DÜZCE UNIVERSITY | FACULTY OF AKÇAKOCA BEY POLITICAL SCIENCES

JEP
Journal of Economics and Political Sciences

Research Article

Legitimization and Discourse Continuity in the United States Grand Strategy

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 11.07.2025
Revision: 17.12.2025
Accepted: 18.12.2025
Available Online: 31.12.2025

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Keywords: Discourse Continuity, George W. Bush, Grand Strategy, Harry S. Truman, Legitimation

ABSTRACT

The United States has sought to legitimize its policies aimed at securing global hegemony by creating a dichotomy among global actors and presenting itself as the legitimate party. This study examines how the U.S. constructs a "freedom-oppression" dichotomy at the discursive level to legitimize its global leadership and how this dichotomy is sustained in its foreign policy discourse. In this context, the study uses discourse-historical analysis to compare and analyze Harry S. Truman's discourse against the Soviet Union with George W. Bush's discourse on terrorism and radical ideologies. The U.S. has constructed a discursive dichotomy by identifying itself with "freedom" and defining its opponents as "oppressive" in order to legitimize its global leadership. The study concludes that the U.S.' foreign policy discourse positions "others" as "evil" from moral and political perspectives and defines itself "good" and savior over the "evil" nature of the "other". This traditional method continues to be used. This discursive pattern has been assessed as an institutionalized reflection of exceptionalism in the foreign policy of the U.S. Recognizing these parallels and evaluating developments through this lens is essential for adopting the most appropriate strategic posture in future crises.

1. Introduction

The formulation of American foreign policy encompasses a vision of international leadership, accompanied by the development of strategies aimed at legitimizing the policies that will be executed in accordance with this vision. The Grand Strategy of the United States encompassed not only elements of national power but also a series of ideological and discursive policies. These discursive strategies have served to create ideological and moral dichotomies and to legitimize external interventions based on these dichotomies. Both the Truman Doctrine in the early years of the Cold War and the identification of communism as the enemy, and the post-9/11 Bush Doctrine and the "War on Terrorism" discourse provide two examples of parallels in the context of legitimizing global leadership and struggle in the U.S. foreign policy. These parallels stem from the utilization of similar methodologies to establish an antithesis that serves as the inverse of a designated order. The objective of this approach is to guarantee the continuity of significant strategic objectives and the accomplishments achieved towards these objectives. Additionally, it serves to reinforce the legitimacy of the means employed. Consequently, the opposition established within the discursive domain furnishes a framework that rationalizes the objectives and the implementation mechanisms of the grand strategy.

In the U.S., Presidents have made references to their predecessors in order to symbolically shape and orient the political meaning and limits of the presidential office (Brown, 2007,

p. 125). During the Bush administration, propaganda reminiscent of the Truman administration and the Second World War, emphasizing American exceptionalism and the virtue of sacrifice, was used.[1] This method was used to legitimize some certain policies. There are three main similarities between the Truman and Bush Doctrines in terms of discursive continuity. To begin with, in both doctrines, the enemy is portrayed as an "existential threat" to the fundamental values such as "freedom" and "democracy". Truman described communism as an expansionist ideology that would destroy the values on which the U.S. was founded, such as freedom and democracy and that would disregard human honor and dignity. During the Bush administration, terrorism and radical ideologies were declared enemies using similar rhetorical strategies and were portrayed as "existential threats" to global security and well-being. Secondly, in both doctrines, the U.S. sought to legitimize its means through the rhetoric of a moral necessity to fight the existing threat. Finally, in both doctrines, the U.S. emphasized that they were the savior leader, protecting the "free world".

A comparative analysis of Truman's and Bush's statements will be conducted with a focus on how these legitimization discourses served the ends of American Grand Strategy. The study will examine the elements of the Cold War that were inherited by the post-Cold War era in the U.S. and the extent to which the general strategic direction persisted. The analysis of the discourses which form the foundations of American foreign policy should not be regarded merely as a historical analysis. Rather, it would provide an understanding of the fundamental discursive framework within which the U.S.'s power struggle and strategic decisions in the international arena are constructed today and in the near future.

Methodology

In this study, a Critical Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA) method will be employed to compare the discourses of Truman and Bush. The employment of DHA is deemed suitable as it examines how language, historical context, and power structures interact by viewing discourse as a tool that constructs social reality, legitimizes political actions through rhetorical strategies, and reinforces institutionalized power dynamics. It analyzes contextual patterns and strategic language use to reveal how concepts such as "threat" or "enemy" legitimize policies, emergency measures, or restrictions on freedoms. Discourse shapes perceptions through the framing of identities, the legitimation of othering, and the management of ideological conflict (See for further information Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Wodak, 2015; Wodak & Forchtner, 2018). DHA is considered the most appropriate discourse analysis method to use because it analyzes the topics, strategy, and linguistic tools of discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 63-72).

