patriotic campaign to support the war against terrorism, anyone who stood against him was viewed as an enemy of the United States. In such a situation, only a few brave intellectuals criticized Bush, and called for public debate and discussion.

For instance, Edward Said, the late Old Dominion Foundation Professor in the Humanities, Columbia University, warns us by saying

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"Rational understanding of the situation is what is needed now, not more drum-beating. ... George Bush and his team clearly want the latter not the former" (2001). Similarly, Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor at the MIT and an world renowned political activist and linguist, contends: "While we should certainly seek to reach our considered judgments about questions of fact, we must recognize that it is a very long step between our opinions, however convincing we find them, and proposals for action. That next step requires argument--substantial argument when the actions proposed have large-scale human consequences: bombing some country, for example" (2002). Thus, both Said and Chomsky question Bush's use of rhetorical power when it comes to militaristic actions based on the emotional reaction.

Therefore, we seek to explore Bush’s rhetorical handling of issues after the September 11th in order to accomplish the following: one, to examine the concept of power in relation to the study of argumentation; two, to explain the paradigm shift from the just war doctrine to the Bush doctrine; three, to discuss how Bush justified his new paradigm; and last, to provide a remedy to what has happened to the U.S. public sphere regarding the political decision-making. In the end, we hope to indicate how policy issues should be ascertained and debated so that we can make a rational choice about national grave concerns.

**Power in Argumentation Studies**

In the past, argumentation scholars have developed various theories of political decision-making. Such theories may include agenda-setting (McCombs, 1981), political campaign (Jamieson, 1996; Hollihan, 2001), political debate (Kraus & Davis, 1981; Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988), to mention a few of their many possible forms. However, it appears to be that far-less-than-satisfactory research has been conducted regarding power-related issues.

It seems that there is a huge void of literature about power in the field of political argumentation. As a result, there exist a number of serious problems. First, the indirect use of power to control decisions has not been clearly defined and explored. The theorists have a tendency to focus
on the power to phrase, select, and advocate political issues, and, at the same time, to de-promote the one to control political discussion. For instance, Bachrach and Baratz note:

power researchers were blinded to the most important and insidious use of power by their emphasis on observing the behavior of parties in conflict. This emphasis constrained them to study only direct, virtual, and indirect uses of power to control decisions and prevented them from considering hidden uses of power, which resulted in what they called ‘nondecisions.’ (quoted by Folger, Poole, and Stutman 1993, p. 115)

Thus, it is necessary to conduct case studies on the power to hinder public debate and discussion among political alternative.

More specifically, Heclo indicts on policy-making structures within America’s separated and fragmented political institutions. The American administration is sometimes incapable to consistent and clear-cut decision because of its complex decision-making framework. He explains the problem of what he calls “issue network”:

In the policy-making process, issue networks can be thought of as a political configuration somewhere between a shared-attention group and a shared-action group. An issue network is like a shared discussion group without a designated discussion leader. A network is composed of individuals who not only pay attention to what they consider a particularly important aspect of public policy but who also regard one another as knowledgeable about the meaning of those issues and the options available for solving problems. (1994, p. 855)

Thus, the current political system is not only problematic but also risky in that the administration may not fulfill its political accountability toward the public, and that the public sphere may not function to keep them informed.

Although we agree that the word “power” is an elusive term to define (e.g., Lukes, 1986), we believe that with the proper focus we can and should conduct a research on power. As the situation after the September 11th illustrates, there is an obvious relationship between the presidential power to control public issues rhetorically and decision-making. Hence, an analysis of Bush’s handling of the war doctrine after the September11th.
provides a valuable opportunity to explore the power of issue control of the president of the United States.

With the above theoretical discussion in mind, let us discuss the controversy over Bush’s paradigm shift of war in the next section.

Paradigm shift from the Just War doctrine to the Bush doctrine
Within the form of war-making address the just war doctrine has long been a part of Western tradition to illustrate a permissible recourse to war. According to William V. O’Brien (1981), Professor of Theology and Ethics at Georgetown University, Western justifications for war depend upon four principle elements: one, a just cause; two, war is said to be a last resort; three, the end is proportional to the means of conflict; and, four and finally, a right intention is exercised. This doctrine originates in the *jus ad bellum* by St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and other Scholastics, and has been regarded as “the most authoritative guidance on the subject offered by the church” (O’Brien, 1981, p. 13). Once war has actually begun, international laws help define its limits. For instance, Article 51 of the United Nation Charter declares:

> Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent rights of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. (1994, p. 661)

Thus, as a basic rule, the United Nations does not grant any member state the right to wage a pre-emptive attack.

