

## An analysis of the rhetoric and the ideology of

### *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2002*

O Lord God arise,	Not in this land alone,
Scatter our enemies,	But be God's mercies known,
And make them fall!	From shore to shore!
Confound their knavish tricks,	Lord make the nations see,
Confuse their politics,	That men should brothers be,
On you our hopes we fix,	And form one family,
God save the Queen!	The wide world o'er.

– from the “British national anthem”, God save the King/Queen<sup>1</sup>

... to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them ...

– the “Declaration of Independence”<sup>2</sup>

may we not be justified in reaching the diagnosis that ... some civilisations, or some epochs of civilisation – possibly the whole of mankind – have become ‘neurotic’?

– Sigmund Freud<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “British national anthem”, *God save the King/Queen*, first publicly performed: London, 1745, attributions vary; Cited from Ben Schott, *Schott's Original Miscellany*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2002), p.54; verses 3 and 4; (or 2 and 4 in other versions)

<sup>2</sup> “Declaration of Independence”; *The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America*, Action of Second Continental Congress, July 4<sup>th</sup> 1776; available at:

<<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/D/1776-1800/independence/doi.htm>>, last updated: May 6<sup>th</sup> 2003, retrieved: May 20<sup>th</sup> 2003

<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, (New York: Norton, 1961; originally published 1930), p.91; cited here from Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (California: University of California Press, 1985), p.183

The United States of America has long been one of the leading advocates of a multilateralist view of the world<sup>4</sup> and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the nation often overcame isolationist proclivities to make great sacrifices in the name of defending freedom. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the US is one of the most widely disliked countries in the world. Its motives are distrusted, or it is feared as a hyperpower, or it is resented as an imperial power. And then there is the rhetoric. This paper examines the ideological themes within the text *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*<sup>5</sup>, published on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2002. The method of this paper will be to pinpoint within the rhetoric, the techniques which are used to confer legitimacy onto imperial practices by America. The starting point for such an exercise is Edward Said's contention that the cultural products of an empire serve to affirm its practices:

It is not a question of a directly imposed regime of conformity in the correspondence between contemporary United States cultural discourse and United States policy ... Rather it is a system of pressures and constraints by which

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Tyrie, *Axis of Anarchy: Britain, America and The New World Order after Iraq*, (London: The Bow Group and The Foreign Policy Centre, 2003), p.5; available at:

<<http://www.bowgroup.org/pub/axisofinstabilitytext.pdf>>, posted: March 2003, retrieved: May 20<sup>th</sup> 2003, p.5

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter, the *National Security Strategy* document. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, signed: September 17<sup>th</sup> 2002, issued September 20<sup>th</sup> 2002, available at:

<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>>, retrieved: May 1<sup>st</sup> 2003. The three unnumbered pages of this PDF document which hold George W. Bush's covering letter will here be taken as being lettered consecutively: iv, v, and vi; thereby leading without break to the first actually lettered page – "Table of Contents" on page vii.

the whole cultural corpus retains its essentially imperial identity and direction.<sup>6</sup>

The *National Security Strategy* document is a policy document, but also a cultural product. It has, I would argue, functioned since its inception as a repository of readymade discourse for the stimulation and simulation of consent, and furthermore – less contentiously – it laid the ideological foundations for the 2003 US/UK invasion of Iraq to be legitimised as a pre-emptive strike. Here then, is a cultural product which is overtly aimed at legitimising a specific expression of imperial behaviour. However, through close textual analysis, I intend to study how the underlying assumptions (as opposed to the arguments) of this text reproduce the legitimacy of traditional imperialism and how rhetoric is used in it to connote “rational” argument. For the purposes of this analysis, the US is regarded as an imperial power on the basis of its practice of extending political authority over foreign territories with a totalising intent, using cultural influence, economic institutions and then military force when necessary.

This 31 page document (and three page covering letter) contains 188 instances of the word “we” and 213 uses of the personal possessive “our”, used to refer (in order of increasing universality) to the administration, the federal government, the American military

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<sup>6</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p.323

establishment, all Americans, American allies, “our friends”, “great powers”, the Western Hemisphere, developed nations, civilisation<sup>9</sup>, and humanity in general<sup>10</sup>. For the purposes of comparison within the length of this text, it is noted that the word “will” appears 159 times, “is” 100 times, and “human rights” four times. The subject of these pronouns is frequently ambiguous, as when differing levels of inclusivity are addressed interchangeably within the same sentence, such as in the following example: “In the war against global terrorism, we will never forget that we are ultimately fighting for our democratic values and way of life”<sup>11</sup>. As Said remarked, “‘we’ – this pronoun, almost more than any other word, fortifies the somewhat illusory sense that all Americans, as co-owners of the public space, participate in the decisions to commit America to its far-flung foreign interventions”<sup>12</sup>. Whilst it may be unclear exactly how wide it is hoped that the audience for this document will be, it is possible to conceive the imagined community which is being constructed, by the very modes in which it is addressed. In David Chaney’s words, “we can hear the public that is being constituted through listening to how it is being articulated”<sup>13</sup>. At one level, the America being addressed by the *National Security Strategy* document is one which is being encouraged to identify

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<sup>7</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.vii

<sup>8</sup> *ibidem*, p.v

<sup>9</sup> *ib.*

<sup>10</sup> *ib.*, p.3

<sup>11</sup> *ib.*, p.7

<sup>12</sup> Said, (1994), p.293

<sup>13</sup> David Chaney, *Fictions of Collective Life: Public drama in late modern culture*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p.119

itself as a great military power – and to consequently derive affirmation from this identification – through a conflation which deems foreign policy an expression of national will.