The objective of this study is to identify and analyze the metaphors employed by political discourse to construct a sense of threat, which is posited as a prerequisite for policy legitimization. The analysis is rooted in the assumption that metaphorical language does not merely serve to embellish political discourse; rather, it actively structures political reality by framing certain situations as exceptional, dangerous, or morally charged. In this context, metaphors are examined as discursive instruments that initially establish an atmosphere of insecurity and subsequently translate this constructed insecurity into a moral and political obligation to act.

A critical component of this process is the discursive construction of threat through the use of morally absolutist and securitizing lexical choices such as "evil" and "threat". These terms function as more than descriptive labels; they invoke a narrative of

[1] Bush invoked the Truman administration's nation building initiatives in Japan to justify the Iraq intervention and to win public support. Referring to the Cold War rhetoric of fighting for freedom and security, he claimed that similar efforts would lead to success in Iraq. See Edwards, (2009, pp.454-455).

existential danger, thereby intensifying perceptions of seriousness and urgency. By framing the object of policy as inherently dangerous or morally corrupt, political actors effectively narrow the spectrum of legitimate responses and elevate extraordinary measures to the level of necessity. Consequently, the analysis centers on the manner in which such metaphors function to transform contingent political choices into inevitable responses to an externalized and dramatized threat.

The study builds on this threat construction by examining how responsibility is assigned and mobilized discursively to legitimize policy action. Once a state of imminent danger is established and characterized as ethically unambiguous, political authority is presented as bearing an inescapable duty to intervene, protect, or eliminate the source of threat. The article analyzes this sequence as a coherent legitimization strategy, in which metaphors of threat and moral dichotomization precede and enable appeals to responsibility, necessity, and leadership.

In the analysis to follow, metaphors, moral dilemmas, and othering discourses will be analyzed and compared in their historical contexts for both periods. The study will examine how both leaders employed fear rhetoric as a means of legitimizing their struggles and how they sought to sanctify American hegemony. The discourse analysis will be structured around the themes, strategies, and linguistic tools used in the rhetoric of both leaders. The investigation will concentrate on the mechanisms of demonization and policy legitimization, exploring the processes that led to the establishment of these discourses. The present study will undertake an analysis of the way Truman characterized the Soviet Union and communism as “threats” and “enemies” within the context of political and sociocultural frameworks. In contrast, Bush is known for his depictions of radical ideologies in a similar vein, albeit with a focus on the political and sociocultural ramifications.

2. Conceptual Framework: Grand Strategy

In accordance with Clausewitz’s theory, strategy is defined as the art of employing military instruments in a manner that serves political objectives rather than tactical ends of the war. The strategic framework not only dictates how military forces will engage in warfare but also the direction in which these military engagements will be steered towards achieving political objectives. In this sense, Clausewitz defines strategy as *“the form in which battles are used to achieve political ends”*. The term “strategy” does not refer to the employment of armed forces in warfare; rather, it signifies how warfare is utilized to attain political objectives (Clausewitz, 2011, pp. 165-167). This definition necessitates an evaluation of the concept of war that extends beyond mere military success, incorporating the alignment of that success with political objectives. However, Clausewitz underscores the potential for war to have catastrophic consequences even for the victorious side. It is imperative to recognize that victory does not invariably translate into a favorable outcome, as warfare exerts a significant drain on the resources of both the vanquished and the triumphant parties. In this particular context, he asserts that when a triumphant army neglects to capitalize its achievements in combat, it forfeits its hard-won gains. In such circumstances, a decline in morale can lead even the most battle-ready troops to diminish their combat effectiveness (Clausewitz, 2011, p. 283). This statement suggests that the victory achieved at the conclusion of a war may diminish in significance if it is not transformed into a sustainable strategy.

Liddell Hart’s perspective on warfare asserts that military victories, by their very nature, do not necessarily translate into clear gains, underscoring the complex and multifaceted nature of conflict. Hart underscores the profound material and psychological ramifications of warfare, asserting that these costs ultimately erode a state’s long-term security and capacity for sustainable peace. He argues that even a victory that appears definitive often results in significant resource

depletion and internal weakening, thereby reducing the strategic benefits that can be gained after the conflict. In light of these circumstances, he advocates a strategic framework that prioritizes sustainable security measures and measured engagement over the pursuit of short-term military victories (Hart, 2003, pp. 489-498). Consequently, beginning in the 20th century, the approach that guides the national security interests of states has been shaped not solely by the institutionalization of military conflicts but also by the incorporation of political, economic, and cultural elements into the collective consciousness. Culture functions as an ideological factor that influences the attitudes and behaviors of individuals and states, as well as the formulation of strategies. This ideological aspect is instrumental in delineating the comprehensiveness and comprehensive nature of strategy. The economy ensures the distribution of resources necessary for the implementation of strategic decisions. Meanwhile, politics plays a pivotal role in the process as the fundamental dynamic force that guides national interests and international relations (Çam, 2024, pp. 21-22).

