THE OPTION ON THE TABLE: OBAMA'S RHETORIC AND THE CASE FOR MILITARY CONFLICT WITH IRAN

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ABSTRACT

THE OPTION ON THE TABLE: OBAMA'S RHETORIC AND THE CASE FOR MILITARY CONFLICT WITH IRAN

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The following analysis seeks to demonstrate how the Obama administration, through its rhetoric, is attempting to build public support for a potential military conflict with Iran. Further, the study seeks to show how the language of the Obama administration rhetorically creates the reality of the foreign policy relationship between Iran and the United States. The study begins with a brief overview of the US-Iran foreign policy relationship over the course of President Obama's first term. The analysis then focuses on three primary areas: the political myth of the inevitability of military conflict with Iran, the Just War rhetoric of the Obama administration, and the relationship between official-level rhetoric, the media, and public opinion. Finally, future possibilities of peace and military conflict are considered. The study analyzes official-level speeches, addresses, debates, and press briefings delivered between January 2012 and March 2013. The study of political rhetoric exposes the ways in which language informs foreign and military policy. Understanding the rhetorical construction of foreign policy relationships and exploring how public support for military conflict is acquired may offer insights into how military conflict could be prevented in the future.

INTRODUCTION

"On every hand, we find men...preparing themselves
for the slaughter, even to the extent of manipulating
the profoundest grammatical, rhetorical, and symbolic
resources of human thought to this end."
            --Kenneth Burke*, A Rhetoric of Motives*

Words are never just words. Words are symbols, the medium through

which we think, reason, interpret and respond to the world around us. Symbols—

including not only words but sounds, gestures, and even objects—are imbued

with meanings that somehow rise above the words, sounds, gestures, and

objects themselves. Words and other symbols can be pieced together to form

narratives and myths, tapestries of meaning which may evolve further into

ideologies, which in turn affirm ways of living in relation to cultural descriptions of

reality. Wayne C. Booth, in his manifesto *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric* (2004),

describes three realities. The first deals with non-contingent realities, the second

with non-contingent-but-changeable realities, and the third with contingent

realities. It is Booth's third concept of reality in which the following analysis is

grounded, as this reality is where rhetoric happens.[1] Contingent reality, as Booth

describes it, is constructed through rhetoric, which he defines as "the whole

range of [communicative] arts not only of persuasion but also of producing or

reducing misunderstanding" (10). Our interpretations of events, the language

through which and by which we interpret them, and our ability to persuasively

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[1] Booth considers non-contingent realities to be unchangeable. His example is one of a teacup falling to the floor; it's splintering into pieces is conditioned upon gravity and the materials and construction of the cup, which are unchangeable truths. Non-contingent-but-changeable realities, Booth argues, are "the history of how nature moves from contingency to contingency" (14). He gives weather-related changes in geography as examples.

communicate our interpretations create this aspect of reality in which we live. For Booth this can be as simple as the reality of my relationship with my significant other after we have just been in a fight, or as complex as the construction of war. Booth argues that "*rhetoric makes realities"* and, further, rhetoric "creates a multiplicity of judgments about what the realities *really* are" (16, emphases in original). Even war may arise through rhetoric. War is *created* through language structures, figures of reasoning, heuristic cues, and language surrounding symbols, myths, and narratives. Booth states that "the rhetoric of President Bush, Prime Minister Blair, and Saddam Hussein *made* the Iraq war of spring 2003" (14-15). Words accomplish action.

Words accomplish action, and for that reason political leaders take great care in choosing what they say. I will attempt to show, in the following analysis, that the Obama administration is saying that the US and its ally Israel are facing a dire threat from Iran. They are saying that Iran must not be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon, and that international efforts to coax Iran to scale back its nuclear program through diplomatic means and sanctions are not working. They are saying that if Iran does not meet its international obligations to halt its nuclear program the United States is prepared to go to war to keep Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

While the Obama administration argues that the United States is prepared for a war with Iran, the US is unlikely to engage in a full-scale conventional war with the country for a number of reasons.[2] First, over ten years of war in

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[2] Defining what constitutes "war" is tricky. By "war," here, I am referring to a large-scale military-to-military confrontation. Although I use the word "war" throughout this essay, I hesitate to do so for a

Afghanistan and Iraq have drained the United States economically. The US has spent over four trillion dollars funding our military campaigns overseas. A war with Iran would be devastating in terms of military and civilian casualties. Politically, a war with Iran would strain US relations with Russia and China. War with Iran could potentially draw the world into another world war. A unilateral attack by Israel could destabilize the region and strengthen support for Iran in the region, though Israel would be unlikely to strike Iran without the United States' full military support. Iran would be unlikely to attack Israel as well, because even if Iran produced a nuclear weapon and launched it at Israel, Iran would not be prepared to deal with an Israeli counterstrike (Brzezinski). Also, if Iran attacked Israel, the international community would likely sympathize with Israel, which could weaken Iran's position in the region. Further, Iran is not likely to attack the United States, at least not directly. Iran does not have a navy or air force capable of bringing the fight to America's soil. Iran does possess the capacity to strike other American targets. But Iran is unlikely to engage in a direct attack except in the case of self-defense. Again, an Iranian attack on the US or its bases would galvanize international support for the US and destabilize Iran's influence in the region to an extent greater than sanctions have been able to accomplish.

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number of reasons. The word "war" makes the situation sound as if there are two roughly equal sides battling it out. Any conventional war between the United States and Iran, even if making the assumption that the US and Iran were the sole participants, would be asymmetrical. The amount of money the United Sates spends on its military is disproportionately large compared to Iran ("SIPRI Military Expenditure Database"). There have been a number of instances that may be considered military attacks from both Iran and the United States: providing financial and military support for certain groups the other nation considers an enemy, assassination attempts, and cyber attacks. This type of activity is likely to continue, and deserves further consideration.

In spite of these reasons for not going to war, the Obama administration is threatening military conflict with Iran over its development of nuclear weapons, even though Iranian leaders have stated repeatedly that the purpose of Iran's nuclear program is not to develop weapons but is instead a part of a peaceful plan to develop energy and medical technology. US leaders have good reasons to question the legitimacy of Iran's words—after all it is the government's responsibility to remain skeptical in order to ensure American security. However, the Obama administration appears to be ignoring its own intelligence when it comes to Iran's intentions of building a nuclear weapon. Former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta stated in an interview for *Meet the Press* in February of this year, "What I've said, and I will say today, is that the intelligence we have is they [Iran] have not made the decision to proceed with the development of a nuclear weapon" ("Sec. Panetta"). When urged by *Meet the Press* Contributing Editor Chuck Todd, Panetta reiterated the statement: "I can't tell you they [Iran] are in fact pursuing a weapon because that's not what intelligence says they are doing right now." Even though the Defense Secretary himself acknowledges that there is no evidence that Iran is planning to develop nuclear weapons, Obama and others in his administration continue to argue that Iran does intend to build a nuclear bomb. Further, there is evidence that the American public may be buying the argument. What I attempt to show in the following analysis is that, through its rhetoric, the Obama administration is attempting to build public support for military conflict with Iran.

A survey by the Pew Research Center, which took place February 8-12, 2012, found that 58% of Americans would support a war with Iran in order to prevent the country from developing a nuclear weapon ("Public Takes Strong Stance"). By November 15 of the same year, 79% of Americans cited preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon as one of the three most important goals for Obama during his second term in office (Saad). These data are taken from polls by different agencies using different questions and sampling methods. These data, however, match the general trend I discovered through analysis of the rhetoric of the Obama administration over the course of that time period. Official-level rhetoric became increasingly hawkish. At the same time, public perceptions of the importance of preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon—even if it means military conflict—rose comparatively. It may be impossible to determine exactly what caused such a dramatic shift in American's opinions concerning the importance of halting Iran's ability to produce a nuclear weapon, particularly since US intelligence indicates that Iran has no intention of building such weapons. The following rhetorical analysis, however, may be able to shed light on the relationship between American public support for military conflict and the rhetoric of the Obama administration.

In the coming chapters I will explore the rhetoric of the Obama administration as it attempts to construct a reality in which military conflict with Iran is necessary, and the persuasive aspects of Obama's rhetoric as it pertains to building public support for such a conflict. In the first chapter I will briefly summarize US-Iranian foreign relations as they have evolved over the course of

Obama's first term in office to where the US currently stands in relation to Iran. In Chapter Two I will look at how information shortcuts, or heuristic cues, are created out of language and how these shortcuts shape the way the public conceives of foreign relations and international events. Then, I will show how Obama's rhetoric establishes and promotes a myth of inevitable military conflict with Iran. In the third chapter, I will examine the rhetoric of the Obama administration in light of establishing the principles of Just War Theory, which is a philosophical framework for determining the morality of going to war. The fourth chapter is a consideration of the relationship between elite rhetoric, the media, and public opinion. In Chapter Five I will look at predictions and suggestions about the direction US foreign policy should take concerning Iran. Finally, I will conclude with a summary of my findings and offer suggestions for future study.

For this study I analyzed speeches, debates, press briefings, and addresses by President Obama and members of his administration. Aside from the brief foreign policy background I provide in the first chapter, most of the official-level language I analyze comes from the period between January 2012 and March 2013.

Any rhetorical analysis requires selecting some bits of language and discarding others. The selection process is always, at least in part, a subjective act. In selecting the language I have used to support my thesis I, too, rhetorically construct a "truth," a truth based no more in objective reality than that of the foreign policy relationship between Iran and the United States. Realities are created through rhetoric.

