

Why we must attack Iraq: Bush's reasoning practices and argumentation system



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ABSTRACT This three-part article describes the reasoning practices and argumentation system deployed by the Bush administration to build a case for the war on Iraq initiated in 2003. First, it analyzes the elaborate description of Saddam Hussein's evil character presented by the Bush administration and the political implications that followed from it. Then, it analyzes the methods by which these understandings were utilized to argue that Saddam Hussein's regime (1) possessed weapons of mass destruction and (2) had collaborative relationships with terrorists, including al-Qaeda. Last, it explains how the Bush administration creatively used event-sequencing strategies and syntactical formations to help forward their accusations in public against opponents who argued that the Bush administration had lacked evidence for its claims. The overall analysis demonstrates that an argumentation system was built through a dialectical process whereby one way of speaking, thinking, and acting helped to legitimize and 'afford' subsequent ones.

KEY WORDS: *arguments, conventions of reasoning, discourse strategies, knowledge, 'war on terrorism'*

Introduction

Colonel: 'Why'd you steal it [a plum tomato] from Colonel Cathcart if you didn't want it?'

Chaplain Tappman: 'I didn't steal it from Colonel Cathcart!'

Colonel: 'Then why are you so guilty, if you didn't steal it?'

Chaplain Tappman: 'I'm not guilty!'

Colonel: 'Then why would we be questioning you if you weren't guilty?'
from *Catch-22* (Heller, 1999 [1961]: 354)

Social order is structured by practices of social reasoning located in discourse. In *Catch-22*, Joseph Heller exemplifies this principle by painting a world in which the activity of reasoning is futile and absurd under hegemonic rules,

where events in the world do not correspond to commonsensical meaning and the relationships between claims and evidence are arbitrarily determined by military authority. Hence, any given claim (e.g. 'Chaplain Tappman is guilty') can be evidenced by any facts (e.g. 'Chaplain Tappman was accused') or falsified by them in that insitution.

This absurd order was most dramatized by the functioning of the military code of *Catch-22*. The novel's main character Yossarian, a US Army Air Forces pilot in World War II, tried to be excused from bombardment duties on the grounds of insanity. Yossarian discovered that insane pilots could be grounded by flight surgeons, but they *must* first submit a request to the doctor who would issue a medical diagnosis. At the same time, the code *Catch-22* 'specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind' (Heller, 1999[1961]: 52). Since the capability of exercising a rational mind is contradictory to the assertion of insanity, soldiers could never be excused.

Such examples from *Catch-22* show that the relationship between facts and claims do not necessarily have transhistorical or universal validity; instead, they are always indexical and a part of a specific discursive formation produced within a specific power complex (Foucault, 1972, 1977). The dramatic elements in Heller's novel lie in taking the ambiguity of claim–fact relationship to the extreme such that the epistemological practices make almost no sense according to the standards of formal logic or argumentation (cf. Johnson and Blair, 1994 [1977]; Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2003; Walton, 1995), and yet they are produced over and over again because of the absolute military regime of power in place.

'Real', non-fictional examples of *Catch-22*, or what we will refer to as oracular reasoning, abound. The common judicial practices across Europe in the Middle Ages had institutionalized trials by various kinds of 'ordeals' in order to test the innocence of the accused. The accused parties were asked to perform such painful tasks as eating dry bread and cheese without water, dipping hands in boiling water, holding glowing iron with their bare hands, and walking over red-hot blades of ploughshares. Signs of choking or vomiting, as well as visible physical damage after a brief period, were interpreted by judging legal authorities as evidence of guilt. The evidential relationship between a claim of guilt and a fact from a test was based on the fundamental assumption that God would have intervened to protect the innocent and would not do so for the guilty (Henderson, 1910; Snell, 2006 [1911]).

The accusation and prosecution of witches in Old England also exhibited the arbitrariness of systematic evidential use. Legal and religious authorities collected physical evidence of witchcraft – invisible objects associated with highly abstract concepts – by screening for 'Devil's marks' on one's body identified by professional prickers and testimonies from virgin boys or confessed witches (who were believed to have the ability to identify witches by looking them in the eyes). Trials of ordeal were also oft-utilized to solicit corroborating evidence. One of the most extraordinary methods was the ordeal by cold water, where suspected witches were strapped onto a chair and thrown into a lake or pond,

which was a recognized medium of baptism. If they drowned, they were deemed innocent because their bodies were received by the medium of baptism. If they floated, the results suggested they were indeed witches and therefore would be prosecuted (Snell, 2006 [1911]). In either case, they wound up dead – indeed a severe ‘catch-22.’

These prosecutions across medieval Europe should not be simply dismissed as practices generating excuses to inflict pain and death on people pre-determined by a few authority figures to be guilty. As an indicator of seriousness, these rituals often required the representative of a group to repeatedly invoke the name of God, hence publicly committing to a tentative relationship with the sacred. The bread and cheese, boiling water, glowing iron, and heated ploughshares were all consecrated with specific texts being recited, which explained the rationale of the tests. The extent of the ordeal (e.g. the amount of bread and cheese, the number of ploughshares) and methods of evaluation (e.g. the number of days for the wounds to be examined) were detailed, and the accuser could be fined if the accused ended up passing the test(s). Such details lent the appearance of rigor, orderliness, specificity, and consistency to the proceedings. The resulting institutionally generated knowledge was, at least for a time, legitimate enough such that some accused persons actually actively approached professional prickers or other appropriate authorities to prove or verify their innocence by their examination or tests (Maxwell-Stuart, 2003).

Evans-Pritchard's field research among the Azande in Africa during the 1920s documented a reasoning practice (and by extension discursive practice) now known as ‘oracular reasoning’ that captures the essence of these reasoning practices (Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Mehan, 1990; Pollner, 1973, 1987). Oracular reasoning involves referencing a large range of events as unequivocal evidence to support ‘incorrigible propositions’ within a cultural meaning system and repelling evidence seemingly contrary to the belief. Evans-Pritchard found that when members of the Azande tribe were faced with evidence that seemed to contradict the predictions made by their oracle – for example, crops failed even after farmers made the proper sacrifices – the members did not abandon their beliefs in the power of their oracle. Quite the contrary, they used the seemingly contradictory evidence to validate the mystery of their basic beliefs, such as proclaiming that they did not purify themselves sufficiently or that the sacrifice was done hastily. Such ‘secondary elaborations of incorrigible propositions’ to explain away contradictory evidences have been reported not only for ancient Greeks (Fontenrose, 1978), medieval mystics (Cohn, 1977), and Puritan witch hunters (Rosenthal, 1993), but also among modern witches (Luhmann, 1989), Christian fundamentalists (Lofland, 1977), and scientists (Gould, 1996 [1981]).

All these reasoning practices generated knowledge phenomenologically real for *some* people in *some* historical locations. This quality of phenomenological realness is understandable if we depart from a logical-empiricist approach that treats knowledge as transcendental truth to be discovered by empirical observations and formal logic; looking at these phenomena through a logical-empiricist lens may lead us too quickly to attribute intellectual, logical, and

scientific backwardness to these forms of reasoning. Instead, if we adopt a constitutive view which conceptualizes knowledge as understanding generated by how people relate theories to observations using diverse practices, of which language use is a critical part (Miller, 1987; Willard, 1983, 1989), then we can better understand the process by which claims are legitimated by evidence in oracular reasoning practices.