The notion of grand strategy came into existence, although it had been employed previously for divergent or analogous purposes, in the form of creating policies that were of the utmost importance until the objectives were accomplished, without encountering the destructiveness of the war. According to John Lewis Gaddis, grand strategy constitutes the integration of military strategy with non-military elements, including politics, economics, psychology, law, and ethics; with this process continuing for as long as necessary (Gaddis, 1987, p. 28). Barry R. Posen, a pioneering figure in the field, defined grand strategy as *"a political-military, means-ends chain, a state's theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself"* (Posen, 1984, p. 13). This perspective does not imply that peace is the ultimate objective or that war is the imperative means to achieve it. However, it does not negate the possibility of war. This dynamic process, a grand strategy, can persist over decades, encompassing periods of both peace and war (Silove, 2017, p. 32).

According to Williamson Murray, grand strategy is defined as the way states address dissonances between their resources, wills, and interests. Great powers encounter unique challenges arising from excessive tension because they must balance several vital, often conflicting interests in the economic, political, and military spheres. These interests have the potential to jeopardize the immediate stability or long-term vitality of the state. In this context, grand strategy is defined as the evaluation of all resources in accordance with the nation's priorities (Murray, 2011, p. 2), thereby imposing limits on potentially unlimited goals under capabilities.[2]

Grand strategy is not merely an extension of foreign policy, but a broader concept that integrates all elements of national power - political, economic, military, diplomatic, ideological, rhetorical, and even moral values such as religion- to achieve long-term ultimate goals. While foreign policy encompasses a state's interactions with other nations, a grand strategy can be defined as the orchestration of all available resources to optimize the efficacy of these endeavors. A fundamental distinction between a doctrine or policy and a grand strategy is that the grand strategy is a dynamic focus that adapts to changing conditions while always keeping the nation's priorities in mind.

2.1 Discourse and Legitimization in Grand Strategy

At the heart of politics lies not just physical force, but the strategic use of discourse. As Simon Dalby (1990, p. 174) argues, *"discourses are political resources which can be mobilized and used to justify particular political arrangements in the world"*. This function of legitimization is critical, especially within grand strategy. Securitization fundamentally relies on consolidating

[2] According to Gaddis, it is impossible to develop a strategy without striking a balance between dreams and reality (Gaddis, 2018, pp. 30-31).

national and international public opinion (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 25). In this context, legitimization through discourse proves to be the most efficacious form.

The essence of this process is the attempt of politicians to justify their political stances, views, and actions to communities and other states in order to gain their support (Goddard & Krebs, 2015, p. 6). Legitimization is essential for two key reasons. First, an effective discursive strategy can transcend social, political, and ideological divisions, facilitating the necessary alignment (Tilly, 2003, p. 34). Second, it is vital to counteract the influence of everyday or artificial politics, thereby ensuring that the ultimate goal is not compromised by exaggerated demands of small, vocal groups (Goddard & Krebs, 2015, p. 10). According to Schaar (1981, p. 21), legitimacy involves the state's attempt to make the system appear "suitable" and "desirable", leading individuals to demonstrate a willingness to comply and reducing the need for constant enforcement.

The legitimization process through discourse places significant emphasis on the construction of threat perception. Weldes (1996) demonstrates that national identity and threat perceptions are in a state of constant reconstruction through discourse, with the objective of serving political purposes. In this construction process, while the focus is directed towards a specific threat, alternative threats may be overlooked or downplayed. Campbell (1992) expounds on this process, elucidating its role in fortifying the "us" identity and its utilization to substantiate policies such as military intervention, repressive security measures, and social exclusion. The critical point is that the perception of danger is not merely a result of objective realities; it is also deeply influenced by dominant interests. The interpretation of a threat can vary significantly depending on the individual defining it and the specific context in which it is situated. From this perspective, discourse does not merely reflect reality; as Campbell observes, it functions as an instrument of power, actively shaping reality.

In this context, the conceptualizations of "communism" and "terrorism" engender a discursive space characterized by enhanced flexibility and freedom in comparison to the selection of a fixed and concrete enemy. Aligning with Thibault (1995), these concepts are structured in such a way that they can adapt to different contexts and be defined in different ways. This discursive phenomenon is not a fixed element of reality; rather, it is an indicator of the role of reflecting or constructing reality. The deliberate or inadvertent warping of reality through a specific lens -and consequently the formation of perceptions- is a prevalent phenomenon in political discourse.

Suddaby and Greenwood (2005, pp. 59-63) elucidate the manner in which political actors employ the manipulation of contradictions inherent within prevailing ideologies -for example, the tension between freedom and security- to present change as both natural and inevitable. Consequently, even radical reforms are rendered seemingly ordinary and acceptable. On the one hand, the concept of "the will of the people" is invoked to substantiate these actions. Conversely, historical narratives of progress are employed to depict this transformation as a necessity for the future. Therefore, rhetoric is not merely a tool for persuasion; it also serves to redefine what is considered legitimate, possible, or imaginable.