My intended audience, I assumed, would be skeptical of the idea that Obama was attempting to build public support for military conflict. The language I chose to include in this study reflects my attempt to appeal to my imagined audience. I would like to state up front that I am not convinced that President Obama, nor those in his administration, *want* to go to war with Iran. What I attempt to show is how Obama may be building support for military conflict, not that he is necessarily trying to initiate it. However, US foreign policy with the country is precarious. No one really knows what may happen. In order to place the following analysis within its particular political and historical context I will begin with a brief overview of the foreign policy relationship between the US and Iran over the course of Obama's first term in office.

CHAPTER ONE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY WITH

IRAN

Tensions between the United States and Iran are higher now than at any point in the last twenty years. A 2012 poll by Gallup shows that Americans have consistently rated Iran as America's greatest enemy over the last six years, beating out North Korea, China, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Newport). The trend transcends partisanship, with Republicans, Democrats, and Independents in agreement. Over the last year, the number of Americans citing Iran as the greatest enemy has continued to rise. What accounts for the growing fear of Iran within the American public? Is Iran as much of a threat as Americans perceive it to be? What is really happening between Iran and the US?

In 2003, Iran was at its weakest. The country was surrounded by aggressive US military forces numbering in the hundreds of thousands in Afghanistan and Iraq. Iran's nuclear program was at a dead halt. Further, Iran was under intense international pressure to aid in the fight against terrorism. After being lumped in with Bush's "axis of evil," and recognizing its declining influence in the region, the Iranians attempted to open negotiations with Washington. In a document approved by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran sent a proposal that seemed too good to be true. Iran agreed to formally recognize Israel and support a two-state solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict; to aid in every effort to combat terrorism, including al-Qaeda; to end its affiliation with groups the US determined to be terrorist organizations, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad; and to allow full

access to international inspections of its nuclear program. The Bush administration, however, rejected the proposal with the administration's characteristic hawkish and ideological response: "we don't talk to evil" ("Washington 'Snubbed'").

Two major events occurred in 2005, however, which caused dramatic changes in Iran's position in relation to the United States. First, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected to Iran's presidency. The intentionally incendiary tone of the hard-line conservative's rhetoric against the United States, the UN, and Israel signaled a change from the relatively moderate tone set by the previous president, Mohammad Khatami. Second, Iran pledged to restart its nuclear program in direct violation of international pressure. These events rekindled the twenty-five-year-old enmity between Iran and the US.

The election of Barak Obama in 2008 was seen by some reformists in Iran as an opportunity to re-engage in direct negotiations. Obama stated in his 2009 Inaugural address:

> To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on
> mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around
> the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's
> ills on the West, know that your people will judge you on
> what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling
> to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of
> dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but

that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your

fist. (Phillips)

There is no doubt that this section of the address is directed, at least, in part, to

Iran. Ahmadinejad has long been an outspoken critic of the United States and

has blamed the West for much of the ills he sees in Muslim society. Obama's

language in this address is, on the one hand, damning. But in comparison to

Bush's outright refusal to engage in any kind of negotiations with Iran, some

Iranian reformists saw it as a step forward. That a sitting American president

would offer to "extend a hand" in any way to Iran marked a change in attitude.

Leaders in Iran have vocally expressed grievances over the lack of respect the

Islamic Republic receives among the international community. Obama's

statement that a "new way forward" would be based on "mutual respect"

demonstrated his willingness to listen to and address issues important to Iran.

A few months later, at midnight on March 20, 2009, Obama made a

controversial move by posting a video on YouTube marking the Iranian New

Year, *Nowruz* (Black). In the message, Obama appeals directly to the Iranian

people, highlighting changes between his new administration and the

administration of George W. Bush. "My administration," he says, "is now

committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us. . . .For

nearly three decades relations between our nations have been strained. . . .But

at this holiday we are reminded of the common humanity that binds us together."

In a marked change in tone from Bush's "axis of evil" comments, Obama states:

"This process will not be advanced by threats. We seek instead engagement that

is honest and grounded in mutual respect." However, Obama's New Year's message was received with skepticism, according to Trita Parsi of the National Iranian American Council (Parsi 65-66). Parsi notes in *A Single Roll of the Dice* (2012) that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made a cautious response to Obama's message, in which the Supreme Leader brought up three important doubts. Khamenei was unsure if Obama had the power to engage in direct diplomacy with Iran in the face of American political and corporate opposition. He also expressed skepticism about Obama's sincerity. So far, Iran had seen a change in official-level rhetoric, but there were no concrete indications that American foreign policy would change strategically. Finally, as long as the Obama administration continued to pursue further sanctions, Khamenei refused to engage in direct diplomacy with the United States.

Khamenei's fears may have been justified. Early on, the Obama administration adopted the dual-track strategy, a policy based on a review authored by US Envoy to the Middle East, Dennis Ross. Ross's "hybrid option" involved a push for non-conditional engagement with Iran, backed by international sanctions. The inclusion of diplomacy without preconditions was a dramatic break form Bush's policy of non-engagement, but the threat of sanctions led to skepticism among the Iranian hard-liners.

Despite this skepticism, the US and Iran did attempt talks a number of times in early 2009. An event occurred in Iran, however, which left attempts at direct diplomacy in the dust. The reelection of Ahmadinejad in June 2009 was probably the most contested election in Iran since the Revolution and the fall of

the shah in 1979. Ahmadinejad was challenged by Mir Hussein Mousavi, a political figure who denounced Ahmadinejad's foreign policy toward the West. As Parsi notes, "tensions with the United States did not serve Iran's interests, Mousavi believed, and Ahmadinejad had pursued an extreme policy that had raised tensions without bringing Iran any dividends" (82). Mousavi was seen as the candidate likely to unseat the current president. Ahmadinejad, however, through voter fraud, raids, and public and secret arrests of opposition leaders, and media outlets, was reelected in a landslide victory.[3] When, two days after the election, the Supreme Leader announced that Ahmadinejad was indeed the winner, millions of Iranians flooded the streets of Tehran demanding justice. The protests that followed were brutal, with thousands arrested and dozens dead. While Obama initially tried to avoid taking sides in order to allow time for regime change in Iran from within, Obama's political rivals and pro-Israeli groups began demanding a tougher approach. As Parsi notes, "By late November 2009, weeks before his official deadline for progress on diplomacy, President Obama gave the green light to the sanctions track" (151).

Economic sanctions may result in negative consequences in both philosophical and practical terms. On a philosophical level, economic sanctions run counter to American ethical values of democracy and human rights. Durson Pesken and A. Cooper Drury conducted a study from which they concluded that the effects of sanctions often help authoritarian rulers consolidate power and give them the incentive to restrict human rights and shut down political opposition,

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[3] For more information about the Iranian election of 2009, and the resulting conflict that ensued in the nation, see "Chapter Six: Fraud" in Parsi's *A Single Roll of the Dice* (2012).

which is harmful to the democratic principles on which this country was founded (Pesken and Drury). On a practical level, the sanctions imposed on Iran may be having the exact opposite effect than they are intended. Instead of pressuring Iran to cease enriching uranium and drop its nuclear program, the sanctions imposed by the US and its allies may be seen as the driving force behind Iran's push to expand its nuclear capabilities. Economic sanctions have the effect of backing Iran into a corner, making the nation desperate to find a way of expanding its regional power. Possessing a nuclear weapon would put Iran in a better position to extend its own influence in the Middle East and beyond. Considering that Iran is surrounded by US military bases and naval forces it may be that Iran seeks a nuclear arsenal in order to defend itself from what it sees as a threat to its own national security.

But in the run up to the 2012 elections, Obama announced yet another round of sanctions against Iran, restricting its ability to sell oil through the help of foreign banks. The announcement came as Obama and his challenger Mitt Romney each sought to surpass the other on who could portray himself tougher on Iran. I am convinced that Obama's new sanctions were not merely a political move designed to bolster his image at home, but were in fact in line with his new, more hawkish stance on Iran. In the next chapter I will try to demonstrate this new stance through an analysis of the Obama administration's rhetoric. Specifically, I will point to the Administration's use of rhetoric to establish reality and persuade Americans to support a potential military conflict with Iran.

CHAPTER TWO: RHETORIC OF THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

If, as Wayne C. Booth argues, language creates and informs reality as we know it, then the study of rhetoric becomes crucial to understanding how realities are constructed. Political leaders choose carefully the rhetoric they employ. It is no accident that, as I will show, a number of leaders in the Obama administration use a variety of nearly identical phrases and turns of speech. Leaders work together to frame reality through language, to rhetorically construct a way of understanding that they want the American people to share. By exploring the rhetoric of the Obama administration, I hope to shed light on the way rhetoric is used to promote to the American people an officially-sanctioned interpretation of the foreign policy relationship between the US and Iran, thus constructing the reality of the situation. Additionally, I hope to show how the rhetoric of the Obama administration is geared toward persuading Americans to support a potential military conflict with Iran. In this section I will explore two rhetorical strategies used by the Obama administration: the heuristic cues *nuclear, threat,* and *regime*, and the political myth of inevitable military conflict with Iran.

HEURISTIC CUES

Samuel L. Popkin, in his book *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns* (1994), argues that voters' use of low-information rationality, in the form of information shortcuts, is effective for helping people with little textbook knowledge to evaluate information and make informed decisions. Low-information rationality, as Popkin explains, is a type of "'gut'

rationality" which "draws on various information shortcuts and rules of thumb that voters use to obtain and evaluate information" (7). This type of reasoning, Popkin argues, "offer[s] people a way to connect personal and political information, to project that information into the future, and to make a complete picture from limited information" (214).