This view is partly supported by Toulmin's theory of practical arguments (Toulmin, 2003 [1958]), which inspired numerous philosophical and argumentation studies. Toulmin conceives of arguments (mostly verbal and textual) to be fundamentally based on a relational system among (1) claims, (2) data, and (3) warrants. When a claim is supported by an adequate amount of data (i.e. grounds) and the underlying linkage between data and claim (i.e. warrant) is legitimate to the readers, then the claim should be legitimate and justified. Other activities, such as backing warrants with additional data, rebutting potential counter-arguments, and using qualifiers to reduce the certainty of conclusion can be seen as strategies to strengthen the structural coherence of an argument. Such coherence is key to cohesive knowledge and meaning.

Many contemporary scholars have attempted to construct standards that distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate reasoning and argumentation practices (e.g. Johnson and Blair, 1994 [1977]; Kahane, 1976 [1971]; Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1983, 1992, 2003; Walton, 1995).¹ But history shows that humans often do not apply these standards for various reasons – for example, most social discourses do not take the model of argumentation (as conceived by pragma-dialecticians). Even when applying these standards in argumentative contexts, there is still a degree of legitimate malleability in knowledge – at least on many important questions where argumentation is exercised. After all, a justified warrant is not necessarily a transcendently true warrant, and a strong argument is not necessarily a correct argument (Hitchcock, 2005; Toulmin, 2001). It is possible for a warrant to be legitimate in the 1950s but not in the 2050s, in Russia but not in Estonia. It is also possible to have two contradictory arguments that seem equally strong. Indeed, the distinctions between claims, evidence, and warrants are not always clear in actual practice (Van Eemeren, 1996: 158–9). As a dialogue proceeds, 'evidence' could transform into a mere 'claim' upon challenge, and a claim could be used as a 'warrant' once its truthfulness is taken for granted. Such 'dialogic' features of arguments are similar to features of face-to-face interaction, where the meaning of an expression at a local situation is 'afforded' by works accomplished in interactions or discourse of previous moments (cf. Voloshinov/Bakhtin, 1994: 58–9; Erickson, 2004: 12–13, 17).

Toulmin's theory of practical arguments, as a framework of knowledge, enables us to understand how the seemingly bizarre reasoning practices we have reviewed functioned to construct coherent knowledge systems in their historical contexts. If the premise (warrant) that 'God will *always* protect the innocent through a trial' is true, then a trial of ordeal would indeed seem to be a heuristic way to provide data to conclude whether an accused is guilty. Likewise, if the

oracle understood by the Azande really existed, then their interpretative practices would have made legitimate sense.²

Hence, the coherence (and legitimacy) of arguments is in every bit related to both human ingenuity and social/power relations at a particular historical point in time. Given that human practices and cultural environments are important bases of constructing legitimate knowledge, human reasoning will always carry both inherent fragility and strength. Studying how bodies of knowledge are constituted in discourse processes not only sheds light on technical questions regarding language use, but also potentially helps to illuminate particular aspects of human condition or states of social order.

CONSTRUCTING POLITICAL ARGUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE US 'WAR ON TERRORISM'

Each political policy in the modern world calls for a specific explanation built on a reasoning system relating specific claims to specific evidence. This article describes the arguments, and the conventions of reasoning constituting them, that the Bush administration proffered in the political arena in the aftermath of 9/11 under the heading of the 'war on terrorism.' The Bush administration constructed and applied a "war on terrorism" script, which is grounded in the institution of American civil religion, to justify the invasion of Afghanistan in pursuit of the alleged perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks (Chang and Mehan, 2006). The script dichotomized actors (into good vs. evil) or societies (into civilized vs. barbaric), constructed a scene of war, and explained the motives behind the 9/11 attackers (Lazar and Lazar, 2004; Leudar et al., 2004). The application of the script discursively connected a variety of ordinary events substantiating the terrorism plot. This mode of representation was 'religious' in the specific sense that it was (1) predicated upon the American civil religion and (2) related events in the world to this meaning system. Compared with rational and legal modes of representation adopted by critics and dissenters, the 'war on terrorism' script was powerful in that it created a coherent account of the 9/11 events and advocated a program of action at a time when very little evidence was available regarding who coordinated the 9/11 attacks and whether the Taliban regime was involved.

This study further demonstrates how the 'war on terrorism' script was used by the Bush administration to construct political evidence for proposed military actions against Iraq, to support specific propositions that the Iraq government possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD), had collaborative ties with al-Qaeda terrorists, and presented an imminent danger to the international community – at a time when empirical evidence was perceived as lacking. We also explore how the Bush administration's reasoning practice intersects with current scientific modes of reasoning, and how its use may change the convention of discourse governing 21st-century politics.

DATA AND RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

The documentary materials for this analysis, about 500 documents in total, are drawn from a number of archival sources. They include:

1. all key speeches on terrorism by President Bush between 11 September 2001 and 20 March 2003 (when the invasion of Iraq began), as available at the White House website;
2. all congressional hearing testimonial statements (prepared and/or delivered) by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz during this period, as posted on the US Department of Defense website;
3. documents and speeches that index the Bush administration's official positions, including the *National Security Strategy*, *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction*, *National Strategy to Combat Terrorism*, Secretary of State Colin Powell's address to the United Nations, as well as news briefings with senior administrative representatives such as Powell and Rumsfeld.

In addition, many secondary sources that describe the contexts of these periods, including international and domestic public opinion climates, were also reviewed.

Studies of the 'war on terrorism' discourse have employed particular units of analysis, such as membership categories (Leudar et al., 2004), strategic speech acts (Lazar and Lazar, 2004), grammar (Butt et al., 2004), discourse deixis and space (Chilton, 2004), informational accuracy and flow (Altheide, 2006; Kellner, 2005, 2007), cultural symbols (Wallerstein, 2002), and metaphors (Lakoff, 2004). This study focuses on *reasoning practices* in discourse as reflected in arguments.³ The main analytic approach is descriptive rather than evaluative. Our initial methodological procedure involves segregating (1) major claims and (2) evidential facts in an argument, seeing how the former element purports to support the latter. We study how cultural repertoires, discursive articulation, and speech acts played a major role in constructing coherent relationship between data and claims within the Bush administration's arguments. Wherever appropriate, we use diagrams to aid with the description.

When dissecting the corpus we imagine ourselves as ethnographic researchers entering a discourse field site. When seeing a particular argument made, we are less interested in counting precisely the frequency of similar actions enacted and more interested in asking: how is the activity of reasoning being systematically practiced in discourse, what kind of knowledge does it constitute, and what are the implications of such practices in the field? In other words, we are interested in the enabling features of an argument more than its pervasiveness. The quotes presented in this article are selected based on how well they – despite their apparent diversity – help to reveal an overall pattern by which the Bush administration practiced political reasoning to support a general case for the war on Iraq. In some cases, the quoted texts represent what we observe to be repeated patterns of utterances. In other cases, the expressions may only be uttered on one or two occasions but those occasions may be of special symbolic or institutional importance and are widely broadcasted. Our analysis reports whether the selected texts represent repeated or one-time expressions, but invariably these texts are selected with the goal of illustrating the Bush

Administration's arguments on different topics and patterned reasoning practices. Particularly, they help to show the intertextual and dialectical nature of discourse strategies, revealing the manner by which strategies used in one historical moment are built upon and 'afforded' by previous discourse (cf. Voloshinov/Bakhtin, 1994; Erickson, 2004). Texts in bold are phrases, words, or passages that we want to emphasize in our discussion on arguments and they do not represent the speakers' emphasis in prosodies or tones.

Part 1: Establishing incorrigible propositions of the Iraqi regime

INTERNATIONAL NORMS OF WAR, PEACE, AND ARMAMENT RESHAPING

During the build-up toward the war on Iraq, the Bush administration introduced a preemptive doctrine, also called a 'preventive' doctrine by critics (Chomsky, 2003), to legitimize a potential military action. The Bush administration argued that a preventive or preemptive military action would be justified when enemy regimes posed a grave threat to the national security of the USA.⁴ 'Threats,' 'risks,' and 'danger' were vague, albeit crucial, terms in the preventive doctrine, because it necessitated a process of calculation and assessment of them.