In essence, as Mencken (1956, pp. 217-218) observed: *"The state is not force alone. It depends upon the credulity of man quite as much as upon his docility. Its aim is not merely to make him obey, but also to make him want to obey"*.[3] The advantages of achieving this legitimacy through discourse and rhetoric are clear: *"Legitimacy is more cost-effective than ways of force, and unlike force, it produces long term support"* (Throut, 1975, p. 253). By shaping threat perception, constructing identity, and legitimizing action, discourse

[3] The term "obedience" may be considered exaggerated in this context. It is our considered opinion that states seek "compliance".

enables states and political actors to secure that crucial voluntary compliance and enduring backing. It is the invisible, yet immensely powerful, manifestation of political authority.

Presidential speeches intentionally manipulate language to redefine reality and advance political agendas. Discourse often exercises a form of influence more pervasive and enduring than the use of physical force: It constructs reality itself. While weapons destroy bodies, rhetoric invades minds; reshaping perceptions, legitimizing violence, and forging collective identity through manufactured threats and moral binaries. This linguistic alchemy transforms ambiguity into existential danger, dissent into treason, and aggression into defense. History's bloodiest conflicts were ignited not by arms alone but by words that dehumanized enemies and sanctified violence. To navigate today's era of viral disinformation, we must dissect these rhetorical strategies, recognizing how language engineers consent to oppression or war. Mastering this "literacy of power" is urgent: speech can incite genocide or prevent it, making it humanities most dangerous -and indispensable- tool.

Ultimately, discourse emerges as an element that constructs reality beyond being a means of persuasion and expression. A grand strategy that is not accompanied by a robust rhetorical strategy is merely military tactics; it fosters division rather than unity. The capacity for rhetoric to effectively transform raw power into legitimate authority is evident in its ability to contextualize actions within narratives of justice, freedom, or the survival of civilization. In the absence of these mechanisms, interventions are perceived as occupations, proper alignment cannot be achieved, and security becomes a constant conflict. A review of Cold War strategies reveals that the emphasis was not on missiles but on meticulously chosen words.

3. Harry S. Truman's Justification of the Cold War (1947-1949)

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the U.S. regarded the Soviet Union as a rising *"menace"*. The predominant rationale for this perspective stemmed from the Soviet Union's rejection of an Anglo-American-style peace order (Schlesinger Jr., 1967, p. 34), which led to the emergence of a formidable "Iron Curtain" that effectively divided Eastern Europe from Western Europe. The Soviet Union's strategic use of obstruction in international negotiations, its covert aid to communist insurgencies in countries like Italy and France, and the subsequent establishment of communist regimes in Eastern Europe contributed to the escalation in the Soviet threat perception (Kissinger, 2023, pp. 400-401). These actions were interpreted as efforts to expand Soviet ideological and geopolitical influence, challenging the liberal-democratic-capitalist order that the U.S. sought to establish. The Soviet Union's behavior during the San Francisco and Dumbarton Oaks conferences underscored its unwillingness to compromise, casting doubt on the viability of postwar international cooperation (Hilderbrand, 1990). The U.S. saw Soviet ideology as fundamentally opposed to values like equality, all kinds of freedoms, and moral governance. Eventually, the U.S. considered that Soviet expansion posed a direct threat to its allies in Europe, the stability of global trade, and its national security. This forced the U.S. to take any necessary measures to counter growing Soviet expansion.

In his renowned "Iron Curtain" speech, Winston Churchill asserted that this expanding adversary would overshadow the achievements of the Second World War and transform into a new challenge (Churchill, 1946). The day after Churchill's address, Truman delivered an equally significant speech to the Federal Council of Churches. In this speech, Truman emphasized that new threats were imminent and that the U.S. had to assume responsibility for the protection of values such as "freedom" and "democracy":

> Now that we have preserved our freedom of conscience and religion, our right to live by a decent moral and spiritual code of our choosing, let us make full use of that freedom. Let us make use of it to save a world which is beset by so many threats of new conflicts, new terror, and new destruction (Truman, 1946a).

The post-World War II behavior of the Soviet Union in Iran, Turkey, and Greece has been determined to be a primary factor in the *U.S.*' decision to pursue a policy of continuous foreign intervention. The Soviet Union maintained military forces in northern Iran until March 1946, during which time it demanded oil privileges and provided support for the separatist movement in Azerbaijan. This intervention compelled Iran to apply to the United Nations, which was interpreted as a direct threat to its national sovereignty. Concurrently, the Soviet Union requested that Türkiye reconsider the status of the Straits and asserted its entitlement to basing rights and unimpeded passage. This was interpreted by the West as an open challenge to Türkiye's national security. The communist uprising in Greece was perceived in the West as an indirect reflection of Soviet expansionism, even though it did not take place with direct Soviet support. These developments presented the *U.S.* with a threat perception that necessitated constant engagement, not only in a military sense but also in ideological and geopolitical dimensions. This constituted the justification for the policy of permanent foreign intervention, which would be institutionalized through the Truman Doctrine.