The weltanschauung propagated by the *National Security Strategy* document is one in which the country has been unwillingly thrust into a new era. The task of the federal government has “changed dramatically”<sup>14</sup> in “the new world we have entered”<sup>15</sup> according to the covering letter. The *National Security Strategy* document continues to use this frame of reference to legitimise a radical overhaul of the norms of engagement: “*Different circumstances require different methods*”<sup>16</sup>, “In an increasingly interconnected world”<sup>17</sup>, “our security environment has undergone a profound transformation”<sup>18</sup>, “Today, our enemies see weapons of mass destruction as weapons of choice. ... Traditional concepts of deterrence will not work”<sup>19</sup>, and “This is a new condition of life”<sup>20</sup>. The actual argument which this rhetoric augments, culminates on page 15 with the reasoning that: given the heightened threat that we now appreciate could be posed by terrorists who possess certain kinds of weaponry, and since nuclear deterrence will no longer work on new, irresponsibly roguish leaders and

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<sup>14</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.iv

<sup>15</sup> *ib.*, p.v

<sup>16</sup> *ib.*, p.3

<sup>17</sup> *ib.*, p.9

<sup>18</sup> *ib.*, p.13

<sup>19</sup> *ib.*, p.15

<sup>20</sup> *ib.*, p.31

on these stateless organisations (albeit stateless organisations that may be affiliated to certain ruling parties), the kind of security which the US requires can only be achieved by attacking states pre-emptively where necessary and (implicitly, following on from this) instituting a change of regime if leaders might be in a position to supply particularly dangerous weapons to malevolent groups.

The paraphrasing above is disingenuous on one point: the document does not accept that such a threat has always existed for nation-states, indeed it continues an American tradition of public discourse (more established in the context of capitalism, the New World and democracy) by giving the impression that in terrorism America has discovered an entirely new phenomenon. Thus, the argument is not about “the heightened threat we now appreciate could be posed by terrorists”, but rather that “Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than its costs to purchase a single tank”<sup>21</sup>. The rhetoric of a brave new world is intended to conceal the fact that nothing has fundamentally changed in the world order or in military technology since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 to justify such a radical policy departure. One development which

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<sup>21</sup> *ib.*, p.iv

may be worth assessing is the growth in anti-American feeling as a motivation for movements which may pose a security threat to the US. However, the *National Security Strategy* document instead offers a palatable ideology to obviate the need for any examination of motivation.

Rigid dichotomies may be a legacy of Christian influence upon currents of American thought, but in the context of the *National Security Strategy* document, the lines between good and evil, and friend and enemy, are clumsily drawn. In this text, America comes to represent all that is good and benign, and there is no middle ground or grey area between the friends of America and “our enemies”<sup>22</sup>. Whilst the term “friends” in the context of international relations between state actors is curious enough – especially since it is most commonly used with an implied distinction in the phrase “our allies and friends” (11 occurrences, including variations) – it is confused by being broadened inconsistently to include either allies (“attacks against us and our friends”<sup>23</sup>), or to designate non-hostile states which are not allies (the document lists Taiwan and the Republic of Korea<sup>24</sup>, Singapore and New Zealand<sup>25</sup> as “our friends” and “close friends” respectively). When the term “friends and

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<sup>22</sup> *ib.*, p.15. There are 26 occurrences of “enemy” / “enemies” in the *National Security Strategy* document, with ten of these being in the phrase “our enemies”.

<sup>23</sup> *ib.*, p.1

<sup>24</sup> *ib.*, p.3

<sup>25</sup> *ib.*, p.26

partners”<sup>26</sup> surfaces, it appears to be a legacy of the laudably broad-based international coalition which was formed by the administration in the wake of the September 2001 incidents, as well as merely a casual use of language. Thus “partners” includes “our alliance partners in Thailand and the Philippines”<sup>27</sup>, as well as the G-8<sup>28</sup> countries (or, on page 18, the “G-7” despite Russia’s re-ascension status since May 1998) and in a slippage of terminology, it is elsewhere used to include industrial partners and international trading partners: “We will also continue to work with our partners to develop cleaner and more energy efficient technologies”<sup>29</sup>. This elision is significant and understandable, given the administration’s close working-relationships with parts of the petrochemical industry.