Two elements were central to Bush's claim for the need to launch a preventive strike: (1) the evil character of the Iraqi regime and (2) its possession of WMD. According to the Bush administration's argument, Iraq's arsenals of WMD created grave risks and grave threats. Iraq's ownership of WMD was onerous *because* Saddam Hussein was evil. Many nations possessed WMD, and the USA championed their possession. What distinguished a justified from an unjustified possession of WMD was the 'character' of the nations and their leaders: a good nation owning WMD would not lead to mass destruction, while an evil nation owning WMD would (Table 1).⁵ Alleged 'terrorist states' which already possessed WMD – Iran and North Korea, for example – were characterized as participants in an 'axis of evil' along with Iraq. The axis of evil states were said to acquire WMD not for purposes of national defense but for the purposes of national offense – because they were evil and irrational.

Evil and madness as international risk

In the 2002 State of the Union Speech, Bush labeled the Iraqi regime, along with the regimes of North Korea and Iran, as an 'axis of evil.' Claiming that 'we know their true nature,' Bush subsequently described these regimes one by one. North Korea was characterized by Bush as 'a regime arming with missiles and weapons

TABLE 1. *Structure of argument pertaining to legitimate national access to WMD*

	<i>Legitimate nations</i>	<i>Illegitimate nations</i>
Possess WMD?	Yes	Yes
Character	Good	Evil
Politically justified?	Yes	No

of mass destruction, while starving its own citizens.' Iran was characterized as a regime that 'aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom.' Iraq received the longest and harshest description:

Iraq continues to **flaunt its hostility** toward America and to **support terror**. The Iraqi regime has **plotted to develop anthrax**, and **nerve gas**, and **nuclear weapons** for over a decade. This is a regime that has already **used poison gas to murder** thousands of its own citizens – leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections – then **kicked out the inspectors**. This is a regime that **has something to hide** from the civilized world.

Thus, the Iraqi regime was characterized by Bush as evil primarily based on its previous use of WMD, which included the use of 'poison gas on the Kurds.' This reference was drawn from the period of the Iraq–Iran War in the 1980s and was repeated again either explicitly or implicitly in numerous latter speeches, including Bush's address to the UN General Assembly on 12 September 2002.⁶

Saddam Hussein was also characterized as an 'insane' person or a 'madman,' notably in the 2003 State of the Union address:

Trusting in the **sanity** and restraint of Saddam Hussein is not a strategy, and it is not an option. (Applause.) The dictator who is assembling the world's most dangerous weapons has already used them in whole villages – leaving thousands of his own citizens dead, blind, or disfigured. Iraqi refugees tell us how forced confessions are obtained – by **torturing children** while their parents are made to watch. International human rights groups have catalogued other methods used in the torture chambers of Iraq: electric shock, **burning with hot irons**, dripping acid on the skin, mutilation with electric drills, cutting out tongues, and rape. If this is not **evil**, then **evil** has no meaning . . .

Saddam Hussein's evil character was consistently represented by Bush in absolute terms. In the following quote excerpted from his 7 October 2002 speech in Cincinnati, Ohio, Bush stated that the lives of Iraqi citizens 'could hardly get worse,' and he compared the evil of the Iraqi regime with that of the Taliban and Stalinist regimes:

Some worry that a change of leadership in Iraq could create instability and make the situation worse. **The situation could hardly get worse**, for world security and for the people of Iraq. The lives of Iraqi citizens would improve dramatically if Saddam Hussein were no longer in power, just as the lives of Afghanistan's citizens improved after the Taliban. The dictator of Iraq is **a student of Stalin, using murder as a tool of terror and control, within his own cabinet, within his own army, and even within his own family**.

By characterizing Saddam Hussein as evil, insane, and mad, Bush tried to achieve several argumentative goals to convince his audience of the claims that: (1) extreme measures such as military actions would be warranted; (2) the US–Iraqi conflict was rooted in Saddam Hussein's character rather than in sociological, economic, or political factors; and (3) a policy of deterrence would not lessen his threat to the national security of the USA.

Bush propagated the notion that it was necessary to remove Saddam Hussein from power, because the root of the danger resided in his character, rather than economic, political, or sociological factors. On 6 March 2003, shortly before invading Iraq, Bush stated in a National Press Conference:

The **risk** of doing nothing, the **risk of hoping that Saddam Hussein changes his mind and becomes a gentle soul**, the **risk** that somehow – that inaction will make the world safer, is a **risk** I'm not willing to take for the American people.

Preventing attacks on America, as Bush portrayed in this statement, required a change of soul, rather than a reliance on international institutions; and since Saddam Hussein was not likely to do so, it is extremely risky not to act. This statement highlights Bush's discourse strategy of personalizing the source of the problem and thereby personalizing the solution.

This statement is also a good example of how elements of a religious discourse creep into a cost–benefit analysis, a practice typically used by academics and policy experts. While the Bush administration asserted that the risk of not acting is greater than the risk of acting – a seemingly 'rational' calculation – the outcome of that cost–benefit analysis (i.e. attacking Iraq is necessary) was made coherent within the 'war on terrorism' script.

Indeed, Saddam Hussein's evil character played an important part in Bush's attempts to justify a preventive war doctrine rather than a policy of deterrence. Mehan and Skelly (1988) observed that the development of nuclear weapons during the cold war always depended on a constructed enemy. First the US government argued that the development of nuclear weapons was necessary to deter Hitler, and then Japan, and subsequently the Soviet Union. Even though all these enemies had been demonized, during the cold war, a doctrine of deterrence was established to deal with them once they possessed WMD; in fact, the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty was based on the assumption that enemies could calculate a cost–benefit analysis, where each nuclear country knew that the possible cost of retaliation would be greater than the benefit of nuclear aggression.

Explaining away deterrence as a plausible alternative

Despite the historical success of the doctrine of deterrence in avoiding nuclear holocaust, Bush insisted that a similar doctrine would be questionable in the new context of the 'war on terrorism' because Saddam Hussein's sanity was in doubt. Because Saddam Hussein was insane or mad, not rational or logical, the mutually assured destruction logic of deterrence policy would be rendered ineffective. Representative Tom Delay (R-Texas) reinforced this argument on 10 October 2002 in a congressional debate regarding the Authorization For Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution (H.J.Res. 114: H7777):

Because once a **madman** like Saddam Hussein is able to deliver his arsenal, whether it is chemical, biological or nuclear weapons, there is no telling when an American city will be attacked at his direction or with his support.

In a similar manner, in a widely broadcast TV interview several months after Iraq was occupied on 7 February 2004, Bush explained why he avoided a deterrence policy:

We can't say, 'Let's don't deal with Saddam Hussein. Let's hope he changes his stripes, or let's trust in the goodwill of Saddam Hussein. Let's let us, kind of, try to contain him'. **Containment doesn't work with a man who is a madman.** And remember, Tim, he had used weapons against his own people.

Once the Bush administration and its supporters established that Saddam Hussein was incapable of the reasoning necessary for deterrence to work, the 'war on terrorism' script was invoked in order to justify placing a policy of preemptive war in its place. In the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, released by the White House in February 2003, the Bush administration cited Aum Shinrikyo's and bin Laden's past efforts to acquire WMD as examples of a threat.⁷ Listing Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Cuba, North Korea, and Sudan as the seven 'state sponsors of terrorism' which allegedly contribute to the threat, the publication stated:

Unlike the Cold War, where two opposing camps led by superpower states vied for power, we are now engaged in a war between the civilized world and those that would destroy it. (pp. 18–19)

This statement compared the personalities of enemies during the cold war and the 'war on terrorism'. The 'war on terrorism' is not a war between two civilized states that fight for dominance in power, but it is a war between a civilized society and a barbaric society. The plot of the 'war on terrorism' script – civilization versus barbarism – further mitigated against the possibility of deterrence (Table 2).⁸ Simultaneously, the possibility that these states sought to develop WMD for the purposes of national defense and international power were excluded, and the legitimacy for such actions was denied.