While I agree with the premise that Americans use information shortcuts instead of taking the time to study and research political issues, I disagree with Popkin that such shortcuts actually help people to form an accurate picture. [4] Nonetheless, people do frequently use information shortcuts in order to make decisions. The problem is that arriving at a conclusion without careful consideration of the complexities of a particular situation or event opens the door to being manipulated. Political leaders recognize the effectiveness of targeting citizens' propensity for low-information rationality. That is why they encourage the repetition of succinct phrases and slogans as a method of persuasion. If a complex concept is compressed into a terse statement or idea and is repeated often enough, many people will come to see it as a reflection of reality. Through this process heuristic cues are constructed. A heuristic is a commonsense rule that guides people in learning, solving problems, and making decisions. Leaders, through language, can create heuristic cues to manipulate the way people interpret and respond to information. For example, instead of referring to what the military calls *chemical and biological agents* in the buildup to the Iraq War, the Bush administration made a point to use the phrase *weapons of mass*

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[4] A number of political scientists disagree with Popkin's ideas. See Bartels's "The Irrational Electorate" for an in-depth counterargument to Popkin's claims.

destruction (Zoglin and Novack). *Weapons of mass destruction* sounds more

fierce and dangerous than the technical-sounding nomenclature used by the

military. The phrase caught on in the media, which repeated it endlessly. The

phrase proved exceptionally effective at heightening the sense of urgency that

the Bush administration relied upon to gain popular support for war. In this

section I will demonstrate how the Obama administration has constructed three

information shortcuts with which to guide the low-information rationality on which

many Americans rely, the heuristic cues: *nuclear, threat, and regime*.

Early on in Obama's first term, the Obama administration made an effort

to change the tone in Washington. In "Ten Years On: Obama's War on Terrorism

in Rhetoric and Practice" (2011), political scientist Trevor McCrisken explains that

President Obama made a conscious decision to reframe the narrative of the *war

on terror*. McCrisken argues that Obama wanted to change the George W. Bush-

era ideology associated with the phrase. One way that McCrisken argues that

Obama did this is by establishing new narratives of nuclear disarmament and

non-proliferation. But, cautions McCrisken, "while the message has changed . . .

the policies have shifted less" (782). Obama may have made a point to stop

using the phrase "war on terror," but he continues to use language which may

have the effect of manipulating the public to see Iran and Obama's policies

toward the country in a certain light.

First is the association of the nation of Iran and the term *nuclear.* The word

nuclear brings to mind images of the Cold War arms race, WWII, and explosions

at Fukushima and Three-Mile Island. *Nuclear* is not a value-free word, but is

instead loaded with negative connotations. In the third presidential debate during the 2012 election cycle, President Obama stated "as long as I'm President of the United States, Iran will not get a nuclear weapon" ("Remarks by the President and Governor Romney"). In making this assertion Obama assumes that Iran is seeking to build a nuclear weapon, even though there is no intelligence supporting the assumption and Iran has always insisted that its nuclear program is for the peaceful production of energy and medical technology. Some leaders in Washington, however, are convinced that Iran is attempting to build a nuclear weapon which, of course, is the crux of the conflict between the US and Iran. Both candidates in the third presidential debate repeatedly associated the words *Iran* and *nuclear*. Obama and Mitt Romney together used the phrase "nuclear Iran" or "nuclear-capable Iran" six times in the debate. Using *nuclear* as a modifier for the word *Iran* establishes in the audience an association of these words, an association which over time may stick in people's minds and manipulate the way they think about the nation of Iran.

The Obama administration also used the association in speeches aimed at an international audience. Both President Obama and former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta used this association in their addresses to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a pro-Israeli lobbying group, in early March 2012. Together they made the connection six times, using such phrases as "nuclear-armed Iran," "Iran's nuclear program," and "an Iranian nuclear weapon" ("Remarks by the President at AIPAC," "Defense Secretary"). Obama

also referred to "a nuclear-armed Iran" at the meeting of the UN General

Assembly on September 25, 2012 ("Remarks by the President to the UN").

The association of the words *nuclear* and *Iran* collapses two meanings

that can be associated with the word *nuclear*—nuclear weapons and nuclear

energy. By collapsing these meanings, the Obama administration may be

creating a heuristic cue. If the phrase *nuclear Iran* comes to have only one

possible meaning—an Iran that possesses nuclear weapons—then the Obama

administration has created a heuristic for Americans to use when considering

their support for military conflict with Iran, whether that was Obama's intention or

not.

Another problematic combination of terms is the association of Iran with

the word *threat*. What constitutes a threat? Does the vitriolic rhetoric coming from

Iran alone constitute a threat to the United States? Perhaps so, inasmuch as

American rhetoric constitutes a threat to Iran. But, as noted earlier, Iran is

unlikely to attack the US or Israel, even if the country were to possess a nuclear

weapon. In the third presidential debate, both President Obama and Governor

Romney went to great lengths to portray Iran as a threat. Romney stated: "The

greatest threat of all is Iran," and "Iran is the greatest national security threat we

face." Further, Romney declared that "with regards to Iran and the threat of

Iran—there's no question but that a nuclear Iran, a nuclear-capable Iran is

unacceptable to America. It presents a threat not only to our friends, but

ultimately a threat to us to have Iran have nuclear material, nuclear weapons that

could be used against us or used to be threatening to us." Here Romney

connects *Iran, nuclear,* and *threat*, producing multiple associations at once.

Perhaps the most vitriolic language Romney uses in regards to Iran is when he

promises "I'd make sure that Ahmadinejad is indicted under the genocide

convention. His words amount to genocide incitation." Here, Romney appears to

concede that words themselves may constitute more than a threat; they have the

potential to incite, or bring about, genocide. Romney appears to agree with

Booth's idea that reality is created rhetorically. Through powerful and persuasive

language events can be set in motion which establish and alter the reality of

those who experience them.

Obama's rhetoric in the debate was just as hawkish as Romney's. The

first time Obama mentioned Iran in the third presidential debate is when he

boasts to Governor Romney about "dealing with the Iranian threat," making an

immediate connection between the words *Iran* and *threat* ("Remarks by the

President and Governor Romney"). Here is Obama's explanation of why Iran is a

threat to the United States:

> [A] nuclear Iran is a threat to our national security and it's a threat
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> to Israel's national security. We cannot afford to have a nuclear
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> arms race in the most volatile region in the world. Iran is a state
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> sponsor of terrorism, and for them to be able to provide nuclear
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> technology to non-state actors, that's unacceptable. And they have
>
> said that they want to see Israel wiped off the map. ("Remarks by
>
> the President and Governor Romney")

Obama declares that Iran is a "state sponsor of terrorism," a rhetorical appellation which may manipulate the way Americans think about Iran. "State sponsor of terrorism," however, is a title that, while rhetorically powerful, may just as easily be applied to the United States as Iran. Two of the items in the 2011 Country Reports on Terrorism which designated Iran as a state sponsor of terror were a state-sanctioned assassination attempt on the Saudi Ambassador in Washington, and providing support for resistance groups fighting what they see as an illegitimate government (United States). If scrutinized under the same parameters, the US would also be considered a state sponsor of terror, both for Obama's "kill list," his approved list of people—including American citizens—targeted for assassination (Becker and Shane), and for providing support to Syrian rebels as they attempt to overthrow the existing order (Hosenball). As for the arms race Obama refers to, it has already begun. Israel already possesses nuclear weapons. Further, there is no indication that Iran is planning to "provide nuclear technology to non-state actors," as Obama claims ("Remarks by the President and Governor Romney"). And like Romney, Obama also indirectly supports the idea that national security threats may be the result of rhetorical constructions when he states that "they [Iran] have said that they want to see Israel wiped off the map." Obama and Romney both appear to imply that language can constitute a threat to national security.

Obama's language in the third presidential debate signaled a new tone as he attempted to out-hawk Romney in displaying a tougher stance on Iran. Clearly, the display was intended for an American audience as he sought

reelection. This kind of verbal conflict plays well with an American audience. I argue that the polls showing an increase in the American public's perception of Iran as the nation's greatest national security threat, as I explained on page 7, demonstrate the effect such rhetoric can have on its audience.

A third problematic coupling is referring to Iran's government as a *regime*. During the speech Obama gave to AIPAC in 2012, he used the phrase "Iranian regime" five times ("Remarks by the President at AIPAC"). The White House spokesperson, Press Secretary Jay Carney, referred to "the Iranian regime" and "the regime in Tehran" in at least three early 2013 press briefings ("Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 1/31/2013," "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 2/1/2013," "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 2/21/2013"). Even the Deputy Press Secretary, at a press gaggle on February 14, 2013, used the phrase "the Iranian regime" ("Press Gaggle"). *Regime* and *government* are in many cases used synonymously. *Regime*, however, refers to the overarching political system, and *government* refers to the various forms of rule within a regime. For example, a country could have successive governments, but the nation's liberal democratic regime may remain unchanged. Regime change comes about when the fundamental political system undergoes change.

The word *regime*, however, serves a rhetorical purpose when used by the Obama administration. Though the words may be used synonymously, *regime* and *government* each have a different connotation. Put simply, *regime* is most frequently used to refer to countries the United States does not like. Americans

do not refer to their government as "the American regime" or "the regime in Washington," unless, of course, a member of one political party wishes to demonize the other. Also seldom heard is "the regime in France" or "the Canadian regime." No, the word regime is normally reserved for countries such as Syria, North Korea, Iran, and other countries the United States sees as not conforming to the wishes and foreign policy of the United States. Using the heuristic cue *regime* does the rhetorical work of creating an "other" of Iran, demonizing not only its form of government, but the country, the culture, and its people as well. The use of the heuristic cue *regime* may change the way Americans perceive Iran, making it easier for leaders to gain public support for a potential military conflict.