The formation of American foreign policy in response to the mentioned challenges, along with the formal adoption of the U.S.'s global role, commenced with the Truman Doctrine. Although the doctrine was a plan to provide financial and political support to Türkiye and Greece, more broadly, it was a speech summarizing the principles on which the U.S. would fight against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Truman's primary basis for establishing a dichotomy between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was the universal values, most importantly, democracy and freedom. By creating that dichotomy, Truman sought to legitimize the U.S. ideal of global leadership and interventionist policies. He depicted the Soviet Union as a regime that imposed totalitarianism on its people without their consent:

> We must not be confused about the issue which confronts the world today. The issue is as old as recorded history. It is tyranny against freedom.
>
> Tyranny has, throughout history, assumed many disguises, and has relied on many false philosophies to justify its attack on human freedom. Communism masquerades as a doctrine of progress. It is nothing of the kind. It is, on the contrary, a movement of reaction. It denies that man is master of his fate, and consequently denies man's right to govern himself (Truman, 1948e).

On the other hand, portraying the U.S. and its allies as the democratic side that reflected the will of the majority and enjoyed freedom. He contended that it was imperative to undertake the responsibility of safeguarding "free peoples" who are attempting to be subjugated by armed minorities:

> One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.
>
> The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms (Truman, 1947b).

An essential element in Truman's discourse on legitimacy concerns the characterization of communism as a repressive, expansionist, and oppressive ideology: *"The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died"* (Truman, 1947b), *"Communism thrives on human misery"* (Truman, 1948a). Truman's geopolitical vision encompassed a multifaceted approach to international responsibility, including the support of independent nations, the counteraction of Soviet influence, and the prevention of

"tyranny from attacking free people" (Spalding, 2006, p. 68): *"In helping free and independent nations to maintain freedom, the United States will be giving effect to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations"* (Truman, 1947b).

This rhetoric suggested that the Soviet Union was not merely a rival, but rather a pernicious ideological contagion that was inconsistent with human nature. In order to achieve grand strategic goals, a thesis has been constructed at the discursive level, along with an antithesis positioned against it. This dichotomy has led to the perception that choosing a side is both necessary and inevitable. The discourses under discussion have been instrumental in fostering political consolidation among the decision-making elites and at the societal level. This is due to the fact that a fundamental component of grand strategy is the utilization of all national power elements in pursuit of the aforementioned objective until the ultimate goal is realized. Consequently, a unifying "Hobbesian axis of fear/security" is to be established (Ataç & Çam, 2020, p. 604). Thus, as indicated above, maximum benefit will be derived from all elements of national power and across social groups, enabling the conduct of great power competition in the most optimal manner.

Truman characterized communist ideology as an *"evil thought"*; furthermore, describing its framework as a *"godless creed"* and a *"false philosophy"* (Truman, 1949; Truman, 1948b). By choosing terms like *"false philosophy"* and *"godless creed"*, Truman nominated communism as fundamentally illegitimate and bankrupt. He also adopts labels such as *"tyranny"* and *"menace"* to label the communist regime in Moscow (Truman, 1948b; 1948d). Truman's framing of "us" and "them" positions the U.S. as the "champion of freedom" and the Soviets as the "dangerous outsider".

Truman also frames choices as a moral dichotomy. In his Inaugural address (1949) he states that *"these differences, not to draw issues of belief as such, but because the actions resulting from the Communist philosophy are a threat to the efforts of free nations to bring about world recovery and lasting peace"*. The phrase *"free nations"* has been often interpreted the U.S. and the other democracies as the altruistic nations threatened by the *"communist philosophy"*. This interpretation is based on the attribution of Soviet descriptions such as *"ruthless"*, *"a major obstacle"*, *"violent hostility"*, *"aggressive"*, and *"determined"* (Truman, 1948d).

The rhetorical justifications employed by Truman in his speeches are rooted in a cause-and-effect argument and an ethical-moral framework. The one of two commonly used topos was the danger: *"It is of vital importance that we act now, in order to preserve the conditions under which we can achieve lasting peace based on freedom and justice"* (Truman, 1948d), *"Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East. We must take immediate and resolute action"* (Truman, 1947b). The other commonly used topoi was the responsibility: *"We have a higher duty and a greater responsibility than the attainment of our own national security. Our goal is collective security for all mankind"* (Truman, 1947a), *"We have sought to help free nations protect themselves against aggression"* (Truman, 1948c).

Through the employment of these discursive strategies, Truman effectively established the legitimacy of the U.S. not only in terms of defense but also in active intervention. At the level of argumentation, the topoi of "responsibility" and "danger" were employed to codify the Soviet threat as not only a geopolitical danger but also an ideological attack that challenged global values. Consequently, foreign interventions were presented not solely as instruments of foreign policy but also as a moral obligation to safeguard democratic principles. In this framework, Truman's discourse overlapped with a moral idealism that transcended classical and neoclassical realism. However, this idealism underwent a shift in its ideological orientation, becoming intertwined with national interests.