Part 2: Using incorrigible propositions in the technical proof of assertions

The Bush administration did not *simply* argue that the evil character possessed by Saddam Hussein warranted a need for military action. The Administration made two further specific allegations about the Iraqi government – (1) it possessed WMD and (2) it had collaborative ties with al-Qaeda. Much so-called 'evidence' was presented to the public at the time, with Secretary of State Colin Powell's presentation on 5 February 2003 to the UN Security Council being

TABLE 2. *Structure of argument rejecting deterrence as a plausible policy toward Iraq*

	<i>Iraq</i>	<i>USSR</i>
Character	Evil	Evil
Political motive	Madness/insanity	Power domination
Deterrence/ containment	Not plausible	Plausible

the culminating event for justifying the war on Iraq. On this occasion, the Bush administration presented its evidence in the most detailed, coherent, and systematic manner.

The evidence advanced in support of both allegations was highly questionable and strongly questioned. In fact, much evidence was later refuted by the government's own reports – the most famous being the uncovering of the falsified document purportedly proving Iraq was buying yellowcake uranium from Niger. Evaluating the problematic use and interpretation of empirical evidence is not the objective of this article; instead, we analyze how these allegations are afforded by the 'war on terrorism' script via the systematic use of tautological and oracular reasoning in the evidencing of claims.

EVIDENCING THE THREAT POSED BY IRAQ'S POSSESSION OF WMD

The allegation concerning Hussein's possession of WMD was a long-standing topic of empirical ambiguity among many experts involved in the international weapons inspection regimes. It was not clear in 2003 whether Saddam Hussein had WMD anytime from the end of the Gulf war in 1991 to then. The discrepancy lay between the number of WMD found by UN inspectors in Iraq and the number that the international community estimated that Iraq possessed (see Rangwala et al., 2003). Former UN Chief Inspector Scott Ritter, as well as the UN Chief Inspector in 2003, Hans Blix, had acknowledged that while it was possible that a large number of WMD remained hidden in Iraq, it was also possible that some WMD had been destroyed by Iraq's government without documentation (Blix, 9 January 2003; Ritter, 2003). Concerning nuclear weapons specifically, a report released by the CIA in 2002 stated '... Saddam probably does not yet have nuclear weapons or sufficient material to make any . . .,' indicating, at the very least, the US government acknowledged Iraq's possession of nuclear weapons was extremely ambiguous rather than clear.⁹

The level of threat posed by these potentially existing weapons was equally ambiguous. On the one hand, there were estimates that the majority of such chemical or biological weapons, if they existed, would have exceeded their shelf life, their lethality would be drastically reduced, and their further production could be prevented by rigorous international inspections. On the other hand, there were estimates that Iraq *could* possess a 'stockpile' of lethal biological weapons, that it was only years away in developing nuclear weapons, and that the regime of UN inspections had been ineffective and would continually be ineffective in deterring Iraq in acquiring WMD in the future (Rangwala et al., 2003). In the face of these empirical ambiguities, the Bush administration strenuously asserted Saddam Hussein's possession of WMD and the threat posed by the 'unaccounted' amount of WMD.

A tautological explanatory system

The Bush administration's use of questionable sources was bolstered by placing this argument within the 'war on terrorism' script. On multiple occasions, when Bush claimed to present 'evidence' for Iraq's lies and deceptions, he actually invoked as evidence the empirical ambiguity around Iraq's WMD,

Saddam Hussein's historical attempts to acquire WMD, and his history of deceiving inspectors. Here is a representative quote drawn from Bush's speech on 7 February 2003 that asserts the absence of WMD in Iraq as evidence of Saddam's deceitful and evil character:

This is a guy who was asked to declare his weapons, said he didn't have any. This is a person who we have **proven** to the world is **deceiving** everybody – I mean, he's a master at it. He's a **master of deception**. As I said yesterday, he'll probably try it again. He'll probably try to lie his way out of compliance or deceive or put out some false statement. You know, if he wanted to disarm, he would have disarmed. **We know what a disarmed regime looks like**. I heard somebody say the other day, well, how about a beefed up inspection regime. Well, **the role of inspectors is to sit there and verify whether or not he's disarmed, not to play hide-and-seek** in a country the size of California. If Saddam Hussein was interested in peace and interested in complying with the UN Security Council resolutions, he would have disarmed. And, yet, for 12 years, plus 90 days, he has tried to avoid disarmament by **lying** and **deceiving**.

In this statement, Bush did not question how it was possible to 'disarm' if the regime did not currently possess the arms. This statement fundamentally assumed that the weapons 'unaccounted for' must have existed and Iraq must have knowledge about it, so the absence of them became unambiguous evidence of Iraq's conscious, deceptive behaviors. Powell had made a similar statement on 7 March 2003, immediately after Blix delivered his briefing to the UN Security Council.¹⁰

A more blunt policy position was articulated by Richard Perle, a renowned pro-war advisor in the Bush Administration.¹¹ He argued that Iraq's current possession of WMD and the effectiveness of UN inspections were not relevant for determining whether a war was warranted or justified. The excerpted statement from Perle's congressional testimony on 26 September 2002 displays his argument. Even if nothing was found by UN inspectors, Iraq still must have possessed the weapons and military action would still be necessary:

Let us suppose that in the end a robust inspection arrangement is put in place after a year or two it has found nothing. Could we conclude from the failure to unearth illegal activity that none existed? Of course not. All we would know is that we had failed to find what we were looking for, not that it was not there to be found. And where would that leave us? Would we be safer – or even more gravely imperiled? There would be a predictable clamor to end the inspection regime and, if they were still in place, to lift the sanctions. Saddam would claim not only that he was in compliance with the UN resolutions concerning inspections, but that he had been truthful all along. There are those who would believe him. Given what **we know about Saddam's weaponry, his lies, his concealment**, we would be fools to accept inspections, even an inspection regime far more ambitious than anything the UN contemplates, as a substitute for disarmament . . .

Perle's argument to set aside inspection regimes in favor of preemptive military action has all the hallmark features of oracular reasoning. He asserts the basic premise of Iraq's WMD stockpile even in the absence of confirming evidence;

indeed, he uses the absence of evidence to confirm his underlying premise – rendering his argument incorrigible. His incorrigible proposition was further bolstered by his presumption of the unchangeable character of Saddam Hussein.

Reflecting on the Bush administration's approach to the issue of Iraq's disarmament, Blix stated that 'there was a tendency on the US administration to say that anything that was unaccounted for existed' (even though the evidence brought forth to the United Nations 'was rapidly falling apart' by March 2003).¹²

This argumentative mode was enabled by taking Hussein's deceptive character as an incorrigible proposition; even if an inspection effort found no WMD in Iraq, this seemingly contradictory evidence would not undo the proposition that the weapons never existed and that Iraq had been honest all along. Instead, such an absence only further affirmed Saddam Hussein's deceptive, evil character. Hence, within this self-justifying explanatory system, the absence of WMD became evidence of Saddam's deceitful character, and Saddam's deceitful character explained the absence of WMD.