These identifications of Iran with *nuclear*, *threat*, and *regime* form heuristic cues for an American audience to follow. These cues are repeated relentlessly, and are therefore likely to stick in people's minds. When Iran is mentioned in a news conference or speech, members of the Obama administration can be sure that Americans have on hand a well-stocked arsenal of heuristics with which to interpret the language in whatever way that the Administration sees fit. Providing these cues to the public ensures that the Administration can influence reality as Americans perceive it and manipulate the way Americans think and act toward Iran.

THE MYTH OF INEVITABLE MILITARY CONFLICT WITH IRAN

Heuristic cues are an example of a rhetorical strategy the Obama administration may use to inform American perceptions. Political myths represent another strategy for constructing reality and building public support for political objectives. Trita Parsi, in his book *A Single Roll of the Dice: Obama's Diplomacy with Iran* (2012) argues that a narrative is taking hold in America in which diplomacy with Iran has been exhausted. "Acceptance of this narrative," he writes in his preface,

> would result in limiting Washington's options on Iran to various
>
> forms of confrontation—that is, either continued sanctions and
>
> containment or military action. In view of the failure of sanctions
>
> and containment thus far, that policy option is arguably not stable
>
> and will eventually deteriorate into military confrontation as well. (x)

The narrative of which Parsi speaks appears to be manifesting itself as a political myth. Political myths are narratives through which people come to understand and give meaning to their experiences and the political conditions in which they live. Political myths contribute to the justification of war through presidential rhetoric (Merskin, Rojecki, Williamson), policy legitimization (Collet, Esch) and popular imagery (Cloud). There are some instances in which political myth may contribute to peace (Ivie and Giner), though there is less academic research in this area. In this section I will seek to show how President Obama and his administration have, particularly over the last year, invoked a myth of inevitable military conflict in official-level rhetoric.

There are three elements to the myth:

1. Diplomacy has been tried, but it has failed,

2. Sanctions have proven ineffective, therefore,

3. The only remaining option is military action.

The Obama administration insists that it wants to pursue diplomacy as a solution to its standoff with Iran. Obama stated at his address to the UN on September 25, 2012: "America wants to resolve this issue through diplomacy, and we believe that there is still time and space to do so" ("Remarks by the President to the UN"). At a news conference shortly after his reelection, Obama stated: "I very much want to see a diplomatic resolution to the problem," "I think there is still a window of time for us to resolve this diplomatically," and "I will try to make a push in the coming months to see if we can open up a dialogue between Iran and not just us, but the international community, to see if we can get this things resolved" ("Remarks by the President in a News Conference"). Biden stated at a security conference in Munich, "There is still time, there is still space for diplomacy, backed by pressure, to succeed" (Biden). Jay Carney, in a press briefing on February 21, 2013, said, "we believe there is still time to resolve this issue diplomatically," and "the window remains open for this to be resolved diplomatically" ("Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 2/21/2013").

However, the administration's insistence that they want to pursue diplomacy is usually followed by admonitions or warnings. Obama's above statement to the UN was followed by: "But that time is not unlimited." His comments at the news conference were followed with: "We're not going to let

Iran get a nuclear weapon," "We've imposed the toughest sanctions in history. It is having an impact on Iran's economy," and "we're not going to be constrained by diplomatic niceties or protocols." Biden's comment, "There is still time, there is still space for diplomacy, backed by pressure, to succeed," includes within it the phrase "backed by pressure," which seems to contradict the spirit of diplomacy. Carney's statement in the press briefing mentioned above—"we believe there is still time to resolve this issue diplomatically"—is shortly followed up with: "If [Iran] fails to address the concerns of the international community, it will face more pressure and become increasingly isolated." His comment, that "the window remains open for this to be resolved diplomatically," is followed up with: "but that window will not remain open indefinitely."

The Obama administration claims, on the one hand, to seek diplomacy in good faith, but on the other hand, the administration seems to follow up its statements on diplomacy with threats or warnings, which only creates distance between Washington and Iran. These claims to diplomacy may, however, build on the myth of inevitable military conflict with Iran in that they show, at least on the surface, that the Obama administration has sincerely tried its hand at negotiating with Iran.

But there are some who are already declaring that diplomacy has failed. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently announced that he believes Iran is only agreeing to hold talks (referring to the P5+1 talks in Kazakhstan on Feb. 26-27, 2013) in order to buy time for developing a nuclear weapon (Williams). Israeli hawks favor a preemptive strike against Iran, and there are

some in Washington who agree. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina)

introduced a bi-partisan resolution in February 2013 which "Urges that if Israel is

compelled to take military action in self-defense, the United States will stand with

Israel and provide diplomatic, military, and economic support in its defense of its

territory, people, and existence" (Graham). The resolution, if passed, states that

the US will back Israel if it takes military action against Iran in self-defense.

However, if Israel considers a preemptive strike as a form of self-defense, as

Bush did in the lead-up to the war in Iraq, the US could be drawn into war with

Iran. Israel believes that diplomacy is already exhausted—if the Obama

administration sides with Israel on this, there may be little or no time left to

pursue negotiations.

The second part of the myth involves the ineffectiveness of sanctions. The

Obama administration frequently boasts about the sanctions imposed on Iran

since Obama took office. Here is a sample:

- "[Against Iran] we've put in the toughest, most crippling sanctions
  ever." ("Remarks by the President and Governor Romney")

- "We've imposed the toughest sanctions in history. It is having an
  impact on Iran's economy." ("Remarks by the President in a News
  Conference")

- "The United States, the European Union and the United Nations
  imposed what Iran—the Iranian leaders are acknowledging to be
  the most robust sanctions in history." (Biden)

- "The issue with Iran is we have pursued a policy that has imposed upon that country the most severe sanctions regime in history with significant economic consequences." ("Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 1/31/2013")

- "Iran is suffering under a sanctions regime that is more strict and more universally applied than any in history, and a regime that's having a real impact—a negative impact on the Iranian economy and on its political structure." ("Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 2/21/2013")

Here we see in official-level rhetoric Obama's "dual-track" policy toward Iran, diplomacy backed by the pressure of sanctions. The problem is that unless the dual-track approach convinces Iran to open its nuclear program to international inspection, which it has not, the Obama administration will have backed itself into a corner. If the sanctions against Iran have been the toughest in history, and yet Iran has so far refused to budge, then what options remain? Here we come to the third element of the myth, the inevitability of military conflict.

The euphemism for a military attack against Iran is the well-known phrase "all options on the table," the "option" of military conflict. To AIPAC in March 2012, Obama declared: "I have said that when it comes to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, I will take no options off the table, and I mean what I say" ("Remarks by the President at AIPAC"). To the UN in 2012 Obama declared, "the United States will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon" ("Remarks by the President to the UN"). In the third

presidential debate, Obama stated, "[Iran] can take the diplomatic route and end their nuclear program, or they will have to face a united world and a United States President—me—who said we're not going to take *any options off the table*," and "we are going to take *all options necessary* to make sure they don't have a nuclear weapon" ("Remarks by the President and Governor Romney," emphasis mine).[5] Panetta said to AIPAC, "We will keep *all options – including military action* – on the table to prevent them from obtaining a nuclear weapon" ("Defense Secretary"). Carney stated at his press conference on January 31, 2013, "the President has also made clear that when it comes to Iran's development of nuclear weapons, that a*ll options remain on the table*" ("Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 1/31/2013"). It is hard to know what form military action against Iran could take. It could be continued cyber attacks against Iran's technological infrastructure, targeted drone strikes, a ground war, or any number of other military actions. It is clear, however, that these statements, when taken together, demonstrate the myth of inevitable military conflict with Iran.

The myth is presented most clearly during the third presidential debate in 2012. Obama warns:

> The clock is ticking. We're not going to allow Iran to perpetually
> engage in negotiations that lead nowhere. And I've been very clear
> to them. Because of the intelligence coordination that we do with a
> range of countries, including Israel, we have a sense of when they
> would get breakout capacity, which means that we would not be
> able to intervene in time to stop their nuclear program. And that

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[5] All italics within the following quotes in this section are the author's emphases, unless otherwise noted.

clock is ticking. ("Remarks by the President and Governor

Romney")

"The clock is ticking" implies that some type of action is inevitable. It implies a

deadline, after which some type of drastic action must be taken. The action is the

intervention of which Obama speaks, which must happen before Iran reaches a

point where it could develop a nuclear weapon. The statement "We're not going

to allow Iran to perpetually engage in negotiations that lead nowhere "shows that

Obama lacks faith in the diplomatic process, or at least in Iran's sincerity in

resolving the issue diplomatically. Taken in conjunction with Senator Graham's

resolution on providing unrestrained military support to Israel and Israel's

insistence on preemptive strikes, we may have a scenario in which diplomacy is

considered failed and military conflict with Iran becomes inevitable. Obama

invokes the entirety of the myth in this passage from the same debate:

> So the work that we've done with respect to sanctions now offers
>
> Iran a choice: They can take the diplomatic route and end their
>
> nuclear program, or they will have to face a united world and a
>
> United States President—me—who said we're not going to take
>
> any options off the table. ("Remarks by the President and Governor
>
> Romney")

Here Obama provides a map of the myth. With regards to sanctions, the US has

done all it can. Regarding diplomacy, Obama pushes the responsibility onto Iran

because the US has done all it can—there is no more room for US leadership in

negotiations. Finally, "we're not going to take any options off the table" signals the end of the myth—a military solution to the standoff.