When provoked, Jesus is recorded in two gospels as saying, “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters”<sup>30</sup>. The *National Security Strategy* document sets out a similar position. Speeches made by W. Bush and quoted in italics in this document by way of setting a keynote for each chapter, include the following excerpts: “*Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different*

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<sup>26</sup> ib., p.9

<sup>27</sup> ib., p.26

<sup>28</sup> ib., p.14

<sup>29</sup> ib., p.20

<sup>30</sup> *The Insight Bible: New International Version*, International Bible Society, (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 1992), Matthew 12:30 [with the second comma omitted] p.843; Luke 11:23, p.901. According to the gospel of Matthew, verse 34, Jesus continues his answer to the Pharisees’ cynicism with, “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good?”.



*moralties*”<sup>31</sup>; “*This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger*”<sup>32</sup>. The body of the text goes on to remove a fundamental legal distinction: “We make no distinction between terrorists and those who knowingly harbor or provide aid to them”<sup>33</sup>. Just as with the inconsistent and overlapping categories of allies, friends, and partners, the text depicts its “enemies” in broad brush-strokes and presents the image of a polity both too impassioned and too distracted to work with more subtle and well-differentiated categories. This leads to the successful development of a rhetoric which is versatile and threateningly ambiguous in its scope.

Character notes for “our enemies” are extensive within the *National Security Strategy* document and, as Johann Herder wrote, “the explanation of such words unlocks for us manner of thought and police, *character* and ethics, in short, the secret of the nation”<sup>34</sup>. According to the W. Bush introductory letter, they make themselves manifest in “the evil designs of tyrants”<sup>35</sup>, they are “shadowy networks of individuals”<sup>36</sup> who can bring “great chaos and suffering”<sup>37</sup>, they are “the enemies of civilisation”<sup>38</sup> and represent one of many

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<sup>31</sup> Speech given by President George W. Bush, West Point, New York, June 1<sup>st</sup> 2002, cited in *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.3

<sup>32</sup> Speech given by President George W. Bush, The National Cathedral, Washington, D.C., September 14<sup>th</sup> 2001, cited in *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.5

<sup>33</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.5

<sup>34</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder, ‘Fragments on Recent German Literature’, *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.47, his italics

<sup>35</sup> *ib.*, p.vi

<sup>36</sup> *ib.*, p.iv

<sup>37</sup> *ib.*, p.iv

“foes”<sup>39</sup> such as “poverty and disease”<sup>40</sup>, which have “tested”<sup>41</sup> freedom throughout history. An interesting implication in this last paragraph is that poverty and disease (and terrorism) are sent to test humanity – a biblical notion epitomised by the Book of Job. In the body of the document itself, the enemies are “the embittered few”<sup>42</sup>, who are “*wrong*”<sup>43</sup>, who “resist”<sup>44</sup> “the cause of human dignity”<sup>45</sup> and “*have been caught seeking these terrible weapons*”<sup>46</sup>; whose “so-called soldiers seek martyrdom in death”<sup>47</sup> as well as “wanton destruction”<sup>48</sup> – they are “*evil*”<sup>49</sup> and certain conditions “spawn”<sup>50</sup> them. The document argues for terrorism to be viewed by more governments “in the same light”<sup>51</sup> as “slavery, piracy, or genocide”<sup>52</sup>. Moreover, the document implies that to be one of “our enemies” is to forfeit any rights to having one’s values respected, or is perhaps to have no values worth respecting at all: “In exercising our leadership, we will respect the rights, values, judgement, and interests of our friends and partners”<sup>53</sup>. Adding unexpected depth to this caricature, the text does observe that

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<sup>38</sup> ib., p.v

<sup>39</sup> ib., p.vi

<sup>40</sup> ib.

<sup>41</sup> ib.

<sup>42</sup> ib., p.1

<sup>43</sup> ib., p.3

<sup>44</sup> ib., p.4

<sup>45</sup> ib.

<sup>46</sup> ib., p.13

<sup>47</sup> ib., p.15

<sup>48</sup> ib.

<sup>49</sup> ib., p.5

<sup>50</sup> ib., p.6

<sup>51</sup> ib.

<sup>52</sup> ib. This is an incongruous list and the demonisation process falters slightly here, since whilst genocide can refer to the annihilation of an entire ethnic group, and whereas slavery is an advanced form of capitalism, commodification and instrumentalisation which also subverts human rights, piracy consists in essence of theft.

<sup>53</sup> ib., p.31

“In many regions, legitimate grievances prevent the emergence of a lasting peace. Such grievances deserve to be, and must be, addressed within a political process”<sup>54</sup>. This is as close as we come to an examination of what might motivate “our enemies”.