Nothing remained ambiguous for long within Bush's, Powell's, and Perle's evidencing system. Saddam's evil character – the very version manufactured by Bush according to the 'war on terrorism' script – explained every technical ambiguity. This mode of argumentation by the Bush administration reduced complex situations understood fully only by experts into simple facts digestible by the public; it brought the ambiguous Iraq-WMD issues out of the context of expert discourse and placed them into the context of the 'war on terrorism' script.

EVIDENCING THE THREAT OF AN AL-QAEDA–IRAQ CONNECTION

In addition to portraying Saddam Hussein's regime as an imminent threat because a mad and evil man possessed WMD, the Bush administration asserted a connection – which was interpreted more specifically as a collaborative relation – between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's administration in order to justify an invasion of Iraq. Different from the discourse on Iraq's possession of WMD, which was a long-standing international concern, the discourse on a possible connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda did not become prominent until the Bush administration politicized it in 2002. The allegation of an al-Qaeda–Iraq relationship was ambiguous and begged for supporting evidence.

Colin Powell's UN presentation on 5 February 2003 was the occasion in which the Bush administration attempted to lay out the evidence for this connection in the most comprehensive and systematic manner. The main charge in Powell's presentation was that Iraq had collaborated with Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, who was described by Powell as a confederate of bin Laden and al-Qaeda:

Iraq today **harbors** a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, an associate collaborator of Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaida lieutenants. Zarqawi, a Palestinian born in Jordan, fought in the Afghan war more than a decade ago. Returning to Afghanistan in 2000, he oversaw a terrorist training camp. One of his specialties and one of the specialties of the camp is poisons. When our coalition



FIGURE 1. *Terrorist poison and explosives factory, Khurmal*

ousted the Taliban, the Zarqawi [Zarqawi] network helped establish another poison and explosive training center camp. And this camp is located in **northeastern Iraq**. You see a **picture** of this camp . . . [a satellite photo of a camp followed].

While the statement seemed to suggest that Zarqawi ran a terrorist training camp inside Iraq, the location of the camp was actually in an area outside of Saddam Hussein's control, as Powell shortly acknowledged. However, Powell's argument was that Hussein 'has an agent' in the organization who controlled that part of Iraq:

Those helping to run this camp are Zarqawi lieutenants operating in northern Kurdish areas **outside Saddam Hussein's controlled Iraq**. But Baghdad **has an agent** in the most senior levels of the radical organization, Ansar al-Islam, that controls this corner of Iraq. In 2000 this agent offered Al Qaida safe haven in the region.

The validity of Powell's claims has been scrutinized by critics and observers. Some claimed that Zarqawi ran an organization called Tawhid that was separated from al-Qaeda; some argued that Ansar al-Islam was a dissident Kurdish Islamic militant group that was opposed to the Iraqi regime, and some asserted that Zarqawi has only been a marginal figure in al-Qaeda, as shown by the fact that he did not appear on the FBI's list of 22 most-wanted terrorists (Beeman, 2003; Bergen, 2003, 2004; Borger et al., 2003). Also, much of the evidence for an Iraq-al-Qaeda link provided by Powell was based on defectors' and detainees' accounts, sources that were hardly accepted in the intelligence community as reliable. Again, evaluating whether these claims are potential technical fabrications and fallacies is not our objective; we are demonstrating that Powell often stated events or situations as if they were *self-evident* indicators for a collaborative relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda. Saying that the Iraqi government 'has an agent' in a terrorist organization – without

mentioning what that agent actually did – is only one example; the following quotes demonstrate that much of Powell's evidence for the Iraq–al-Qaeda connection was based on similar supposedly self-evident events:

Zarqawi's activities are not confined to this small corner of north east Iraq. He **traveled to Baghdad** in May 2002 for **medical treatment, staying in the capital of Iraq** for two months while he recuperated to fight for another day.

Last year, two suspected Al Qaeda operatives were arrested **crossing from Iraq into Saudi Arabia**. They were linked to associates of the Baghdad cell . . .

We know members of both organizations [i.e. al-Qaeda and Iraq's intelligence service] **met repeatedly** and **have met at least eight times** at very senior levels since the early 1990s. In 1996, a foreign security service tells us, that bin Laden **met with** a senior Iraqi intelligence official in Khartoum, and later **met** the director of the Iraqi intelligence service.

This collaborative link is warranted by the 'war on terrorism' script. Just as in the month following 9/11 when Bush used the 'war on terrorism' script to impose unambiguous, extraordinary meanings on various ambiguous, ordinary events (Chang and Mehan, 2006), in a similar manner Powell implicitly deployed the 'war on terrorism' script to assert a collaborative relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda. When accusing Zarqawi for having received medical treatment and having stayed in Baghdad, Powell curiously did not explicitly state if the events happened with Saddam Hussein's knowledge or support – perhaps because available information did not support such an assertion.¹³ But even if Zarqawi's medical treatment happened with Hussein's knowledge, the event did not automatically suggest a collaborative relation. From a humanitarian perspective, providing medical treatment could be an act of kindness; but when acts such as these are embedded within the 'war on terrorism' script they become self-evident, oracular indicators for a cooperative relationship between two evildoers.

Like the event of Zarqawi 'staying in' Baghdad, the event of (suspected) al-Qaeda members 'crossing from Iraq into Saudi Arabia' was stated as a self-evident indicator for a collaborative link, when the event actually suggested only that some al-Qaeda suspects have been somewhere in Iraq. The arrested al-Qaeda suspects could have been crossing national borders for other purposes and were arrested in the process.¹⁴ Powell's argument gains strength by deriving certain meaning out of ambiguous events embedded in the 'war on terrorism' script.

Similarly, the events in which Iraqi officials repeatedly met with al-Qaeda members were used as self-evident indicators of a collaborative link between the two groups. From a sociopolitical perspective, officials meeting would be put into the context of power relations between institutions, and meanings would be specified from within the actual interactions during those meetings and the artifacts (e.g. contracts) produced by them. Observers who have used such a perspective in analyzing these events have argued that Iraq–al-Qaeda relations have been highly ambiguous. They recognize that the Hussein regime

and al-Qaeda have significant conflicts of interest and competition of values. Any meetings, therefore, were occasions of negotiations for power (Benjamin, 2002). By removing Iraq–al-Qaeda relations from their sociological, political, and historical contexts and placing them in the ‘war on terrorism’ script, however, such meetings unambiguously suggest collaborative relations. The following utterance in Powell’s presentation exemplifies this point:

Some believe, **some claim these contacts do not amount to much**. They say Saddam Hussein’s secular tyranny and Al Qaida’s religious tyranny do not mix. I am not comforted by this thought. **Ambition and hatred are enough to bring Iraq and Al Qaida together**, enough so Al Qaida could learn how to build more sophisticated bombs and learn how to forge documents, and enough so that Al Qaida could turn to Iraq for help in acquiring expertise on weapons of mass destruction.

Power conflicts and value differences between al-Qaeda and Hussein were ignored by Powell; instead, the shared character of the enemy – i.e. ‘ambition and hatred’ – was said to be enough of a motivation to transcend their differences and to unite in common endeavors to build bombs, forge documents, and acquire WMD. Powell’s presentations show how the ‘war on terrorism’ script overpowered a sociopolitical analysis within the Bush administration.

Part 3: Integrating event-sequencing and unique syntactical forms in political reasoning

In addition to the oracular reasoning described in Part 2, two other intriguing discourse strategies were prominent in Bush’s speeches: (1) the creative organization of the sequences of events, and (2) the creative use of syntax and tenses. These discourse strategies do not simply function to mislead (or selectively re-interpret) the technical information given to the American people. They also serve the function of constructing a new convention of political reasoning that would advance the administration’s pro-war argument by shifting the kind of evidence required to legitimate military actions against Iraq.