As stated previously, I am not convinced that Obama wants a war with Iran. However, if the myth of inevitable military conflict takes hold with the American public then Obama will have gone a long way towards framing the perceived reality of the situation between the US and Iran, and towards persuading the American public to support him should he choose to engage Iran militarily. Trough the myth of inevitable military conflict with Iran the Obama administration has established for the American public the necessity of a potential military conflict. But, in order to solidify public support, Obama will need to do more than establish the necessity; he will have to demonstrate the morality of such a military conflict as well. In the next section I will attempt to show how the Obama administration has shaped its rhetoric in such a way as to promote the morality of potential military conflict with Iran.

CHAPTER THREE: JUST WAR RHETORIC

Just War Theory is a philosophical framework for determining the morality

of war.[6] Just War Theory has its roots in antiquity. Thomas Aquinas, building on

the work of previous philosophers including St. Augustine, laid the groundwork

for Just War Theory as we know it today. He established the principles of

legitimate authority, *just cause*, and *right intention* in response to his question "Is

it always a sin to wage war?" (Aquinas). It is morally permissible, Aquinas

argued, to engage in war as long as these principles are met. Modern

philosophers have built upon these principles to construct an expanded

framework. Though there are multiple Just War theories the many variations can

be simmered down into three basic categories: *jus ad bellum* (the justice of

engaging in war), *jus in bello* (just conduct in war), and *jus post bellum* (justice

after the war). Of these I am only concerned with the first, *jus ad bellum*, as I am

interested only in the possibility of entering into military conflict.

Contemporary philosopher Nicolas Fotion, in his book *War and Ethics: A*

New Just War Theory (2007), provides a generic formulation of the many Just

War theories in order to form a basis from which to build on his own model of

Just War Theory. His model does not appear to be widely accepted, but I will

borrow his generic version in order to demonstrate the major principles as I need

only a basic framework for the rhetorical analysis which is to follow. The major

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[6] I have written on the implications of Just War Theory before. See:
Donnellan, Robert. "The Justification of War: Medieval Roots and Just War Theory Today." *The War Crimes Times*   3.1 [Asheville, NC] Winter 2011: 10-11. Print.

principles of the *ad bellum* aspects of the various Just War theories can be summarized as follows:

<u>Jus ad bellum</u>

1. Legitimate Authority

2. Just Cause

3. Right Intention

4. Last Resort

5. Proportionality

6. Likelihood of Success

The *legitimate authority* principle provides that a war is only just if it is declared by a governing body acting with legitimate authority. It is generally held that non-state actors and governments deemed illegitimate cannot justly engage in war. *Just cause* indicates that going to war is only morally permissible if the attacking nation is responding to current or recent attacks to itself or its allies. The *right intention* principle, which is related to *just cause*, requires that nations waging war must do so only for sake of justice or self-defense, not merely out of self-interest. Nations can only wage war as a *last resort*. The *last resort* principle requires that all efforts have been made to find an alternative solution to the problem before declaring war or engaging in warfare. *Proportionality*, in the *ad bellum*, pre-war sense, requires that the benefits of waging war vastly outweigh the costs, both in economic terms and in terms of lives lost. Lastly, a nation is only justified in going to war if there is ample *likelihood of success*. Sending soldiers into harm's way with no chance of victory is simply untenable. Following

these principles, it is argued, reduces the likelihood of a nation waging an unjustified war.

Just War Theory is based within liberal political theory and its emphasis on neutrality, rationality, and universality. There are a number of practical, ethical, and political criticisms of Just War Theory (Ben-Porath; Burke, Anthony; Calhoun; Kamm; Poe). Further, there are a number of criticisms of liberal political theory itself, both as it applies to public discourse (Roberts-Miller) and justification of political violence (Held). Just War Theory, however, remains the dominant method US leaders use to justify the morality of waging war, if only as window-dressing to get the American public on board with an otherwise unjustifiable war, as Joseph M. Schwartz claims was the case in George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Schwartz).

Most scholars use the framework of Just War Theory in hindsight, determining the just or unjust nature of war after it has already happened. I argue, however, that looking at the way official-level rhetoric promotes or corresponds with Just War Theory principles may shed light on where the United States stands in relation to the potential for military conflict with its enemies. In this section I will attempt to demonstrate how the rhetoric of the Obama administration promotes a number of the Just War Theory principles in relation to US-Iranian relations, and how meeting these principles may provide Obama the public support he needs if he makes the decision to go to engage in military conflict with Iran.

The *legitimate authority* principle holds that a war that is declared by an illegitimate entity, that is, a person or group which does not have the legal authorization to declare war, that war is considered unjust. The *legitimate authority* principle can get muddy, however, when considering the role of international governing bodies such as the UN—in the case of governments acting unilaterally, for example. The principle is further muddied when considering the role of internal groups when attempting to overthrow the existing order, such as in the case of revolutionary wars. In any case, the rhetoric of the Obama administration suggests that the US is attempting to portray the Iranian government as illegitimate, thus ensuring that any action taken by Iran can be framed as unjust.

The strongest case for this can be seen in the way the Obama administration has consistently referred to the Iranian government as a *regime*, which I discussed previously. Using a term such as *regime* to describe a nation's governing body may suggest that the government of that nation is illegitimate. But further evidence of the Obama administration's effort to portray the Iranian government as illegitimate can be seen in several press releases given by Press Secretary Jay Carney. When Carney was asked, during a press briefing on January 31, 2013, whether President Obama considers the government of Iran to be "legitimate and elected," Carney responded by saying, "The fact is we judge Iran by its behavior—not by its words, but by its actions—and they are consistently in violation of their United Nations obligations, their international obligations. . . .It is the government that continues to flout its international

obligations, and that behavior is illegitimate" ("Press Briefing by Press Secretary

Jay Carney, 1/31/2013"). The following day Carney reiterated his comments: "We

judge the regime in Tehran by its behavior, by its flagrant violation of its

international obligations. That behavior is certainly illegitimate" ("Press Briefing

by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 2/1/2013"). On February 21, 2013, Carney said,

"the actions taken by Iran that represent a continuation of their refusal to abide by

their international obligations are hardly a surprise" ("Press Briefing by Press

Secretary Jay Carney, 2/21/2013"). In these briefings to the press Carney

emphasizes the illegitimacy of the Iranian government by referring to it as a

regime and by saying the government's *behavior* is illegitimate. Directly denying

the legitimacy of a nation's government can be a dangerous move. A frequent

criticism of Iran's leaders is Ahmadinejad's refusal to recognize Israel as a

nation. Carney is careful not to directly state that Iran's government is illegitimate,

but substituting the idea that Iran's "behavior" is illegitimate has the same

rhetorical effect as far as presenting the case to an American audience. Notice

also the repetition of the idea that Iran is in violation of its United Nations

obligations. Not only is the Iranian government itself illegitimate, but it is also

acting against the United Nations. This can be seen as a further attempt to

portray Iran as acting without legal authority.

The *just cause* principle is necessary for determining whether a nation has

good reasons for going to war. Good reasons include responding to "imminent,

present, or recent acts of aggression" (Fotion 19). This may also include

imminent, present, or recent attacks to a nation's allies. The key to determining

whether a nation has just cause for going to war depends on definitions of
imminent and *aggression*.

An *imminent* threat would justify a military strike. But what does *imminent*
mean? Does it mean that the opposing nation or group is preparing to attack,
getting ready to attack, or in the process of attacking? In what stage does the
opposing force need to be in order to justify attacking it? Colin S. Gray, Professor
of International Politics and Strategic Studies at the University of Reading,
England, describes a *preemptive* war as "to strike first (or attempt to do so) in the
face of an attack that is either already underway or is very credibly imminent"
(Gray v). He defines a *precautionary* war as "one waged not out of strong
conviction that a dangerous threat is brewing in the target state, but rather
because it is suspected that such a threat might one day emerge, and it is better
to be safe than sorry (Gray vi). A *preventive* war falls somewhere in the middle.
The Bush administration employed what it described as *preemptive* attacks
against Iraq, but in reality the Bush doctrine promoted a *preventive* agenda. The
invasion of Iraq initiated a *preventive* war, attacking the nation before Iraq had a
chance to develop the ability to carry out an attack against the US or its allies.
Such appears to be the case with the Obama administration and Iran. Obama
has said again and again that the US will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear
weapon, even threatening a military attack on the country if it continues to
develop its nuclear program. Israel is calling for a "preemptive" (but really,
preventive) war against Iran, before a threat can emerge (Williams). It remains to

be seen whether Obama will follow the Bush Doctrine and Israel's calls and
initiate a *preventive* war with Iran.

The other definition critical to determining whether a nation has just cause
in going to war involves the definition of aggression. Depending on how leaders
choose to define aggression, it could mean anything from vitriolic rhetoric to an
assassination attempt to a full-blown military attack. According to the State
Department's 2011 "Country Reports on Terrorism" Iranian leaders were linked to
a foiled plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington (United States).
An attempted assassination is clearly an aggressive act, perhaps justifying a
counterattack. But, again, the problem with the just cause principle is that nearly
anything can be considered an act of aggression. The reality is that all groups
claim just cause for their attacks. Whether the attacks are actually just is a matter
of interpretation.

The third Just War Theory principle is *right intention*. According to Fotion,
right intention is tied not to a nation's *motives* for entering a war, but with the
nation's *intentions*, which he claims have more to do with the action associated
with the motive (16-18). For example, one could claim that George Herbert
Walker Bush had *right intention* when, after repelling the Iraqi military from
Kuwait in 1991, he halted the advance and did not continue on to invade Iraq. In
that case, it could be argued that the *motive* was to defend Kuwait, and the
intention was to take the action necessary to accomplish the goal. A nation
whose actions take them beyond their original *intent* and go on to occupy or

exploit the enemy nation for the aggressor's own advantage would have *wrong intention*.