Those who would not accept American designations of terrorism are irresponsible and the *National Security Strategy* document avows that the administration will act “by convincing or compelling states to accept their sovereign responsibilities”<sup>55</sup>. State-level actors who are engaged in regional conflicts can be merely “unwilling or unready to help themselves”<sup>56</sup>, and while this helps to account for their sorry condition, the United States will be willing to help them “when people are ready to do their part”<sup>57</sup>. An echo resonates here of what Said termed “an ideological rationale for reducing, then reconstituting the native as someone to be ruled and managed”<sup>58</sup> – a strategy he notes of late 19<sup>th</sup> century European imperialism. China is cited as following “an outdated path” towards what the narrative voice presumes must be that shared and universal intention, the pursuit of “national greatness”<sup>59</sup>; but with a mixture of glib condescension and earnest intercession, it is predicted that “In time,

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<sup>54</sup> *ib.*, p.5

<sup>55</sup> *ib.*, p.6

<sup>56</sup> *ib.*, p.9

<sup>57</sup> *ib.*

<sup>58</sup> Said, (1994), p.131.

<sup>59</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.27

China will find that social and political freedom is the only source of that greatness”<sup>60</sup>. It is an irony that even parts of the “civilised” world seem not entirely to have understood American principles and must therefore be countered through domestic legislation. The International Criminal Court has values from which it is important to “protect US nationals”<sup>61</sup>, lest “efforts to meet our global security commitments and protect Americans”<sup>62</sup> are “impaired by the potential for investigations, inquiry, or prosecution”<sup>63</sup>; or in case military operations should encounter “complications”<sup>64</sup>.

The United States on the other hand, is represented in the text as the embodiment of good, and as an exceptional country at that. In the dichotomy between good and evil, the “enemies of civilisation”<sup>65</sup> are arrayed against a US which must therefore be taken as representing and defending civilisation itself. This is perhaps what contributes to America’s “unique responsibilities”<sup>66</sup> in the world, a phrase later used to explain why unilateralism is sometimes necessary. This assumption that the US represents civilisation, allows the text to speak in the name of “common sense”<sup>67</sup> and thereby to derive what amounts to a

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<sup>60</sup> ib.

<sup>61</sup> ib., p.31

<sup>62</sup> ib.

<sup>63</sup> ib.

<sup>64</sup> ib.

<sup>65</sup> ib., p.v

<sup>66</sup> ib., p.31

<sup>67</sup> ib.

post-enlightenment legitimacy. In this writing, “great powers”<sup>68</sup> or “great nations”<sup>69</sup> are set against “weak states”<sup>70</sup> in such a way as to confer a Nietzschean – and Straussian – respectability upon the powerful, and to make weakness culpable. This ideology has perhaps found fertile ground in the Puritan/Protestant work ethic, which can similarly incline towards consistently imputing moral responsibility to the poor for their situation. It is worth noting that in this document “weak state” comes to take on connotations of “puny” or “militarily weak” – as in the phrase “*even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power*”<sup>71</sup> – whereas in the context of political science, the term “weak state” ought generally to be applied to a state which primarily exhibits low territorial control and low provision of public services. However, America is strong and good, and it is therefore in a position to “welcome”<sup>72</sup> states which will join it in pursuing prosperity and “cultural advancement”<sup>73</sup>. Furthermore, as well as being a refuge of advanced cultural refinement, the US is portrayed as “*peaceful*”<sup>74</sup>, and speaks for “freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages”<sup>75</sup>.

Whereas we have seen that its enemies are in league with poverty and disease in

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<sup>68</sup> ib.

<sup>69</sup> ib., p.13

<sup>70</sup> ib.

<sup>71</sup> ib.

<sup>72</sup> ib., p.v

<sup>73</sup> ib.

<sup>74</sup> ib., p.5

<sup>75</sup> ib., p.iv

their eternal contest with freedom, the US is conversely the champion of “human dignity”<sup>76</sup> and – in a grave proclamation of responsibility<sup>77</sup> – knows that “Freedom and fear are at war, and there will be no quick or easy end to this conflict”<sup>78</sup>. Despite having acknowledged – of its fundamental principles of liberty and justice – that “No nation owns these aspirations”<sup>79</sup>, and whilst undertaking to act multilaterally in “a spirit of humility”<sup>80</sup>, nonetheless, this is a document in which one senses a process of self assurance and of building the resolve of its readership, that its principles are the only way, and the truth, and the right ones – “right and true for people everywhere”<sup>81</sup> – even as it informs China of “the only source”<sup>82</sup>, and the post-totalitarian world of “a single sustainable model for national success”<sup>83</sup>. By taking courage from such a dogma, the administration can aver to “sustain the supremacy of our common principles and keep open the path of progress”<sup>84</sup>. If it seems that the language has already taken a mythical turn into messianism, that is no coincidence – the *National Security Strategy* document is among other things, the rallying call to a spiritual crusade.