EVENT-SEQUENCING STRATEGIES IN POLITICAL ARGUMENT CONSTRUCTION

In explaining the principle of coherence in discourse, Van Dijk states that the two imaginable facts, two propositions, or two sets of texts, cohere if they are conditionally related – the conditional relations could be an elaborative relation (e.g. statement B is an elaboration of statement A), a general–particular relation, a whole–part relation, a goal–outcome relation, and many others (Van Dijk, 1980). Consider the following ‘story’:

- (1) I got a haircut yesterday.
- (2) Today my students laughed at me.

Even though these two events can occur separately, when they are uttered together, they create a meaning beyond the sum of the two individual sentences. Furthermore, people listening to these two utterances would most likely assume a causal relationship that says my students laughed at me today *because* of the

haircut I received yesterday (Sacks, 1974); the two events (and utterances) cohere because readers detect a cause–effect relation.

The manipulation of event sequencing can serve unique functions in political argumentation. Consider the following statement from Bush's speech delivered in Cincinnati, Ohio on 7 October 2002:

Let us first consider the important role of creative organization of sequences of events:

We're concerned that Iraq is exploring ways of using these UAVS for missions targeting the United States. And, of course, sophisticated delivery systems aren't required for a chemical or biological attack; all that might be required are a small container and one terrorist or Iraqi intelligence operative to deliver it. And that is the source of **our urgent concern about Saddam Hussein's links to international terrorist groups. Over the years, Iraq has provided safe haven to terrorists such as Abu Nidal**, whose terror organization carried out more than 90 terrorist attacks in 20 countries that killed or injured nearly 900 people, including 12 Americans. Iraq has also provided safe haven to Abu Abbas, who was responsible for seizing the Achille Lauro and killing an American passenger. And we know that Iraq is continuing to finance terror and gives assistance to groups that use terrorism to undermine Middle East peace. We know that Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorist network share a common enemy – the United States of America. We know that Iraq and al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade. Some al Qaeda leaders who fled Afghanistan went to Iraq. These include one very senior al Qaeda leader who received medical treatment in Baghdad this year, and who has been associated with planning for chemical and biological attacks. We've learned that Iraq has trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases. And we know that after September the 11th, Saddam Hussein's regime gleefully celebrated the terrorist attacks on America.

We break down the organization of Bush's argument as shown in Table 3.

Bush explained to the American people why there is an urgent concern about Iraq. We want to bring attention to the sudden evocation of events #3 and #6 – that is, that Hussein's regime shares a common enemy (the USA) with al-Qaeda and it gleefully celebrated 9/11. Except for events #3 and #6, all other events were allegations of Hussein's links to terrorist groups – not so different from

TABLE 3. *Claim and evidence in President Bush's argument concerning Hussein terrorist links*

Claim	Urgent concern about Saddam Hussein's links to terrorist groups
Evidential events	Saddam Hussein . . .
	1 has provided safe haven to terrorist X and terrorist Y
	2 has funded and assisted terrorists against peace in the Middle East
	3 shares a common enemy (i.e., the USA) with al-Qaeda
	4 has allowed or provided (supposed consciously so) medical treatment to terrorists
	5 has trained al-Qaeda members
	6 gleefully celebrated 9/11

Powell's presentation to the United Nations except for the lack of references to sources. On the surface, these are simply side comments, which add no evidential strength to Bush's argument. But, this kind of argumentative disorganization and incoherence appears throughout Bush's speeches, including supposedly carefully crafted speeches such as the State of the Union addresses of 2002 and 2003. This peculiar, seemingly incoherent sequencing of events actually builds a different kind of coherence – one that is enabled by the 'war on terrorism' script.

Applying Van Dijk's framework again, the argument seems incoherent if we regard it as a discussion of a collaborative link between Iraq and terrorist groups. While events numbered 1, 2, 4, and 5 were *specific manifestations* of a collaborative link between Iraq and terrorist groups, events #3 and #6 were not. However, if we imagine the Iraq–terrorists 'link' is based upon a religious mode of discourse in the context of the 'war on terrorism' script, then *all* events – including events #3 and #6 – became *concrete manifestations* of the proposition that Iraq was linked to terrorist groups by their commonality of character – in their acts against civilization and their acts against goodness. Providing safe havens, and supposedly consciously allowing terrorists to receive medical treatment, gleefully celebrating 9/11, and sharing the same enemies are all different parts of the same argument – they are all indicators of the content of the evil character of America's enemies. While not every single activity was a violation of international laws or UN resolutions, and not every activity suggests physical threat, every single one of those activities violated the principles celebrated in the American civil religion.

Furthermore, the meanings of other events were altered because events #3 and #6 were inserted in the narrative. When linked with events #3 and #6, the discussion of the other events (#1, #2, #4, and #5) became more than a list of possible legal violations or assessment of a physical threat; they became part of the discourse about assessing who belongs to which side in the 'war on terrorism'. Taking this point into consideration, the Bush administration's participation in the technical discussion of Iraq's WMD capabilities and potential collaborative link with al-Qaeda did not necessarily mean a participation of a legal-technical mode of discourse; a highly technical discussion of Iraq's WMD and link with terrorists could only be a part of discussion in the religious mode of discourse.

SYNTACTIC AND GRAMMATICAL STRATEGIES IN POLITICAL ARGUMENT CONSTRUCTION

Let us now consider the important role of syntax and tenses in discussing Iraq's disarmament issue. Consider the following seven statements:

- (1) Iraq **has developed** WMD.
- (2) Iraq **possessed** WMD.
- (3) Iraq **possesses** WMD.
- (4) Iraq **is producing** WMD.
- (5) Iraq is developing a WMD **program**.
- (6) Iraq has a WMD program.
- (7) Iraq **had** a WMD **program**.

In terms of a technical assessment of Iraq's physical threat or a legal assessment of potential legal violations, a difference of a word could make a sea of difference. The prominent concern of the international community after 1991 (the end of the first Gulf war) was the possibility that Iraq still *possesses* or *produces* WMD (statements #3 and #4); such a possibility indicates that Iraq retains the unambiguous ability to cause massive damage to other countries. The meaning of Iraq's ongoing development of a WMD *program* (statements #5 and #6) is more ambiguous. A WMD program could merely be a set of ideas; but without the necessary infrastructure, expertise, raw materials, and technological equipments, pure ideas per se could not amount to tangible threats.

The UN inspectors who resumed inspection after November 2002 focused on detailed assessment of these two issues – that is, Iraq's possible possession of WMD and the development of an advanced WMD program and capabilities in Iraq. In terms of Iraq's past activities with WMD (statements #1, #2, and #7) these are facts already known to the international community and they were the reasons for the establishment of the UN inspection regime; the facts that Iraq *had* possessed and *had* developed WMD were not evidence for a current, tangible threat to the international community. Therefore, UNMOVIC and IAEA produced statements with precise syntax and verb tense to explain whether they had found any significant WMD, WMD production activities, or any advanced WMD programs. The Bush administration, by contrast, used syntax and verb tense very unsystematically when assessing Iraq's threat. The Bush administration often mingled tenses and syntax in the speeches we have reviewed. Consider the following utterance from the 6 March 2003 National Press Conference, shortly before the war on Iraq started:

I believe Saddam Hussein **is** a threat to the American people. I believe **he's** a threat to the neighborhood in which **he lives**. And **I've got good evidence** to believe that. **He has** weapons of mass destruction, and **he has used** weapons of mass destruction, in his neighborhood and on his own people. **He's invaded countries** in his neighborhood. **He tortures** his own people. **He's** a murderer. He **has trained and financed** al Qaeda-type organizations before, al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. I take **the threat** seriously, and I'll deal with the threat. I hope it can be done peacefully.