But the United Nations grants that anticipatory self-defense is permissible only when there is no other choice to defend the nation: “the only form of legally permissible war now available to a state is a war of individual or collective self-defense” (O’Brien, 1981, pp. 22-23).

President Bush, on the other hand, makes a radical departure from the stance of past American administrations in that it justifies a pre-emptive strike (Bartholet, 2002; Nagata, Katsuda, & Ikemura, 2002). On September 21, 2002, the Bush administration laid out “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” or the so-called Bush doctrine. It is a
new American strategy aimed at fighting against global terrorism. There are six principle elements in the new American strategy: one, defending freedom; two, the struggle against global terrorism is different from any other war in American history; three, pre-emptive and unilateral action to exercise American right of self-defense if necessary; four, deterrence and defense against the threat before it is unleashed; five, a military structured for Cold War-era must be transformed; and, six and last, the United States must and will maintain the forces to defeat any attempt by an enemy.

What is at stake is not that Bush considered pre-emption as a viable option since it is not that pre-emption has never been considered before. Rather, what is important is that Bush changed the definition of what counts as an imminent threat. Among these six principles, the point is that the doctrine declares a need of pre-emptive attacks:

Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today's threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries' choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first. (White House, 2002)

Thus, the new stance in American policy is marked out in the sense that the Bush doctrine allows the administration to define "potential attackers" arbitrary without asking for any clear criterion.

Consequently, the Bush doctrine invited a worldwide controversy. Although a few countries, including Great Britain, supported the Bush doctrine, it provoked harsh criticism from France, Germany, China and others. The opponents took a position similar to the Just War doctrine.

Actually, a number of experts point out serious risks in the Bush doctrine. First, the Bush doctrine "has opened the door for anarchy throughout the world as leader after leader justifies his/her actions against his/her enemies as a 'war against terrorists'" (Cook, 2002). In fact, the logic of the Bush doctrine could be equally applied to other countries. In Newsweek J. Bartholet (2002) argues: "If pre-emptive war is good for America, then why not for Russia, India or Israel?" (p. 24). Therefore, following such logic, any country can justify its pre-emptive attacks in the
name of war against terrorism.

In addition, the Bush doctrine emphasizes “the right of America to determine and execute ‘pre-emptive attacks’ against perceived enemies” (Cook, 2002). Since America has the right to name or identify its threat, any resistance against America can be regarded as terrorism. The Bush doctrine grants the United States more power, and even hinders the emergence of any strategic rival.

Analysis of Bush’s Rhetorical Handling of Issues
In this section, we examine Bush’s argumentation to justify his new doctrine of war. By argumentation, it is here meant to be an act aiming at “increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader. The constellation of propositions put forward by the arguer is calculated to achieve that purpose by convincing the audience” (Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Henkemans, 1996, p. 4). An analysis of the Bush doctrine within the public sphere is so important in that it is a site for public opinion formation, where tentative agreements on issues can evolve into a consensus, or conversely, where the terms of disagreement can be sharpened and better understood through public debate and discussion by politicians, intellectuals, and the media (Habermas, 1981; Goodnight, 1982).

After analyzing Bush’s discourses, we discovered five argumentative strategies employed to define the situation and to show the way for the Americans to go. First, Bush tried to appropriate the Americans, amplifying his “I” into an authoritative “we,” and at the same time “my” into “our.” Diamond argues the appropriation to one’s perspective makes spectators become “extensions of her desires and ideologies” (1992, p. 393). She continues and says that it is through such identification that on “sur reptitiously reinforces the social arrangements of the society it claims to mirror” (1992, p. 393).

Instead of saying, “I do something,” Bush repeatedly said “we.” For example, in an address to the Nation on Sept. 11, 2001, Bush stated: “Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came endure attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts” (emphasis
added). Bush's repetition of "we," instead of "I," aimed at politicizing identification in order to justify his argument. But it is not a one-way transformation. Typically, "we" are attacked and "I" respond—thereby both identifying the president with the nation and emphasizing the president's decisiveness and leadership. Thus, this is, of course, a staple in the rhetoric of war.