At this point, it is possible to establish a direct relationship between Truman's discourse and

the American Grand Strategy. While the moral dichotomies presented by the discourse (freedom vs. tyranny) provided legitimacy for political decisions, the linguistic demonization of the enemy and the portrayal of the U.S. as an altruistic power prepared the social and institutional ground for interventionist strategies. The opening of a pathway through this rhetoric of legitimization resulted in the provision of politic-economic support to Turkey and Greece in 1947 and beginning in 1948, Europe received support in the form of both material resources and political backing. The bipartisan orientation of American foreign policy, which constitutes a core principle of U.S. political practice, was consolidated in this context through the deployment of such rhetoric in line with overarching grand strategic objectives.

In conclusion, Truman's speeches during the first years of the Cold War established a reality that legitimized the U.S. right to intervene at the global level both politically and morally. This rhetoric has been shown to internalize the concepts of "leadership responsibility", "security concern", and "defense freedom," which form the basis of the American Grand Strategy, not only for foreign policy elites but also for the American public. Consequently, the rhetoric established during this period evolved into a potent narrative that significantly influenced the foreign policy mindset not only of the Cold War era but also of the subsequent decades. This narrative exemplifies the efficacy of rhetoric in shaping strategic orientations, thereby facilitating an assessment of Truman's rhetoric that transcends classical diplomatic historiography and assumes the role of ideological construction.

4. George W. Bush and the "War on Terror" (2001-2002)

Before and during the Cold War era, the interests and perceptions of nations were profoundly influenced by prevailing ideologies. However, in the aftermath of the Cold War, ideologies—which had previously served as the predominant factor in determining alliances and perceptions of security—were superseded by concepts of culture and civilization (Huntington, 2002, pp. 34-35). Until the end of the Cold War, international relations were understood to be limited to relations between Western civilizations. By the 21st century, a multipolar world order had emerged, and as Pearson (1955) predicted, non-Western civilizations had gained the opportunity to enter the international arena. Subsequent to this development, international relations began to transform into inter-civilizational relations. During this period, religion, as a part of cultures and civilizations, reached a level equal to that of ideologies and gained increasing importance in the international perceptions of states (Huntington, 2002, p. 54; Mortimer, 1991).

The U.S. emerged victorious in the Cold War. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union has led to the resurgence of frozen conflicts. One of those conflicts that has come to the fore was Islamic terrorism. This radical ideology, which is said to have originated in 1979, gained widespread traction following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It challenged the prevailing U.S. hegemony by positing that, given the precedent set by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. could also face a similar demise (Rapoport, 2013). Al-Qaeda's confidence and freedom of action have grown to the point that they attacked the World Trade Center, the center of capitalism, and the Pentagon, the center of American security architecture, with kamikaze planes.

Following the September 11 attacks, the foreign policy of the U.S. underwent a radical change and restructuring under the Bush Doctrine. During this period, many international actors perceived the escalating threat of terrorism as an international problem and endorsed its securitization (Sjöstedt, 2007, p. 243). As a result, following the conclusion of the Cold War, the heightened emphasis on globalization and trade policies initiated during the Clinton administration has once again ceded ground to political and military struggle (Lafeber, 2002, pp. 543-547). This paradigm shift in the understanding of the phenomenon has been accompanied by the emergence of the

concept of terrorism as an "existential threat" to civilization, as Bush notes, *"our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts"* (Bush, 2001, p. 1099). In his address to a joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, Bush characterized the attacks as an act of war, stating, *"On September 11, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country"* (Bush, 2001, p. 1140). This statement signaled a shift in the perception of terrorism from an internal security concern to a global threat.

Beyond the severity of the attack, which was regarded as a direct challenge to the prevailing neo-liberal capitalist world order, the ideological foundations, and moral values that constitute the ultimate objective of the American Grand Strategy, the attack was perceived as a significant threat to international security. In this context, President Bush has sought to establish a "good" and "evil" dichotomy, reminiscent of the Truman era, in order to undertake any necessary ways to re-establish grand strategic ends. Thus, it has begun to seek ideal ways to ensure lasting security, as discussed by Posen (1984). The notion that American values must be defended at the global level emerged, and in this vein, international military interventions, counterterrorism policies, and new security architectures were presented as necessary instruments for the perpetuation of the neoliberal order. Consequently, the Bush administration endeavored to portray threats as violations of universal norms, thereby reviving the ideological struggle of the Cold War and seeking to establish a moral foundation for its foreign policy decisions.

In a speech that will be remembered for its doctrinal implications, Bush established a Manichean dichotomy between *"free people"* and *"evil people"*, who are *"the very embodiment of fear"*. In his statements Bush alludes to "the others" by employing terms such as *"barbaric"* (2001 p.1112), *"uncivilized"* (2001 p.1362), *"unlawful combatants"* (2001, p.1462), *"fanatical"* (2001 p.1440; 2002b 1154), *"outlaw groups and regimes that accept no law of morality"* (2002b p. 1573). He asserted that *"freedom and fear are at war"* (2002a, p. 937). He characterized the opposition as comprising *"evildoers"* (2002b, p. 2140) and *"a radical network opposed to America and Islam"*.

Contrary to popular belief, Bush never targeted Islam or Muslims in his rhetoric. In fact, he explicitly stated that radical Islam harms Muslims the most:

> I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful… The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them (Bush, 2001, p. 1141).