The claim and evidence in Bush's arguments in this paragraph can be broken down as seen in Table 4.

TABLE 4. *Claim and evidence in President Bush's argument about the threat of Saddam Hussein*

Claim	Saddam Hussein is a threat to the American people
Evidential events	Saddam Hussein . . .
	1 has WMD
	2 has used WMD
	3 has invaded other countries
	4 tortures people
	5 is a murderer
	6 has trained terrorists

The kinds of events and activities being considered as evidence for Iraq's threat in Bush's speeches are very different from the kinds of events and activities that would indicate Iraq's threat in the UN discourse. Except for event #1, all the stated events are irrelevant to the discourse around Saddam Hussein's WMD ownership and technological capabilities in 2003. This is one of the many passages in which Bush invoked Saddam Hussein's *past* use of WMD, *past* invasion of relatively small countries, and killing of people in *distant* countries as indicators and evidence of a *current* threat to the American people. Past events and activities – such as the former possession of WMD are not necessarily relevant in a political analysis because past events do not automatically inform the current situation. But Bush's evidential system is enabled by taking these events – i.e. Hussein's past invasion of countries, past use of WMD, and past possession of WMD – out of complicated political historical contexts and placing them exclusively in the religious context of the 'war on terrorism' script. He is claiming that because Iraq had WMD before, Iraq would use them in the future because Saddam Hussein possesses an evil character; Saddam Hussein's evil character – evident by some past actions of his regime – constitutes the entire *context* of discussion over Iraq's threat to the American people. The possibility that Hussein may not attack the USA because of rational self-interest (e.g. fear of retaliation) was not considered.

In sum, what would be a glaring difference of wordings and reasoning in technical and legal discussions have little difference in a religious mode of discourse in the context of the 'war on terrorism' script. Such a creative combination of tenses and grammar not only functioned to confuse the less careful and knowledgeable. It also allowed the Bush administration to engage in (or appear to engage in) empirical debates at the United Nations concerning whether the Iraqi regime possessed WMD, while in reality the questions were rather irrelevant to the strength of its current case against Iraq.

Conclusion: reasoning conventions in the Bush administration

Following the success of using the 'war on terrorism' script immediately after 9/11 to characterize the world order as a state of pure war between the good (USA and allies) and evil (al-Qaeda, bin Laden, the Taliban government) and of toppling the Afghanistan government, the Bush administration extended the characterization to include Iraq. Saddam Hussein was represented as an insane, evil tyrant with access to WMD and collaborative links to terrorists. Injecting a regime's character into the equation of international policy proved to be a critical component of the Bush administration's argumentative apparatus. Bush argued that *because* Saddam Hussein was evil – his regime should not be allowed to possess WMD. *Because* he was insane, a deterrence policy that was practiced during the cold war would be useless. He negated the possibility of making the situation for Iraqi's citizens worse via a military action that would cause many deaths and broader regional instability in the Middle East; in short,

because Hussein was so horrendous, the 'situation could hardly get worse' for both world security and the Iraqi people.

Characterizing Hussein's character in this manner was also important for arguing that Hussein possessed WMD and had collaborative links with al-Qaeda and other terrorists. Faced with an amount of WMD that was 'unaccounted for' – perhaps hidden by Iraq, perhaps already used, perhaps destroyed without evidence, and perhaps never existed – the Bush administration argued that such empirical ambiguity was the result of Hussein's deception, thereby challenging alternative theories suggesting that those weapons may not exist in Iraq. The more robust UN weapons inspection effort headed by Hans Blix that found nothing substantive did not deter Bush's incorrigible proposition regarding Iraq's WMD. On the contrary, within the Bush administration's argumentative structure, such findings only further proved Hussein's non-cooperation and deliberate deception. Regarding Iraq's collaborative links to al-Qaeda, terrorists who crossed the Iraqi border and stayed there were used as indicators of Iraq's known, active involvement in helping those terrorists. Likewise, alleged meetings between al-Qaeda leaders and Iraqi officials were unequivocally interpreted as unambiguous evidence for collaborative relations and the need for war. Even though such meetings could well have been negotiation between two groups that had well-known conflicts, their sociopolitical differences were dismissed by the Bush administration *because*, supposedly, 'ambition and hatred are enough to bring [them] together.'

The Bush administration's event-sequencing strategies helped to make a coherent argument for war. Its use of peculiar syntactical formations arguably helped to confuse a technically unsophisticated audience into believing that the government had evidence for Hussein's current possession of WMD when the government was saying that Hussein had WMD *in the past* (ca. 1980s), had the *intention* to acquire WMD, and had some form of WMD *programs*, however underdeveloped.

Manipulating established conventions and practices of reasoning can be dangerous. Conventions of reasoning help to regulate and direct social power in multifaceted ways, mediating the use of physical, military, political, and social power. In *Catch-22*, the absurd convention entrapped soldiers into dangerous duties and eliminated possibilities of their escape through rationalistic appeal and reasoning. It also brought them into a world of absurdity, oxymoron, repetition, cliché, and contradictions. The Salem witch-hunt – movement which inspired Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, and achieves the status of a popular cautionary tale – was extraordinary not only because it inflicted death and pain on the innocent but because it generated a social order characterized by widespread panic, fear, lies, distrust, and paranoia (see Rosenthal, 1993; cf. Altheide, 2006).

Modern conventions have been established related to international war, peace, and armament; they tend to operate on the stated principles of freedom, fairness, democracy, human rights, and peace. These discourses often appear to be civil, modern, and scientific (both visually and verbally), with institutions

adhering to bureaucratic and documentary procedures in meetings, and with speakers deploying academic theories, statistics, and cost–benefit analysis.

However, these conventions do not necessarily halt the nightmares imagined by fiction writers and described by historians. Certainly, even given the common set of values discursively shared by different nations and institutions – i.e. freedom, democracy, justice, human rights, and peace – what these terms mean and how to attain them invite fierce arguments and competing interpretations. The reason is that these topics are often not about technical, verifiable details but involve issues of morality, values, cultural assumptions, speculative predictions, and – last but not least – power interests.

But even given the subjectivities inherent in the enterprise of political debates, the Bush administration arguably breached wholesale standards and conventions of reasoning, seeking to institute new ones in the age of the ‘war on terrorism’. It stated many ‘reasons’ a war is needed, and, in complicated ways, these arguments are dialogically related into a coherent system where one set of established arguments serves to support another. But this new mode of political reasoning unmistakably relies on *character* as the determinant of important institutional judgments and as the basis of empirical inquiry. It is this attempt to revolutionize the existing reasoning conventions that could have far-reaching implications on world security.

The main issue under debate was technical in nature: did Saddam Hussein possess WMD? Yet, instead of accepting the weapons inspection regime as a means to find the answer, we saw in the Bush administration’s discourse egregious reasoning techniques similar to witch-hunt movements and *Catch-22* oracular reasoning, with debates over values confused with debates over empirical facts. And instead of adhering to linguistic conventions to invoke empirical facts to legitimate claims, the Bush administration used creative syntactical forms to convolute the phenomena and the discourse enacting it. All these practices – ranging from ignoring contradictory data and dismissing alternative perspectives to oversimplifying issues and applying circular reasoning – tamper with the fragility of political conventions aimed at a stable world order.

These practices threaten the institutional authority of international agencies and leaders. By disregarding argumentative norms that UN officials and international leaders try to uphold, the Bush administration exerted US dominance in determining what counts as legitimate knowledge – in a manner similar to the Colonel interrogating Chaplain Tappan in *Catch-22*, the Azande consulting their oracles and Old England authorities testing for witches.