Victor Gordon Kiernan wrote that “An economic system ... like a nation or a

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<sup>76</sup> *ib.*, p.4

<sup>77</sup> Edward Said classes characteristics of post-Cold War US governmental rhetoric: “redolent self-congratulation, its unconcealed triumphalism, its grave proclamations of responsibility” – which come to typify a structure of attitude and reference; Said, (1994), p.xvii

<sup>78</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.7

<sup>79</sup> *ib.*, p.3

<sup>80</sup> *ib.*, p.25

<sup>81</sup> *ib.*, p.3

<sup>82</sup> *ib.*

<sup>83</sup> *ib.*, p.iv

<sup>84</sup> *ib.*, p.28

religion, lives not by bread alone, but by beliefs, visions, daydreams as well, and these may be no less vital to it for being erroneous”<sup>85</sup>. For the America being constituted by this text, the mantra of this crusade is “freedom”, a notion which becomes deified in the course of the writing to provide what Said would term a doctrine of “Western salvation and redemption through its ‘civilizing mission’”<sup>86</sup>. He elaborates: “Redemption is found in the self-justifying practice of an idea or mission over time, in a structure that completely encircles and is revered by you even though you set up the structure in the first place”<sup>87</sup>. The ordained role of protecting freedom is a vocation: “These values of freedom are right and true ... and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages”<sup>88</sup>.

Of necessity, this undertaking cannot be limited to those already saved, for it is an outward-looking and proselytising “great mission”<sup>89</sup> which sees a world hungry for its message and thirsting for its eschatological revelation. This is an opportunity to “extend the benefits of freedom across the globe”<sup>90</sup> and to “further freedom’s triumph over all these

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<sup>85</sup> Cited by Said, (1994), p.289

<sup>86</sup> Said, (1994), p.131

<sup>87</sup> *ib.*, p.69

<sup>88</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.iv

<sup>89</sup> *ib.*, p.vi

<sup>90</sup> *ib.*, p.v

foes”<sup>91</sup>. It would be churlish to suggest that US foreign policy is driven primarily by self-interest like those of other nations, for “*Our Nation’s cause has always been larger than our Nation’s defense*”<sup>92</sup> and merely holding the values of liberty and justice, entails an obligation: “the United States must start from these core beliefs and look outward for possibilities to expand liberty”<sup>93</sup>. Serving freedom means bringing light to dark places – “*our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil*”<sup>94</sup> – and it is important to keep the faith through consistent communion with other NATO members: “We will sustain a common perspective on the threats to our societies”<sup>95</sup>. Once freedom has been enshrined in this way, the crusade – directed to whatever end – can proceed with our consent, our blessings, and the righteousness which America’s mass democracy requires. Thus, in a pledge which is more accurately a prediction, the *National Security Strategy* document can affirm that “The reasons for our actions will be clear, the force measured, and the cause just”<sup>96</sup>. As Marlow in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* comments, “What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before,

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<sup>91</sup> *ib.*, p.vi

<sup>92</sup> *ib.*, p.1

<sup>93</sup> *ib.*, p.3

<sup>94</sup> *ib.*, p.5

<sup>95</sup> *ib.*, p.26

<sup>96</sup> *ib.*, p.16



and offer a sacrifice to. . . .”<sup>97</sup>.

The doctrine of “freedom” is subsequently extended into free trade, which apparently “arose as a moral principle even before it became a pillar of economics”<sup>98</sup>. Accordingly, this ideology takes centre stage, is abused and then discarded. First, we are made aware concerning free trade that, “This is real freedom, the freedom for a person – or a nation – to make a living”<sup>99</sup>; subsequently the notion is quietly eviscerated: “Laws against unfair practices are often abused, but the international community must be able to address genuine concerns about government subsidies and dumping”<sup>100</sup>. Finally, the universal moral principle of “free trade” comes to encompass globalisation for American businesses, but trade barriers around the domestic market: “The benefits of free trade depend upon the enforcement of fair trading practices. These safeguards help ensure that the benefits of free trade do not come at the expense of American workers”<sup>101</sup>. It is at precisely such a rhetorical juncture that Aimé Césaire would melodramatically warn: “American high finance considers that the time has come to raid every colony in the world. So, dear friends, here you have to be

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<sup>97</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text: Backgrounds and Sources: Criticism*, third edition, ed. Robert Kimbrough, (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1988), p.10

<sup>98</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.18

<sup>99</sup> *ib.*

<sup>100</sup> *ib.*, p.19

<sup>101</sup> *ib.*

careful!”<sup>102</sup>.

Even in a representative democracy, “the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country”<sup>103</sup>, as Hermann Goering famously remarked in his Nuremberg cell<sup>104</sup>. Arundhati Roy adds that a common rhetorical technique in American politics is “this use of the urgent morality of the present to obscure the diabolical sins of the past and the malevolent plans for the future”<sup>105</sup>. In the *National Security Strategy* document the galvanising sense of urgency is coupled with a teleological interpretation of historical events, whereby history becomes personified as the expression of a providence tantamount to divine will. Thus, now is said to be a “historic opportunity”<sup>106</sup> and “the best chance since the rise of the nation-state in the seventeenth century”<sup>107</sup>, but we are warned that “History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act”<sup>108</sup>. This alloy ensures that should the urgent morality of the present begin to corrode, it simply offers sacrificial protection to an

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<sup>102</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p.76

<sup>103</sup> Herman Goering, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1946, from ex post facto notes by Gustave M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1947), pp. 278-279; cited by Barbara and David P. Mikkelson, *Urban Legends Reference Pages*, available at:

<<http://www.snopes2.com/quotes/goering.htm>>, last updated: October 4<sup>th</sup> 2002, retrieved: May 20<sup>th</sup> 2003

<sup>104</sup> No broader comparison is intended here between the W. Bush administration and the Third Reich.