Obama has not directly addressed the principle of *right intention*. The only indicator that he is attempting to establish the justness of his intent is in the State of the Union address early in 2013, where he seeks to portray the United States as a nation that abides by values which ensure that the intentions behind any military action is just. He said:

> And where necessary, through a range of capabilities, we will continue to take direct action against those terrorists who pose the gravest threat to Americans. (Applause.) Now, as we do, we must enlist our values in the fight. That's why my administration has worked tirelessly to forge a durable legal and policy framework to guide our counterterrorism efforts. Throughout, we have kept Congress fully informed of our efforts. I recognize that in our democracy, no one should just take my word for it that we're doing things the right way. So in the months ahead, I will continue to engage Congress to ensure not only that our targeting, detention and prosecution of terrorists remains consistent with our laws and system of checks and balances, but that our efforts are even more transparent to the American people and to the world. ("Remarks by the President in the State")

Unfortunately, as Fotion notes, *right intention* can only really be determined after the action has taken place. As with *just cause*, all nations claim

they have the right intent going into a conflict, and therefore it is impossible to predict exactly what intentions Obama might have were a military conflict to break out. We will not know for sure unless and until that conflict is underway.

The *last resort* principle holds that all other available options should be exhausted before making the decision to go to war. Every opportunity for diplomacy and negotiation must be employed and exhausted before any direct military engagement should take place. President Obama and some members of his administration appear to support this principle. Obama stated during the third presidential debate, "The disagreement I have with Governor Romney is that during the course of this campaign, he's often talked as if we should take premature military action. I think that would be a mistake, because when I've sent young men and women into harm's way, I always understand that that is the *last resort*, not the first resort" ("Remarks by the President and Governor Romney," emphasis mine). To AIPAC in March 2012 Obama said: "I will only use force when the time and circumstances demand it" ("Remarks by the President at AIPAC"). Joe Biden, during his debate with Paul Ryan, stated bluntly, "War should always be the absolute last resort" ("Vice Presidential Debate").

Obama and Biden both argue that war should be the last resort, after diplomacy has failed. As I showed in the previous chapter, however, the rhetoric of the Obama administration suggests that diplomacy has already failed, or at the very least the window of opportunity for diplomacy is closing. At what point will the Obama administration consider the window closed? At the recent P5+1 (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States plus Germany) talks in

Kazakhstan, talks with Iran ended with no real progress, but a future meeting

was set for April 5-6, 2013, to try it again. Shortly before the meetings took place,

Jay Carney was asked during a press conference: "Chris Van Hollen [Democratic

Representative from Maryland] just said that these talks that are coming up next

week are the last best chance to resolve this issue in a peaceful manner. Does

the President, does the administration share that view? And are these talks the

last best chance?" In his response Carney largely dodged the question, instead

repeating the worn refrains, "the United States is determined to prevent Iran from

acquiring a nuclear weapon," and "the window remains open for this to be

resolved diplomatically, but that window will not remain open indefinitely" ("Press

Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 2/21/2013").

The more the myth of inevitable military conflict takes hold, the easier it

will be for Obama to declare the window closed. But part of the problem with the

last resort principle is that unless a country is attacking or on the verge of

attacking, there is always the possibility of another shot at diplomacy. The *last

resort* principle stands at odds with doctrines of *preventive* or *precautionary* war.

If a nation goes on the offensive before an enemy attack "is either already

underway or is very credibly imminent" then there must be, by definition, at least

one more opportunity to negotiate and thereby avoid military conflict. The case

for truly *preemptive* war is a little trickier, but, as I've shown, Obama's policies

seem not to differ much from Bush's. Were Obama to follow George W. Bush's

and Israel's lead and conduct a *preventive* or *precautionary* war, even were he to

meet all other Just War Theory principles, he would be in violation of the Just War Theory principle of *last resort.*

The fifth Just War Theory principle is *proportionality.* To adhere to this principle, a nation would have to perform a cost-benefit analysis to see if war makes sense, in terms of lives lost, the economic burden associated with war, and the potential harm done to the nation's own people and infrastructure. To be morally permissible, the benefits of war must outweigh the costs. This may be the toughest principle for the Obama administration to sell to the American people. The United States is in an economic slump since the financial crisis of 2008. Americans are weary of over a decade of war; many service-members lives have been lost yet there is little to show for the sustained military effort. Perhaps it is for this reason—the difficulty of persuading Americans that the benefits of military conflict outweigh the costs—that Obama is pushing for alternatives to direct conventional warfare, including targeted killings, drone strikes, and cyber attacks. But, once ground forces have been removed from Afghanistan, as Obama has pledged to do within the coming year, and as the economy slowly improves, gaining public support for the *proportionality* principle may become easier for Obama to achieve.

Finally, the *likelihood of success* principle demands that there must be at least a chance that a military confrontation could be successful. It would be unjust for leaders to send their troops into a war that is determined unwinnable from the start—it would simply be sending men and women to slaughter. In promoting this principle to the public, leaders must argue that they very likely to

win. They may do this by pointing to past military successes, boasting about their arsenals and military capabilities, and pointing out the enemy's weaknesses. In the Vice Presidential debate, Biden stated: "With regard to the ability of the United States to take action militarily, it is—it is not in my purview to talk about classified information. But we feel quite confident we could deal a serious blow to the Iranians." During the State of the Union address in 2013 Obama said, "Our brave men and women in uniform, tempered by the flames of battle, are unmatched in skill and courage," and "As long as I'm Commander-in-Chief. . .we will maintain the best military the world has ever known." In his speech to AIPAC, Panetta recounted the many ways in which the United States and Israel are prepared for military action. After listing a number of threats the United States and Israel face, including "the threat from Iran," Panetta declared: "The cornerstone of this unprecedented defense cooperation is our commitment to maintain and expand Israel's qualitative military edge. This is an ironclad pledge which says that the United States will provide whatever support is necessary for Israel to maintain military superiority over any state or coalition of states, as well as non-state actors" ("Defense Secretary"). Clearly, the Obama administration believes in the military might of the United States. Further, Obama points out Iran's weaknesses in the third Presidential debate. He declares, "Iran is at its weakest point economically, strategically, militarily, than in many years" ("Remarks by the President and Governor Romney"). He also states: "We then organized the strongest coalition and the strongest sanctions against Iran in history, and it is crippling their economy. Their currency has dropped 80

percent. Their oil production has plunged to the lowest level since they were fighting a war with Iraq 20 years ago. So their economy is in shambles." The Administration's emphasis on the readiness and lethality of our military and the weakened state of Iran work to establish the principle of *likelihood of success*.

Each of the Just War Theory principles—*legitimate authority*, *just cause*, *right intention*, *last resort*, *proportionality*, and *likelihood of success*—work together to serve as a framework for establishing the morality of war. Leaders can build public support for military conflict if each of these principles is addressed and the morality of the war thereby established. My examination of official-level rhetoric shows that the Obama administration has sought to construct, through language, the morality of potential military conflict with Iran. The Administration has depicted Iran's government as illegitimate. US leaders have assumed the justness of their cause. Obama has deferred to congress to ensure that the intention of the US is legal and morally just. Members of the Administration have established that any military action would be a last resort. Recognizing the difficulty of establishing the principle of proportionality, Obama has sought to skirt the issue by using alternative methods of combat. Finally, US leaders promote the strength and power of the US military while simultaneously pointing out the weaknesses of its foe.

Having made the case for morality, Obama may be able to gain enough support for the public to back him were he to make the decision to mobilize against Iran. It is impossible to predict what may happen to push the US into conventional warfare with Iran, but the President has gone a long way toward

ensuring public support should he choose to do so. There is another player,

however, which may have as much or more impact than the Obama

administration on American perceptions of the reality of the situation between the

US and Iran. The news media—including the traditional or "mainstream" media in

addition to new media designed to reach internet audiences—is another driver of

public opinion. US leaders want to influence media coverage in order to promote

their agendas to the American people. The media, however, in their effort to

increase profits, also attempt to control the narrative. In the next section I will

explore the relationship between presidential rhetoric, the media, and public

opinion.

CHAPTER FOUR: OFFICIAL-LEVEL RHETORIC, THE MEDIA, AND

PUBLIC OPINION

Without myth-evoking rhetoric, government, military, and corporate

leaders would not be able to sway public opinion to gain popular support for war

and other projections of military might. In the case of pervasive political myths

such as the myth of inevitable military conflict with Iran, leaders may use

language to sustain and exploit existing prejudices and established "truths" to the

same effect. In order to achieve their ends, governments, particularly

governments of democratic societies, must convince those they govern that

military action is both morally permissible and necessary for protecting the

nation. The less tenable the motivations for military might as a solution to a

nation's problems, the more persuasive and pervasive the rhetoric must be. But,

argues Matthew A. Baum and Tim J. Groeling in their book *War Stories: The*

Causes and Consequences of Public Views of War (2010), "the true nature and

extent of elite debate may matter less than *media coverage* of any such debate

and the partisan makeup of the debaters, and that this is the case well beyond

the short-term or 'rally period' of a foreign policy crisis or conflict" (9). Leaders

can rarely rely on direct persuasion as a method of social control and power.