Indeed, applying double-standards, arbitrary judgments, and oracular reasoning is a way to practice domination. The Bush administration was not only practicing power over Iraq but also exercising the power to shape the world order according to its liking outside of the constraints of international norms. It took full advantage of UN credibility and institutional apparatuses to disarm a regime. Then, it acted outside of the UN mandate to start an invasion, discrediting arguments voiced by the UN representatives and breaching the promises

the United Nations made to the regime. Hence, the practice of reasoning the Bush administration performed at the United Nations coincided with practice of power *on* the United Nations (and its members at that particular moment). This style of diplomacy had, at least for a moment, created a danger felt by many national leaders beyond the invasion of Iraq. On the same day the USA started to invade Iraq, Russian President Vladimir Putin (2003) remarked that the action created a 'threat of the disintegration of the established system of international security':

If we allow international law to be replaced by 'the law of the fist' whereby the strong is always right and has the right to do anything and in choosing methods to achieve his goals is not constrained by anything, then one of the basic principles of international law will be put into question, and that is the principle of immutable sovereignty of a state. And then no one, not a single country in the world will feel secure.

At the time of writing, the Bush administration has faced considerable repercussions in the international and domestic arenas for its deeds. A dangerous international conflict may or may not have been contained. Whatever the near future may be, the inherent malleability of human reasoning guarantees that *Homo sapiens* will never be absolutely immune to absurdity, contradictions, and clichés. But a relatively more peaceful, just, free, and secure social order can always be in the making as long as people believe and work toward it.

NOTES

1. By formulating rigorous concepts associated with reasonableness, fallacies, and dialogic commitment, these scholars aimed to be more effective in resolving differences of opinions and/or to realize of the situated goals of a dialogue, including institutional dialogues (e.g. courtroom) with the institutional aims of finding truths.
2. However, if these two propositions were widely challenged, or if the beliefs in Christianity and the oracle were weak, then the conclusions flowing from trial of ordeal and Azande rituals would fall apart.
3. Although the terms 'argument' and 'argumentation' have a variety of academic definitions (e.g. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1983: 1–18; Walton, 1992: 161–5; Willard, 1983: 20–1), this article follows Toulmin's characterization, which conceives of arguments as a system of relations between claims, grounds, and warrants.
4. An oft-cited policy document that articulated this position was *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, released on 20 September 2002. The following quote from the introduction articulated the basic policy doctrine of preventive military actions in the 'war on terrorism':

Our enemies have openly declared that they are seeking **weapons of mass destruction**, and evidence indicates that they are doing so with determination . . . And, **as a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed . . . History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act.** In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action.

5. The following statement delivered at West Point on 1 June 2002 is representative of how Bush presented the argument for a preventive strike, and it illustrated the centrality of these two elements:

The **gravest danger to freedom** lies at the perilous crossroads of **radicalism** and **technology**. When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology – when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our **enemies** have declared this very intention, and have been caught seeking these **terrible weapons**. They want the capability to blackmail us, or to harm us, or to harm our friends – and we will oppose them with all our power. (Applause.)

6. In which he stated:

We can harbor no illusions – and that's important today to remember. Saddam Hussein **attacked Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990**. He's **fired ballistic missiles** at Iran and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Israel. His regime once ordered the killing of every person between the ages of 15 and 70 in certain Kurdish villages in northern Iraq. He has gassed many Iranians, and 40 Iraqi villages.

7. Weapons of mass destruction pose a direct and serious threat to the United States and the entire international community . . . We know that some terrorist organizations have sought to develop the capability to use WMD to attack the United States and our friends and allies . . . The Aum Shinriky's unsuccessful efforts to deploy biological weapons and its lethal 1995 sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway provided an early warning of such willingness to acquire and use WMD. In 1998, Usama bin Laden proclaimed the acquisition of WMD a 'religious duty,' and evidence collected in Afghanistan proves al-Qaida sought to fulfill this 'duty.' The threat of terrorists acquiring and using WMD is a clear present danger. (pp. 9–10)
8. Intentions and characterizations aside, Bush also made that argument that the doctrine of deterrence would not work in the new era. Whereas the enemy of the cold war was a nation that had territory and citizens that could be retaliated against by using nuclear weaponry, terrorist organizations are different; they have no state, no territory, and therefore are exempt from retaliatory measures. The following quote from Bush speech delivered at West Point on 1 June 2002 exemplifies this argument:

For much of the last century, America's defense relied on the Cold War doctrines of deterrence and containment. In some cases, those strategies still apply. But new threats also require new thinking. Deterrence – the promise of massive retaliation against nations – means **nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend**. Containment is not possible when **unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction** can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies. We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best. We cannot put our faith in the word of tyrants, who solemnly sign non-proliferation treaties, and then systemically break them. If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long. (Applause.)

Note the contradiction: while this argument might legitimize a military action against terrorist organizations, it failed to explain the necessity for military actions against nations – which had territories and citizens to defend.

9. The full sentence in the document is: 'Although Saddam probably does not yet have nuclear weapons or sufficient material to make any, he remains intent on acquiring them.'
10. Powell stated:

If Iraq genuinely wanted to disarm, we would not have to be worrying about setting up means of looking for mobile biological units or any units of that kind. They would be presented to us. We would not need an extensive program to search and look for underground facilities that we know exist. The very fact that we must make these requests seems to me to show that Iraq is still not cooperating.
11. Richard Perle, who played a leadership role in the neoconservative faction of American politics, was appointed by President Bush to be Chairman of the Defense Policy Board, an influential advisory group to the US Department of Defense, from 2001 to 2003.
12. In an interview on CNN Late Edition on 21 March 2004, Hans Blix explained retrospectively:

Well, I think it's clear that in March when the invasion took place the evidence that had been brought forward was rapidly falling apart. And we had called attention to a number of points. One was that **there was a tendency on the US administration to say that anything that was unaccounted for existed, whether it was sarin, or mustard gas or anthrax.** Another one related to the case that Colin Powell presented to the Security Council about a site in which they held that there had been chemical weapons and that they had seen **decontamination trucks.** Our inspectors had been there and they had taken a lot of samples, and there was no trace of any chemicals or biological things. And the trucks that we had seen were **water trucks.** And, of course, the more spectacular of all was what my friend Mohamed revealed in the Security Council, namely that the alleged contract by Iraq with Niger to import yellow cake, that is uranium oxide, that this was a forgery, and the document had been sitting with the CIA and their U.K. counterparts for a long while, and they had not discovered it. And I think it took the IAEA a day to discover that it was a forgery.
13. One intelligence source in Washington, who has seen CIA material on the link [between Baghdad and Osama bin Laden], described the case as 'soft' and 'squishy' . . . That case relies heavily on a man called Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian member of the al-Qaida leadership who was wounded in the leg in the US-led bombing of Afghanistan. In late 2001, according to US intelligence sources, he sought medical treatment in Iran but was deported and fled to Baghdad, where his leg was amputated. Telephone calls he made to his family in Jordan were intercepted. The question is whether Saddam Hussein's regime knew who he was and whether it offered him any assistance. Yes, we have him telling his family I'm here in Baghdad in hospital, but he's not saying: 'And by the way, I'm getting all this help from Saddam,' said a well-informed source in Washington. (Borger et al., 2003)
14. In other countries with considerable expertise, investigators said they have come across scattered examples of limited connections: An Iraqi member of Al Qaeda turned up in an Italian case. **There are signs of Al Qaeda suspects moving through Iraq en route to other countries before and after Sept. 11, according to Spanish and French law enforcement. But European investigators said the Al Qaeda presence is stronger in Pakistan, Syria,**

Yemen and Iran than it is in Iraq. Since the war in Afghanistan, Iran in particular has become a busy refuge for Bin Laden's operatives, according to French investigators. (Rotella, 2002)

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APPENDIX

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