

Apr 18th, 1:00 AM - 3:00 AM

The “World’s Greatest Deliberative Body” and the Decision to Invade Iraq: The Rhetoric of Senatorial Debate on Senate Joint Resolution 46

Henry Castillo

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, henry.castillo@unlv.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/grad_symposium



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Castillo, Henry, "The “World’s Greatest Deliberative Body” and the Decision to Invade Iraq: The Rhetoric of Senatorial Debate on Senate Joint Resolution 46" (2016). *Graduate Research Symposium (GCUA) (2010 - 2017)*. 4.

https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/grad_symposium/2016/April18/4

This Event is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Event in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Event has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Symposium (GCUA) (2010 - 2017) by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

The “World’s Greatest Deliberative Body” and the Decision to Invade Iraq: The Rhetoric of Senatorial Debate on Senate Joint Resolution 46

Henry Castillo

Abstract

On the issue of the Iraq invasion, many in the public view President George W. Bush as the primary actor in its execution. Yet Bush explicitly sought congressional approval before employing military force against the country and elevated Congress’ role in the Iraq crisis. A plethora of academic research exists on how Bush persuaded the public into supporting the invasion. However, a dearth of scholarship exists on how Congress, specifically the Senate, deliberated on this decision. As a chamber often labeled as the “World’s Greatest Deliberative Body,” as well as having constitutionally-unique responsibilities in matters of foreign affairs, this study investigates the 107th Senate’s debate on the 2002 resolution titled “Senate Joint Resolution 46” (Humphrey, 1959). The debate spanned 14 days from its introduction on October 2nd to its signing by President George W. Bush on October 16th. The Senate dedicated five days—October 4th, October 7th, October 8th, October 9th, and October 10th—to debate.

Sample and Methodology

A **close textual analysis** of **thirty** Senatorial speeches was conducted. These speeches were selected from the *Congressional Record*. Upon collecting and categorizing these texts, attention turned to the types of claims the Senators made, how they supported said claims, the syntactical structure of their arguments, as well as identifying recurring discursive patterns that emerged from their debate (Leff, 1989).

- Within these sets of texts, **an equal number of Democratic Senators and Republican Senators** were selected.
- **Two factors narrowed the selection of these speeches:** leadership role and seniority. Rather than randomly choosing various speeches from each day, texts were chosen deliberately so as to highlight the influential speeches of higher-ranking Senators while still maintaining an equal count of Democrats and Republicans per day. Congress members in leadership roles and those that carry higher seniority are not only interviewed more often, but are often viewed as more credible sources of information (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001).



Analysis

From the close textual analysis, three metaphoric clusters were found to be present in the Senate’s the debate. These clusters, defined as linguistic reservoirs that speakers draw from to help justify their arguments, contained significant terms that frequently emerged throughout the debate.

FORCE – This cluster serves as the most predominant in the Senate’s debate, as observed by the number of Senators that drew from it. This grouping defined the acts performed by the former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein as forceful, brutal, and aggressive.

TIME – This cluster included terms highlighted the urgency of equipping President Bush with military force. Senators either mentioned the length of the debate as being sufficient enough, bordering on excessive, or being excessive.

STATUS - The STATUS cluster referred to America’s leadership and standing on the world stage. Iraq was frequently positioned as a modern Nazi Germany or Soviet Union and America was the nation to confront them. This cluster helped define the invasion not in terms of cost or human sacrifice, but in terms of stature and leadership. Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) explained that “The perception of American power is power, and how our power is perceived can either magnify or diminish our influence in the world.”

References

- Limited references are provided. Please contact Henry.Castillo@unlv.edu for a full reference list.
- Callaghan, Karen and Schnell, Frauke. “Assessing the Democratic Debate: How the News Media Frame Elite Policy Discourse,” *Political Communication* 18 (2001): 184.
- Humphrey, Hubert H. “The Senate in Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 37 (1959): 525.
- Leff, Michael C. 1986. “Textual Criticism: The Legacy of G. P. Mohrmann,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 (1986): 379.

Findings and Conclusion

This study draws two primary conclusions.

First, the clusters operated in a particular direction within the Senators’ speeches: FORCE → TIME → STATUS. By decivilizing Hussein’s character, Senators were better able to craft a logic:

(a) Hussein was an evil, aggressive, and forceful entity,

(b) that entity needed to be neutralized immediately since such evil should not be, as Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL) contended, “empowered by an unnecessarily lengthy debate,” and

(c) that America’s status as a global moral force hinged on the Senators’ passage of the resolution. This in turn ostracized dissenters and helped stifle debate. To be against the resolution was tantamount to being against upholding America’s stature as a world leader.

Second, a recurring pattern emerged where anti-resolution Senators were often projected negatively. A majority of these arguments focused on how those against the resolution were unpatriotic or against the troops. Other arguments were indirect, where many pro-resolution Senators broadly stated that questioning the president was “wrongful.” Lastly, many Senators argued that there was an American duty or obligation to protect other nations and to be against the resolution would be against this duty. See graph below.

Type of Arguments Used Against Senators Who Opposed the Resolution (2002 Iraq Resolution Debates)

American Duty to Protect 18%

Against the Troops 19%

Questioning the President as “Wrong” 23%

Unpatriotic 40%

UNLV