Except for infrequent cases in which political leaders directly address the

American public, such as State of the Union addresses and political debates,

much of the official-level rhetoric to which Americans are exposed is filtered

through the news media. In this section I will explore how presidential rhetoric

and the media work together to influence public opinion, and how public opinion,

in turn, creates the foundational cultural context whereby foreign policy is legitimized.

Nations may enter into military conflict for a number of reasons, including self-defense, protecting allies, projecting might to gain more influence in a region, to acquire resources, to promote the nation's values and ideals, or to counter an opposing ideology. Obama's language, as I discussed previously, indicates that he would engage in a military conflict with Iran only reluctantly. But his rhetoric concerning Iran has become much more hawkish over the course of his presidency—perhaps to solidify his base of support domestically, or perhaps indicating that he is attempting to garner public support in case the US is drawn into war. In order for military engagement of any kind with Iran to be legitimized, Obama must have the public behind him. Even if he does not wish a military conflict with Iran, consolidating popular support now will give him the flexibility to act in the future.

There are cases when presidents can engage militarily without public support. Obama's infamous "kill list," his list of potential terrorists authorized for targeted killing, is an example of a president using his position to authorize military operations without the consent of the American public. Further, Obama's policy on targeted killing is not subject to congressional oversight. So why would Obama bother cultivating public support for a potential military conflict with Iran to begin with? Could he just declare war without public support? Declaring war on Iran is a much larger undertaking than ordering drone strikes against a localized target. A war with Iran would require mobilization of thousands of troops, drain

billions form an already struggling US economy, and would probably result in a lot of US military and Iranian civilian deaths. Americans are weary from more than a decade of war. With the stakes so high, Obama would need public support for a war with Iran, in the case that military conflict was required. No matter what tactics a president uses to win public support, the influence of the media on public opinion must be considered.

THE MEDIA: A PRESIDENT'S BEST FRIEND/WORST ENEMY

Few Americans have traveled to Iran, and most have little opportunity to converse with people from that country. So, Americans get most of their information about Iran either through official-level rhetoric or through the media. The 2012 presidential debates offered Americans an opportunity to hear directly from President Obama and his challenger, Mitt Romney, concerning their views on Iran. The third presidential debate, which took place on October 23, 2012, focused almost exclusively on US foreign policy. In the debate, both candidates expressed that Iran poses a great threat to America. Early on in the debate, Romney states directly that "Iran is the greatest national security threat we face" ("Remarks by the President and Governor Romney"). Obama's first mention of the country, which he simply refers to as "the Iranian threat," presents a logical fallacy ("Remarks by the President and Governor Romney"). The statement presupposes that Iran is a threat without offering any evidence to support the proposition.

The third presidential debate offered an opportunity for official-level rhetoric to directly reach the American people, and that rhetoric may have played a role in shifting American perceptions of Iran as a "threat to America." A president, just by speaking publicly about an issue, can bring that issue from obscurity to light, placing the issue firmly on the national agenda. A potential military conflict with Iran was a hot topic during the debate. But presidential rhetoric alone is not always enough to cause such a dramatic shift in a nation's perceptions. The media is just as, if not more, powerful when it comes to influencing public opinion. In "International Coverage, Foreign Policy, and National Image: Exploring the Complexities of Media Coverage, Public Opinion, and Presidential Agenda" (2012), Cui Zhang and Charles William Meadows III argue that "the news media is a diplomatic device as powerful as formal policy statements" (89). In their study the authors find evidence to support their hypothesis that there is a correlation between negative news coverage, public opinion, and the rhetorical content of presidential public papers. The authors argue that the media plays a significant role in shaping the way Americans perceive foreign countries, particularly when those countries receive negative news coverage. They found that out of fifteen countries, the negative coverage that Iran receives is greater than that of any other.

Political scientists have noted a rise in negative coverage of news stories in the media. John G. Geer, in "The News Media and the Rise of Negativity in Presidential Campaigns" (2012), offers an explanation for this increase in negativity, particularly as it relates to attack ads in presidential campaigns. He

attributes the rise to the way journalists cover news stories, what has come to be

called "interpretive journalism." Over the last forty years the focus of journalism

has shifted from that of description to interpretation. Instead of simply describing

stories, the professionalization of journalism has led reporters to analyze and

interpret news stories. This shift has exacerbated the conflict between

presidential candidates and the news media over who commands public attention

and thereby controls the narrative. Geer states that "The news media are not just

reflecting the goings on of campaigns. Instead, their coverage has altered the

conduct of campaigns. They do more than cover the process; *they shape it*" (426,

emphasis mine). The implications of Geer's analysis extend beyond political

attack ads. From coverage of news events to the presidential debates, the media

plays a role in shaping the way the public perceives other nations and America's

foreign policy, thereby influencing public opinion.

Journalists rely on conflict to make their news stories exciting. Exciting

news stories lead to more viewers and increased income from advertisers. That

the media sensationalizes news stories is a well-known phenomenon, but the

effects of sensationalizing conflict can have important consequences. As Baum

and Groeling note, "whether or not the public will rally behind a president when

he takes the nation to war turns, at least in part, on the strategic interests and

preferences of the news media" (108). Now I will turn to an example to

demonstrate Baum and Groeling's point.

In early July 2012 Amir-Ali Hajizadeh, Brigadier General of the Islamic

Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force, warned on the Al Alam News

Channel that an attack by the US or Israel against Iran would degenerate into a

third world war. The Iranian general announced that in the case of a strike

against the Republic, Iran possessed the capability of retaliating against US

military bases in the region. The story was quickly picked up by American news

agencies.

Fox News reported the story on July 4, 2012, with the headline: "Iran

Threatens Swift Retaliation on US Bases" ("Iran Threatens"). The first paragraph

reads, "Iran declared Wednesday that it can destroy nearby U.S. military bases

and strike Israel within minutes of an attack on the Islamic Republic, reflecting

tensions over Iran's suspect nuclear program." First, "Iran declares" makes the

story sound like it was an official proclamation from the government of Iran

instead of an unofficial announcement on a Tehran-based news network which

has as one of its stated objectives "To adopt an active media policy vis-à-vis

west's one-sided news imperialism" ("About Us"). The Fox article focuses on the

potential destruction of US military bases but never questions why there are over

35 military bases surrounding Iran in the first place. The article refers to the

General's statement as a "veiled threat," but apparently does not consider the

bases surrounding Iran to be a threat to the Islamic Republic. The article goes on

to state, "Israel and the U.S. have hinted at the possibility of military strikes

against Iran if sanctions and diplomacy do not rein in Iran's nuclear development

program." Again, here the threat is still coming from Iran, but the US and Israel

only "hint at the possibility" of strikes against Iran, and then only if "sanctions and

diplomacy do not rein in" a nuclear program which may or may not be used for

the production of WMDs, encouraging the myth of inevitable conflict that the US and Israel have no choice but to attack if sanctions and diplomacy do not work. The article lists a number of reasons why Iran is a threat, including an Iranian military drill and the test-firing of an Iranian anti-ship missile. Further, the article mentions a few American and Israeli sites that could potentially be hit by Iranian weapons. It is clear that Fox News is not investigating the reasons for the Iranian General's statements, attempting to understand and explain why the nation feels threatened and feels the need to make such statements, but instead focuses on the potential conflict that the comments suggest. Conflict sells.

CBS News also reported the story with the headline: "Iran Reports: War Games Showed Missile Accuracy" ("Iran Reports"). Again, this article illustrated the threat posed by Iran. Here is a list of statements in the article which suggest Iran's military might:

- "War games this month showcased missiles with improved accuracy and firing capabilities."
- "The targets were models of foreign military bases, and the stated goal was to show that Iran's missiles can hit Western bases and Israel."
- "90 percent of the missiles hit their targets and said this showed their increased accuracy."

"Another achievement, the reports said, was Iran's capability of firing multiple missiles within seconds. The media reports said this would create a challenge for the U.S. or Israel to intercept incoming missiles should a war break

out." Notice that it says, "should a war break out." Iran's leaders have argued that the military drills are to prepare for retaliation in the case of a US or Israeli strike.

"Iran's Revolutionary Guard commanders said during the war games that the tests were a 'response to the political impoliteness of those who talk about all options being on the table.'" As I discussed previously, the phrase "all options on the table" is a euphemism for potential US military attacks against Iran. The sensationalism in this news report portrays Iran as the hostile aggressor and the US and Israel as the potential victims, in spite of the fact that were the situation to unfold as indicated, Iran would be responding to an American or Israeli preventive attack. And like the Fox News report, the CBS news story does not seek to seriously understand and report *why* Iran is demonstrating its military capabilities.

Though the story that appeared on ABC News had the most inflammatory headline, "Iran: We Can Hit 35 US Bases in 'Minutes'" (Ferran), the report was more even-handed than the Fox or CBS reports. Though Fox and CBS offered a few feeble caveats suggesting that Iran is thumping its chest only to deter an attack from the US, ABC goes a bit farther, even quoting Brigadier General Hossein Salami who stated on Iranian television that "the main aim of the drill 'was to demonstrate the Iranian nation's political resolve to defend [its] vital values and national interests.'"

Taken together, these three news stories may contribute to a sense of fear in the American public. They suggest that Iran is a threat to the US and its interests and do little to explore the reasons for the increased hostility between

the US and Iran. Such interpretations may strengthen in the minds of the American public the Just War principles of *just cause*, *last resort*, and *right intention*. If Iran is bumping up its military capabilities, the US may have a *just cause* for attacking the country. By tying together the buildup of Iran's arsenal with Iran's nuclear program, the media may be encouraging Americans to interpret any US-led attack against Iran as a *last resort*. And through the media's showcasing the belligerence of the Iranian generals, Americans may be left thinking that the US would have the *right intention* in invading Iran. Hyping Iran's military achievements could be seen to diminish America's *likelihood of success*, but this, in turn, may help build public support for increased US military spending and maintaining US military forces in the region. Clearly, the media play an important role in building upon and strengthening US Just War rhetoric.