Bush (2001, p. 1301) noted, *"Our nation is at war right now... We're going to defend America and defend the values that we all hold dear... We want to be friends with Muslims and Muslim children"* thereby, in this manner, he endeavored to mitigate any potential prejudicial attitudes towards Islam and Muslims to the greatest extent possible. The Bush administration has confined the opposition to an ideological framework, independent of religious and national considerations: *"we're fighting evil people... we're fighting evil with good"*. Furthermore, in his speech at the Islamic Center of Washington, Bush stated that *"violence against the innocent is contrary to the principles of Islam"* and that *"Americans must understand this"* (Bush, 2001, p. 1121).

Bush's strategy centered on establishing his legitimacy through the use of rhetoric that emphasized urgency and danger. Bush (2001, p. 1489) asserted that the nation was engaged in a struggle *"to defend the nation's way of life"*. According to Bush, in order to preserve this way of life, it is imperative to take responsibility without any delay. Bush underscored the gravity and immediacy of intervention, stating, *"The cost of inaction is far greater. The only alternative to victory is a*

world characterized by perpetual peril, where every urban center poses a potential threat to life" (2001, p. 1379) and *"We will demonstrate unwavering resolve, though time is not on our side. I will not wait for events to unfold as dangers accumulate"* (2002a, p. 131), directing attention towards the imminent threat.

In his speeches, Bush positions the U.S.' actions within the frameworks of historical and moral responsibility. By stating that, *"History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight"* (Bush, 2002a, p. 132) he emphasizes the inevitability and burden of intervention. This burden is not merely a right but a duty: *"Building this just peace is America's opportunity and America's duty"* (Bush, 2002a, p. 918). Bush extends this sense of responsibility beyond national borders, claiming a global obligation: *"We defend not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear"* (Bush, 2001, p. 1202). The inescapability of this historical task is underscored by his statement, *"Our generation has now heard history's call, and we will answer it"* (Bush, 2002b, p. 1571). The necessity of urgent action is made clear: *"Before the day of horror can come, before it is too late to act, this danger will be removed … free nations have a duty to defend our people by uniting against the violent"* (Bush 2003, pp. 277–279). Finally, the immediacy and certainty of this duty are reinforced in the statement, *"Today we turn to the urgent duty of protecting other lives, without illusion and without fear"* (Bush 2002b, p. 1572).

Bush's rhetoric consistently reflected an unwavering commitment to achieving the objectives of the U.S. Grand Strategy, regardless of the obstacles encountered. Arguments such as moral values, the necessity of struggle, and national responsibility have been used as a means to legitimize the use of force when strategically necessary. As Bush stated, *"If war is forced upon us, we will fight in a just cause and by just means"* (Bush, 2003, p. 89). This statement does not merely serve as a justification for military intervention; it offers a comprehensive rationale that encompasses a wide range of considerations. The aforementioned statement also makes it clear that the U.S. is prepared for an intervention with determination and adequate force whenever necessary. The "being forced into war" argument has served as a conventional justification for preventive or unilateral actions, thereby neutralizing threats to American supremacy before they become viable challenges.

The United States' initiation of military operations in Afghanistan has resulted in the reestablishment of a substantial military presence in a region that had been inaccessible since the conclusion of the Cold War. This military presence has been instrumental in countering radical groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, while concurrently constraining the expanding influence of Russia and China in the region. It is believed that the primary function of establishing air bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, despite higher operational costs, is to ensure flight safety and route planning in support of operations in Afghanistan is a geopolitical maneuver against Russia and China in order to influence the region's political and economic landscape. A similar dynamic can be observed in the support for the color revolutions, which appear to be a deliberate strategy to ensure military permanence.

In The Grand Chessboard, Brzezinski highlighted that the sustainability and efficacy of Eurasian hegemony are the essential prerequisites for maintaining American global supremacy (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 30). Mackinder, in his Heartland Theory, claims that the pivot area, which includes Siberia, Central Asia, and Caucasus is essential to command the World Island, and subsequently to command the world. This region holds a dual strategic imperative: its control would grant Russia and China a decisive advantage, whereas denying them access effectively neutralizes their projection of power in a classic zero-sum dynamic.

From this perspective, it can be argued that the ultimate aim of the military force amassed by the American State in Afghanistan and Turkestan has been global domination since the very moment of its initial presence. While regional developments may appear 'accidental', they have unfolded as a series of planned, sequential steps. Similar to what Gaddis theorizes (1987), the strategy was sustained until objectives were attained, regardless of the duration

5. Comparing the Cases

Table 1: *Comparison of Discursive Structures*

Category	***Truman Administration***	***Bush Administration***
Major Threat	*Soviet Communism*	*Terrorism/ Radical Islam*
Responsibility Theme	*Protecting the free world*	*Protecting the democracy and freedom*
Concepts	*Freedom/ responsibility/ threat*	*Freedom/ responsibility/ threat*
Leadership Understanding	*Without U.S. leadership, there will be chaos*	*U.S. leadership is essential for civilization, freedom and democracy*
Securitization	*Communism is a threat to freedom*	*Terror is a threat to freedom and democracy*