<sup>105</sup> Arundhati Roy, *Instant-Mix Imperial Democracy (Buy One, Get One Free)*, presented in New York City, The Riverside Church, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2003; sponsored by the *Center for Economic and Social Rights*, available at:

<<http://www.cesr.org/Roy/images/roy.pdf>>, retrieved: May 20<sup>th</sup> 2003, p.3

<sup>106</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.v

<sup>107</sup> ib.

<sup>108</sup> ib.

entirely different order of morality: the morality of posterity. In the sentence “History has not been kind to those nations which ignored or flouted the rights and aspirations of their people”<sup>109</sup> as in the phrases “our responsibility to history”<sup>110</sup> and “History will judge harshly”<sup>111</sup> (above), there is the intimation that even if the urgent morality of the present should seem immoral, we ought really to hold ourselves accountable to a historical perspective (or a divine one), which will ultimately redeem us.

If “freedom” is the *National Security Strategy* document’s New Testament God, then contrapuntally, “History” is characterised as a God of wrath. He grants chances, and then He taketh away; He will hold you responsible for your actions, He will judge them harshly and He will punish those who disobey. Yet history is also a teacher and “The lessons of history are clear: market economies not command-and-control economies with the heavy hand of government, are the best way to promote prosperity and reduce poverty”<sup>112</sup>. It may seem a little far-fetched to suggest that underlying this document is a belief in free market capitalism as a divinely revealed truth. However, in the context of the publicly expressed views of those such as US Attorney General John D. Ashcroft, my proposal must seem less

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<sup>109</sup> ib., p.3  
<sup>110</sup> ib., p.5  
<sup>111</sup> ib., p.v  
<sup>112</sup> ib., p.17

implausible. “We are a nation called to defend freedom – a freedom that is not the grant of any government or document but is our endowment from God”<sup>113</sup> he claims, and incidentally serves to invest the “Declaration of Independence” with the authority of a sacred text by quoting from it to corroborate this point.

Another ideological current is worth noting in this text. In an extension of the way in which the US has moved towards a litigation culture whereby it is assumed that accidents imply culpability, and has joined with the more general late capitalist adoption of extensive insurance coverage – which promotes the idea that all the effects of misfortune can be eliminated from life – in this document it seems to want to create a Disney World of the world, where all threats have been vanquished. Although I do not profess to speak as a European, Robert Kagan’s dichotomous model would portray my position as follows: “Europeans often argue that Americans have an unreasonable demand for “perfect” security ... . Europeans claim they know what it is like to live with danger ... . Americans, they claim, make far too much of the dangers these regimes pose”<sup>114</sup>. There is, therefore, a risk of overstating my point.

At times, the *National Security Strategy* document betrays a tendency towards believing that

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<sup>113</sup> US Attorney General John D. Ashcroft, speech made to 59<sup>th</sup> National Religious Broadcasters Convention, Nashville, Tennessee, February 19<sup>th</sup> 2002; cited from prepared text, distributed by the Office of International Information Programs, *U.S. Department of State Website*, available at: <<http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/nea/sasia/text/0219ashcrft.htm>>, posted: February 19<sup>th</sup> 2002, retrieved: May 20<sup>th</sup> 2003

<sup>114</sup> Robert Kagan, ‘Power and Weakness’, *Policy Review*, No. 113, June and July 2002, available at: <<http://www.policyreview.org/JUN02/kagan.html>>, posted: June 2002, retrieved: 20<sup>th</sup> May 2003

it is not only desirable, but actually possible to – in its own words – “*rid the world of evil*”<sup>115</sup>.

Having previously made the case that “Traditional concepts of deterrence will not work”<sup>116</sup> in this post-9/11 world, the document advocates that “It is time to reaffirm the essential role of American military strength. We must build and maintain our defenses beyond challenge”<sup>117</sup>. To be beyond challenge is certainly ambitious. It is also hubristic and unrealistic. The braggadocio is not concerning in itself, but – evaluated by this weltanschauung’s own criteria – the tenacious belief in the attainment of invincible supremacy displays an irresponsible attitude to recent history. For sometimes, the lessons of history are clear. In the idiom of a British Member of Parliament, Andrew Tyrie, “at times the rhetoric of the most hawkish in the US administration seems to indicate a bid for ‘total security’ – a bid to ensure that no other country can hurt America or her interests. Attempting this will prove to be a dangerous delusion”<sup>118</sup>. Yet, the intent is implicitly for a new century of American predominance: “Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States”<sup>119</sup>. As well as being an end in itself, the legitimising assumption here – as made

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<sup>115</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p., p.5

<sup>116</sup> *ib.*, p.15

<sup>117</sup> *ib.*, p.29

<sup>118</sup> Tyrie, (2003), available at: <<http://www.bowgroup.org/pub/axisofinstabilitytext.pdf>>, p.11

<sup>119</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.30

explicit by the “fundamental propositions”<sup>120</sup> of the influential think tank The Project for the New American Century – must be that “American leadership is good both for America and for the world”<sup>121</sup>.