My analysis of the above news story represents only one instance of the persuasive effects of news media interpretation. I have included it here as an example of the ways in which the news media may help shape public perceptions of events, thereby contributing to increased public support for military conflict with Iran. Whether or not that conflict arises depends upon the direction the Obama administration will take over the coming year. In the next section I will consider two potential paths down which Obama may take us.

CHAPTER FIVE: PEACE AND WAR

Over the course of his first term as president, Obama put in place
sanctions that are far harsher than anything put forth under the Bush
Administration. It will be interesting to see where relations between the US and
Iran go from here. At a security conference in Munich on February 2, 2013, Vice-
President Joe Biden offered evidence that the Obama administration is still
willing to consider direct negotiations with Iran (Biden). When asked specifically
whether the time has come for direct US-Iran talks, Biden responded by saying
"we would be prepared to meet bilaterally with the Iranian leadership." But he
also provided a warning: "There is still time, there is still space for diplomacy,
backed by pressure, to succeed. The ball is in the government of Iran's court."
The pressure Biden is referring to is the isolation and the socio-economic
deprivation caused by international sanctions, which he called "the most robust
sanctions in history." By stating that "the ball is in the government of Iran's court,"
Biden is shifting responsibility for the isolation and deprivation from the
governments imposing the sanctions to the government suffering under the
sanctions. This type of doublespeak runs throughout Biden's comments, making
it unclear exactly where the Obama administration stands. After boasting about
the isolating effects of the sanctions, Biden states, "President Obama has made
clear to Iranian leaders, our policy is not containment—it is not containment." If
being shut off from the international community is not containment, I am not sure
what is. Concerning placing responsibility on the Iranian government for the
effects of the sanctions, Biden goes further: "we've also made clear that Iran's

leaders need not sentence their people to economic deprivation and international isolation." Again, he does not acknowledge the role the US and the international community played in bringing about these sanctions. By neglecting to acknowledge this fact Biden essentially blames the victim, making the suffering of the Iranian people out to be the effects of a decision made by the Iranian government, which is surely complicit but not wholly responsible. Ultimately, Biden's comments show that the US position has not changed that much in the last couple of years, offering the option of negotiations while simultaneously imposing devastating sanctions.

There may still yet be hope, however, for avoiding war with Iran. The makeup of the Obama administration has recently gone through a period of transition, and key positions, including the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, have been filled with people who appear to be less hawkish than their predecessors. John Kerry has been confirmed as Secretary of State, replacing Hillary Clinton who, on "Good Morning America" during the 2008 Democratic primaries stated, "I want the Iranians to know that if I'm the president, we will attack Iran [if it attacked Israel]" ("Obama: Clinton's 'Obliterate'"). She went on to say that "In the next ten years, during which they might foolishly consider launching an attack on Israel, we would be able to totally obliterate them."

John Kerry, on the other hand, took a quite different approach to the issue of Iran's nuclear ambitions. In an interview with the *Financial Times* in 2009, shortly before the Iranian election which saw Ahmadinejad rise to power, then Senator Kerry blasted the Bush administration's policy of zero enrichment and

claimed that Iran has "a right to peaceful nuclear power and to enrichment in that purpose" (Dombey). Trita Parsi, in *A Single Roll of the Dice*, adds that "the White House quickly contacted Kerry after the interview had been published and impressed on him not to repeat any such statements—even though Kerry's point did not contradict the White House's new policy" (59). In his confirmation hearings before his nomination to the position of Secretary of State earlier this year, however, Kerry cautiously sought to show that he is in step with Obama's position toward Iran. Though he insisted that diplomacy is still possible with Iran, Kerry repeated the key Obama refrains: "We will do what we must to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon" and "Our policy is not containment" (Cassata). Though Kerry appears to have taken a step back from his earlier position in which he argued for Iran's right to nuclear enrichment, Kerry may prove to be an influential player in US-Iran relations over the coming years, perhaps helping to guide the US toward more direct diplomacy.

Another change in Obama's administration that may change the nature of US-Iran relations is Obama's pick for Secretary of Defense, Republican Chuck Hagel. During the confirmation hearings Hagel has faced much scrutiny over his positions on Iran, most of which came from fellow Republicans who worry over Hagel's position on Israel. In an opinion piece written for the Washington Post in January of this year, Senator Jim Inhofe (R-OK) announced his opposition to Hagel for the position, citing Hagel's vote against a bill calling for further sanctions against Iran in 2001, Hagel's support for Iran's membership in the World Trade Organization, and Hagel's multiple attempts to push for direct

negotiations with Iran (Inhofe). But, like Kerry, Hagel took a much tougher stance on Iran during the confirmation process. From his statement in 2008 that "The United States should open a new strategic direction in U.S.-Iran relations by seeking direct, comprehensive and unconditional talks with the government of Iran," Hagel reportedly took a more hawkish tone on Iran, suggesting that, were diplomacy to fail, he is willing to resort to military conflict (Sanger and Shanker).

It is unlikely to be coincidence that Obama's picks for Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense are two men who have in the past favored direct diplomacy and reduced sanctions on Iran. These changes to Obama's cabinet may be a sign that Obama wants to return to his earlier position regarding Iran, or perhaps signals a shift in a new direction altogether. But no matter how willing the US is to enter direct negotiations with Iran, no talks can take place without a similar sentiment from the Islamist Republic. An event will take place this summer which could change everything—the Iranian presidential election. Under current Iranian election law, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is not eligible to run for a third consecutive term. Ahmadinejad, however, is not known for playing by the rules. Internal discord has plagued the president's administration, and there are fears that the election scheduled for June 14, 2013, could incite another round of bloody demonstrations similar to those in 2009 (Tabaar). Whatever happens, it is possible that the outcome of the Iranian presidential elections could impact the stance of the Obama administration and change the nature of US-Iran relations.

Foreign policy professionals are at odds over the best way to go forward with Iran. In his article "Time to Attack Iran" (2012), Matthew Kroenig, a Fellow at

the Council on Foreign Relations, argues for a "preemptive" strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. He believes that strategic strikes aimed at the facilities would reduce civilian casualties, delay Iran's ability to produce a nuclear weapon, and ultimately bolster America's influence in the region. Kroenig argues that the risk of an all-out war with Iran is preferable to an Iran armed with a nuclear weapon. On the other side, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former national security advisor to Jimmy Carter, argues that a war with Iran would not be worth the costs in terms of lives, American influence in the region, and the economic drain of another protracted war. He argues instead that "[a] more prudent and productive course for the United States would be to continue the painful sanctions against Iran while formally adopting for the Middle East" a policy which holds that "[a]n Iranian military threat aimed at Israel or any other U.S. friend in the Middle East would be treated as if directed at the United States itself and would precipitate a commensurate U.S. response" (Brzezinski). It remains to be seen which course the Obama administration will take in the coming months and years.

CONCLUSION

The study of political rhetoric is important because, as I have argued, mythological narratives and language structures inform foreign and military policy. Understanding political rhetoric, how it relates to public support for military conflict, which in turn shapes policy, may offer insights into how military conflict can be prevented in the future. There may be cases in which military conflict may be the most ethical approach to a given situation in a given context. I believe, however, that citizens of a democracy are responsible for the actions of their government, and we therefore have an obligation to inquire into the way leaders seek to influence our support for their actions. It is my hope that this small contribution may lead to a greater awareness of the ways in which official-level rhetoric is used to garner public support with which US military action is legitimized.

Through an exploration of the rhetoric of the Obama administration, I have attempted to demonstrate how rhetoric informs the American public's perceived reality of the situation between the US and Iran. I have shown how rhetorical strategies can be implemented to create symbols and heuristic cues with which to guide America perceptions. I have shown how political myths, such as the myth of the inevitability of military conflict with Iran, allow leaders to establish and reinforce narratives, narratives which encourage the public to interpret the meaning of events in the way leaders want the people to understand them. My examination of the Obama administration's rhetoric in light of Just War Theory exposes the method through which a war with Iran could be portrayed by the

Administration as ethically justified. Finally, my exploration of the relationship between official-level rhetoric, the media, and public opinion exposes the many layers through which information and meaning are created and shared.

Almost daily in writing this thesis I came across new news stories and developments in relation to Iran. We live in a precarious world; by the time this thesis goes to print the situation between the US and Iran may have changed entirely. Continued study of this topic is necessary to continue to track the evolving nature of official-level rhetoric and public support for war. Israel's role in US-Iranian foreign policy cannot be overstated. Israel's relationship to the US and to Iran should be more carefully explored to flesh out the context in which the above analysis takes place. Further, to make this analysis more comprehensive, rhetorical analysis should be performed using the language of the speakers. If, as Booth believes, war can be rhetorically constructed between two nations, as the war in Iraq was constructed by the rhetoric of both the Bush administration and Saddam Hussein, this rhetorical analysis presents a one-sided argument at best. My analysis has only looked at the rhetoric on the American side of the issue. Further study should include the rhetoric of Iran and Israel. I am prevented from doing so because of my inability to read and speak Farsi and Hebrew. In a few instances I have relied on translations in this analysis, which is appropriate as the comments I analyzed pertained to American perceptions of Iranian and Israeli rhetoric. These perceptions were key in demonstrating the correlation between rhetoric, the media, and public opinion. However, further study should

include researchers with the ability to examine Iranian and Israeli rhetoric in their

own languages.

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