The next strategy Bush deployed is the flip side of the same coin. In other words, Bush often resorted to the use of third person, "they." In so doing, he was trying to dehumanize the terrorists. On December 11, 2001, he stated: "Staring across this divide are bands of murderers, supported by outlaw regimes. They are a movement defined by their hatred. They hate progress, and freedom, and choice, and culture, and music, and laughter, and women, and Christians, and Jews, and all Muslims who reject their distorted doctrines."

The third strategy used by Bush is a use of rhetorical question in the parallel structure. The rhetorical question is a question not intended to ask answers from the audience members, but "is asked for effect" (Morreale & Bovee, 1998, p. 211). And Bush once used the same question four times to make his speech easy to understand. In the joint session of Congress on Sept. 20, 2001, Bush stated:

Americans are asking: Who attacked our country? Al-Qaeda. ... Americans are asking: Why do they hate us? They hate freedoms? our freedom of religions, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. ... Americans are asking: How will we fight and win this war? We will direct every resource at our command. ... Americans are asking: What is expected of us? We are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them.

Thus, Bush's arguments were presented in the form of a series of leading questions and their answers. Such a use of rhetorical question enabled him to advance his arguments without sufficient proof. Bush, in other words, used the rhetorical questions not for the purpose of impression, but for the purpose of deception.

What is worth noting is what questions Bush selected and how he
went about answering them. Actually, Bush’s answer to “why do they hate us” systematically occluded any consideration of what the United States might have done in the world to provoke anti-Americanism in some quarters of the Islamic world.

Fourth, Bush employs a “false dilemma” to construe reality in sets of two extremes, as if there were only two alternatives available rather than many options (Campbell, 1996, p. 240). On Sept. 20, 2001, Bush argued: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime,” and on Oct. 7, 2001, he stated: “Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, there is no neutral ground.” Thus, Bush excluded a choice to wait and see who are really behind the terrorist attacks.

In his false dilemma, what was excluded from other countries’choice is to wait and ascertain what is going on. For instance, in the Iraq war in 2003, those countries that decided to wait and see how Hussein would react to the United Nations’ military inspection were accused by the Bush administration, saying that they were giving a time to the dictator with weapons of mass destruction.

A related problem is that Bush “begs the question,” or evades the issue, as in his “State of the Union Address” on Jan. 29, 2002. Bush labelled North Korea, Iran, and Iraq as “an axis of evil,” since they are arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic.

Thus, the phrase “axis of evil” effectively conjures up the negative image of “the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis” during World War II. But Bush’s reasoning is tautological in that the three nations are terrorist allies are seeking weapons of mass destruction, and at the same time they could provide these arms to terrorists since they are terrorist allies. In this reasoning
process, Bush provides no concrete evidence.

The last strategy is Bush’s appeal to religious authority. He repeatedly appealed to God for justifying his argument. He justifies his argument by “drawing upon evangelical hymns and expressing his conviction that events are often driven by a divine force” (Green, 2003). In other words, he justifies his pre-emptive action by saying that it is God’s will. As Howard has insisted, appeal to authority, or “to accept the word of someone, in particular an alleged authority” is “one of the most serious errors in reasoning” (1995, p. 38) when we should be suspicious or cautious.

In short, Bush’s strategies worked so well, at least, in the short term that his approval ratings recorded 92 percent high immediately after the Sept. 11 attacks. However, in the long term, it continues to slide, down more than 20 points, and lately his overall approval rating hovers around 63 percent.

Conclusions
In this essay, we have so far argued how Bush justifies his new doctrine and how his argumentation is problematic in terms of rules of argumentation. Although argument should essentially aims at opening a site for public opinion formation not by manipulating the audience, but by convincing the audience, Bush manipulates the audience to support his argument by the five strategies we have analyzed. Let us outline the following in order to vitalize the public debate and to achieve a democratic decision-making.

First, we should consider practical consequences of each political decision-making. In an absence of public discussion and debate, Bush could escalating his argument by emphasizing abstract values and de-emphasizing casualties of both Iraqi civilians and American soldiers. Bush’s argumentation is unfair, for no one can attack the already-socially-agreed values of freedom and democracy.