Speaking of Russia, India and China, it is said that recent developments have “encouraged our hope that a truly global consensus about basic principles is slowly taking shape”<sup>122</sup>. If freedom, justice and “basic human values” can constitute a creed, then the *National Security Strategy* document hopes to convert the world. It professes a belief that then, “In a world that is safe, people will be able to make their own lives better”<sup>123</sup>. I shall quote Tyrie at some length here:

Underlying much of the rhetoric of the new Bush doctrines is another fundamental misconception, that western values, and particularly western democratic values, are inherently peaceful and that a fully democratic world would abjure war. One senses that, not far away in some American policy makers’ minds is the thought that if only “everyone was like us” there would be peace in the world.<sup>124</sup>

Unfortunately, representative democracies are not Starbucks franchises and cannot be imposed abroad in a cookie-cutter fashion<sup>125</sup>. In many cases “freedom” is not the answer that

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<sup>120</sup> William Kristol, *The Project for the New American Century website*, available at: <<http://www.newamericancentury.org/index.html>>, PNAC established: spring 1997, retrieved May 20<sup>th</sup> 2003

<sup>121</sup> *ib.*

<sup>122</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.26

<sup>123</sup> *ib.*, p.iv

<sup>124</sup> Tyrie, (2003), available at: <<http://www.bowgroup.org/pub/axisofinstabilitytext.pdf>>, pp.12 – 13

<sup>125</sup> As events continue to show, particularly in non-homogenous societies, workable democracies require certain foundations: a range of established social norms – such as compromise, pluralism, and respect for authority; and they require institutional safeguards and reasonable partisan expectations. The degree to which such democracies will be successful is furthered by other established social norms – such as probity in public life, notions of national/public good, and an accepted differentiation between one’s sublimated personhood and a public office; and their success is furthered by maturation over a period relatively free from exogenic shocks, linguistic and territorial integrity, the political sophistication of the vernacular, developed infrastructure, stable immigration, an educated populace, independent non-state/ (“non-market”) media bodies, consociational

the *National Security Strategy* document sermonises it to be, and successfully transplanted democratic systems are the exception rather than the rule. Neither do functioning democracies necessarily betoken peaceful nations. Nonetheless, the mantra is repeated to the exclusion of doubt, almost as if knowledge about the continued existence of differing values and cultures challenged and undermined America itself. As Eric Hobsbawm has pertinently observed, after the 1870s and “almost certainly in connection with the emergence of mass politics, rulers and middle-class observers rediscovered the importance of ‘irrational’ elements in the maintenance of the social fabric and the social order”<sup>126</sup>.

The manner in which “our enemies” are characterised in this text discourages any deeper questioning of who they are, and why they behave in a manner which has warranted their categorisation as such by the authority of the text. This rhetoric reaches its dizzying apogee as encapsulated in a bullet point, which submits (as an attribute which “rogue states” share in common) that: these states “• reject basic human values and hate the United States and everything for which it stands”<sup>127</sup>. It is worth noting here the awkward avoidance of the term “human rights” (a double-edged sword) and the substitution of a phrase, “basic human

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demographics, strong civic networks, economic growth and the absence of an external ethnic homeland.

<sup>126</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, ‘Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870 – 1914’, *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.263 – 307, p.268

<sup>127</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.14

values”, which is intended to refer back to “liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere”<sup>128</sup>. Frantz Fanon argued that “the building of a nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values”<sup>129</sup>, but the use of the phrase “basic human values” irrespectively presents so broad a term as to make any proposed dichotomy unfalsifiable.

The syllogism upon which this line of thinking rests – were it made explicit – would run as follows:

- a.) We are a force for good, and so all those who do evil things must be in direct opposition to us;
- b.) Terrorists and “rogue states” do evil things because they are evil;
- c.) Therefore they constitute a threat to us and are our enemies.

Although making no pretensions to do so, the text does not distinguish between different values, opposed values and threatening values, and I would argue that this is not an uncommon trope of contemporary public discourse in America. Hobsbawm makes a more general remark of an earlier America towards the end of his period of ‘Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870 – 1914’:

In countries defining nationality existentially, there could be unpatriotic Englishmen or Frenchmen, but their status as Englishmen or Frenchmen could not be in doubt ... . Yet in the U.S.A., as in Germany, the ‘un-American’ or

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<sup>128</sup> ib., p.3

<sup>129</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1968), p.247



‘vaterlandslose’ person threw doubt on his or her actual status as a member of the nation.<sup>130</sup>

Regardless of any postulated relevance which one might claim for such a construction of nationhood as bearing upon tolerance of discussion and difference in present day America, the syllogism is inconsistent in other important ways. One critical problem here is the question of motivation in the minor premise (b.), and what I have hoped to show in adumbrating the above line of thinking is how – in its effect at the rhetorical level – the problem of motivation is neatly circumvented.