The powers that be have the responsibility to explain the relative worth of available policy options, especially when it comes to the importance of values. As Rowland argues,

The relative worth of competing policies can be measured only by comparing the importance of the values which the policies fulfil. At
the same time, the relative worth of competing values can be measured only by considering the effects which the values would if they were to guide human conduct. (1984, p. 48)

Thus, debate can guide human conduct as to what values need to be actualized or enhanced in what ways with what means by whom.

In fact, Bush’s stance seems to be a violation of the very tradition of American community. Zarefsky contends that “the roots of American community are dialectical and rhetorical in nature—dialectical in that they embrace seemingly opposites, rhetorical in that they grow through discourse which bonds speakers and audience” (1995, p. 10). Therefore, we must not rely on emotional reaction, but critically look at the situation by taking practical consequences into consideration.

Second, Bush’s justification for pre-emptive action without clear material evidence and his transcendental justification, e.g., appeal to religious authority, should not be permitted in the sense that any country at its convenience can exploit such justification. By saying that “God is on our side,” Bush tried to say all he said was just and even absolute. However, as Hahn rightly notes, “God is always the ally of the rulers” (P. 120). God is often the useful means for power to evade the issue. However, if we allow such a moral and religious justification without rational and practical reasons, the rule of war will become mere words, far from its actual intentions. Thus, we contend that the just war doctrine is superior to the Bush doctrine as a standard for judging the legitimacy of a war.

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, City University of New York, criticizes the situation after 9.11 harshly, and argues that the role of dissent is crucial especially in the questions of war and peace (P. 30). He asserts:

Before sending young Americans to kill and die in foreign lands, a democracy has a sacred obligation to permit full and searching discussion of the issues at stake. There is no obligation to bow down before an imperial presidency. The views of the American people should indeed have equal weight with those of the fellow they send to the White House. (P. 30)
As Schlesinger argues, debate is essential to the democratic process. Thus, it is essential to consider potential outcomes of a course of action to be taken, and compare with possible alternatives.

Finally, we should always demand accountability of the politicians in a democratic society. By accountability it is meant to be an explanation of the issue showing clear material evidence rather than one relying on emotional rhetoric and religious authority. The Bush doctrine justifies preemptive action without clear evidence of “an imminent danger of attack” by an enemy (White House, 2002). It is through argumentative strategies such as appropriation of the Americans identified as “we,” false dilemma, ideograph, and the use of rhetorical question that Bush attempts to justify his argument. Through these strategies, Bush attempts to appeal to people’s emotion.

After all, Bush engaged in a lot of argumentation to defend his policy, and he gave a lot of speeches before friendly audiences. But we are arguing that the power that be have a responsibility to subject his/her claims to critical scrutiny. Any democratic leader has such a task, especially when the issue in question is concerned with military actions.

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1) In his book, Power, editor Steven Lukes admits that “the views of power advanced seem by no means obvious,” and when explaining the articles included, he continues to introduce a discussion over the definition of power: “for instance, Bertrand Russel defines power as ‘the production of intended effects’... (in the passage included here, Michel Foucault suggests that one should study power ‘at the real and effective practices’.) ... [Max] Weber variously defined power as ‘the probability that an actor in a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests’ and as ‘the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action’.... A different approach is suggested by Robert Dahl, for whom power amounts to the control of behaviour. His ‘intuitive idea of power’ is that ‘A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would otherwise do’.... Thus Hannah Arendt rejects the suggestion that the ‘power question’ is ‘Who rules whom?’ and the focus on the ‘command-obedience relationship’ and she speaks rather of political institutions as ‘manifestations and materializations of power’. Power
is 'not the property of an individual'; it 'corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert' .... Talbott parsons, like Arendts, rejects the Weberian view of power as 'highly selective' and 'elevate a secondary and derived aspect of a total phenomenon into the central place'. Power for Parson is a system resource, a 'generalized facility or resource in the society', analogous to money, which enables the achievement of collective goals through the agreement of members of a society to legitimize leadership positions whose incumbents further the goals of the system, if necessary by the use of 'negative sanctions' .... But for [Nicos] Polantzas, power identifies the ways in which that system (the 'ensemble of the structures') affects 'the relations of the practices of the various classes in conflict': it is 'the capacity of a class to realize its specific objective interests" (pp. 1-4). Thus, the above dialogue presents us competing, probably not contradictory, definitions of power. Depending upon what aspects of power (e.g., function, form, or substance) we are looking at, its definition tends to vary significantly.

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