Now the pieces begin to fall into place to delineate part of a normative – and, in the case of this 2002 document, official – national landscape of ideology. To conclude, I have argued that these are the unspoken assumptions underlying the *National Security Strategy* document: “*American leadership is good for the world because in a dichotomous world view, America wholeheartedly believes in “freedom” and as such must be considered an exceptional force for good. History has vindicated and redeemed America in this. Opponents of America must therefore be evil, and to make the world a better and safer place, these threats must be eliminated. Other countries can be wrong-headed or weak even if they are not evil. Now that the threats have radically worsened, the situation has become intolerable.*

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<sup>130</sup> Hobsbawm, (1983), p.280

*There is an urgent need to pre-emptively spread freedom and to open foreign markets. It is now or never. This is uniquely our duty. If people become more like us, the world will be safe at last. We have achieved national greatness and we must not allow our supremacy to be challenged. If you agree with us, you are more American. If you choose to differ, with these sacred and self-evident truths, you are not really an American and have lower status. And if you are not with us, you are not our friend – and you are against us. May God continue to bless America’.*

It is easy to regard the *National Security Strategy* document as having been written by honest, God-fearing individuals (albeit those somewhat infantile in their application of faith) who – with no sense of irony whatsoever – believe that they will make the world a better place. This would be misleading. I will not venture to judge based on this document, to what extent the politics of the W. Bush administration are directly influenced by the ideas of Leo Strauss, but I will remark that at the core of the *National Security Strategy* document’s rhetoric is what I perceive as an effort to promote a highly conformist cultural cohesion, the problem being that it seems to be undertaken cynically. Sections of this document betray glimpses of an erudition which is damning. In what I shall assume is a reply to Samuel P. Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilisations: and the Remaking of World Order*, the *National*

*Security Strategy* document asides, “The war on terrorism is not a clash of civilizations. It does, however, reveal the clash inside a civilization, a battle for the future of the Muslim world”<sup>131</sup>. This is not mere ignorance at work – there are other influences within the body of this writing.

Yet on the other hand, the messianism of this document in proposing the two doctrines of pre-emptive strike and – implicitly – regime change, would seem to indicate more blind faith and less manipulation of others’ faith, on the part of its authors. This is because, as Tyrie has pointed out, use of this rhetoric – whether intended for the domestic audience or not – is in fact profoundly against America’s interests. Firstly, “the language of pre-emption and regime change will be used by other countries to justify military action with which the West profoundly disagrees or which is against western interests”<sup>132</sup>. The examples given include Russia, North Korea and Israel. Secondly, using the rhetoric of regime change to justify the removal of leaders of “rogue states”, through military action if necessary, destabilises the world order and promotes the acquisition of nuclear weapons by states which could otherwise face the threat of coercion. Tyrie relates, “the Iranian leadership was recently reported as saying that the lesson of different treatment of Iraq and North Korea was to

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<sup>131</sup> *National Security Strategy*, (2002), p.31

<sup>132</sup> Tyrie, (2003), available at: <<http://www.bowgroup.org/pub/axisofinstabilitytext.pdf>>, p.5

acquire a nuclear weapons capacity”<sup>133</sup>.

Regardless of the actions it is used to legitimise, this rhetoric is harmful in itself both to the wider world and to America’s interests. If it intended to use its position for genuine “Good” in the world, American leadership would need to apostatise from its dichotomous weltanschauung, its crudely undifferentiated and inconsistent categories and its threatening and hubristic rhetoric of superiority and of bringing its values to others for the world’s salvation. Whether this rhetoric arises because of ignorance or out of guile, I will submit that at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the electorate of the United States of America ought not to be represented by people who have recourse to such discourse. If one is to have faith in anything, it should be in the capacity of people to understand complex issues and a more nuanced world-view when social expectations are raised.

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<sup>133</sup> ib., p.11

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Alternate Title: National Security Strategy of the United States of America. "This National Security Strategy sets a positive strategic direction for the United States that is meant to reassert America's advantages on the world stage and to build upon our country's great strengths. During the Trump Administration, the American people can be confident that their security and prosperity will always come first. A secure, prosperous, and free America will be strong and ready to lead abroad to protect our interests and our way of life. America's renewed strategic confidence is a More on: Defense and Security The seal of the President of the United States is seen on the wall of one of the rooms of the newly The European Union and the United Kingdom came to a last-minute trade deal on Christmas Eve, narrowly averting the hardest of all potential Brexits. But major uncertainty remains. In Brief by Matthias Matthijs December 28, 2020. The web site is no longer updated and links to external web sites and some internal pages will not work. Skip Main Navigation. Develop Agendas for Cooperative Action with the Other Main Centers of Global Power. Transform America's National Security Institutions to Meet the Challenges and Opportunities of the Twenty-First Century. Printer-Friendly Version Email This Page. President | Vice President | First Lady | Mrs. Cheney | News & Policies History & Tours | Kids | Your Government | Appointments | Jobs | Contact | Accessibility | Search | Privacy Policy | Help | Site Map.