In both cases, it is evident that the Presidents created a dichotomy based on "freedom" in order to protect "global moral norms". While the pro side were defined in terms of "freedom" and "democracy", the opposing side was defined in terms of "oppression" and "terrorism". During the Truman era, the term "freedom" was understood to denote lifestyle and freedom of expression. In contrast, during the Bush era, this concept was interpreted to encompass the protection of lifestyle, with a shift in focus from freedom of expression to religious freedom. This shift in American perception can be attributed to the divergent characteristics of the eras, as well as the disparate practical applications of the grand strategy when confronted with obstacles.

The two administrations have placed an ideological and transnational enemy at the center of the "threat". During the Truman administration, the prevailing threat was identified as Soviet communism, while during the Bush administration, the primary concern was terrorism and radical Islam. In both periods, the struggle was transformed into a matter of national survival. During the Cold War, the United States contended that the conflict was unavoidable, asserting that the Soviet ideological framework was inherently expansionist in nature (Glaser, 1956, pp. 699-701). In a similar vein, Bush has employed the rationale of safeguarding civilization itself to legitimize the discourse surrounding the "war on terror." In an effort to justify the implementation of extraordinary measures, Bush has asserted that terrorism is "evil" (Maggio, 2007, pp. 817-819). These threats were not merely characterized as military or political challenges; rather, they were presented as existential threats to freedom and Western values. This finding underscores the multifaceted nature of security, emphasizing its role as both a physical and an ideological concern.

The reliance on the same set of discursive patterns in both periods stemmed from the continuity of the process administered by the U.S. Grand Strategy. While the identified enemy changed over time, the overarching strategic objective remained intact, rendering the reproduction of similar legitimizing rhetoric both functional, viable and necessary. In this sense, shifts in threat perception did not signify a transformation of strategic purpose but rather a recalibration of adversarial representation, ensuring the sustained coherence and operability of the grand strategic framework.

Both periods under examination can be situated within a shared intellectual–historical lineage rooted in American exceptionalism and its secular–religious

articulation through Manifest Destiny.[4] American exceptionalism is a doctrine that positions the United States not merely as a separate political entity, but as an actor with a distinct mission in world politics, defined by historical and moral considerations. This concept has had a profound influence on the logic of US foreign policy, both during and after the Cold War. The Cold War era and its aftermath represent a prominent period in which the belief that American foreign policy was founded on moral principles was most evident. This dynamic contributed to the development of a perception that the United States would assume a leadership role on the international stage, a role that would persist from the mid-20th century into the early 21st century. During the Cold War, the mission was perceived by individuals who espoused specific values as a form of opposition to communism. This perception played a role in the defense of religion and liberal democracies. The political thought that has been established in the United States has led to the conceptualization of the nation as a unique entity that operates not in the interest of its own citizens, but rather in accordance with a higher purpose that it believes to be of the utmost importance. The George W. Bush era is noteworthy for its reinvigoration of the notion that American foreign policy is grounded in moral principles, a concept that resonates with American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny ideals. This belief was expressed through the conceptual framework of a global war on terror, with the struggle itself being portrayed as a preservation of values, analogous to the war against communism. The contemporary geopolitical landscape has witnessed a repositioning of the United States' foreign policy paradigm, wherein the nation is once again depicted not as a pragmatic entity engaged in the pursuit of its national interests in the global arena, but rather as a nation that is uniquely entrusted with a moral responsibility that is deemed integral to the global struggle between good and evil. This missionary understanding has been predicated on the acceptance of U.S. policies as morally inevitable and correct, thereby aligning both the national and international public.

Furthermore, a notable congruence exists in the securitization of both enemies and the process itself. Both presidents have asserted that in the absence or failure to achieve victory over adversaries, the U.S. risks losing its global leadership position and being compelled to retreat into isolationism (Bush, 2001, pp. 1439–1442; McGhee, 1990, p. 20). This level of alleged "danger" provided a degree of legitimacy that could be utilized to overcome any obstacle that might impede the execution of the American Grand Strategy.

During both periods, the notion that grand strategic achievements and long-term objectives were under imminent threat became central to political discourse and policymaking. This narrative of threat was not constructed around the presence of a specific actor or ideological rival but rather around the perception of a structural risk to the continuity of the global order that the U.S. had built and maintained. The emphasis on urgency broadened the scope of action for decision-makers. Policy choices that would normally be open to debate were presented as necessary and unpostponable steps due to time pressure and the discourse of existential threat. In this context, military, political, and institutional moves have been framed as preventive and defensive, and the grand strategy itself has been represented as the ultimate value to be protected. Despite the presence of different enemy figures in each period, the definition of the threat has remained largely consistent. In both cases, the need for urgent intervention has been

[4] The concept of exceptionalism is predicated on the belief that the United States stands in contradistinction to other developed nations, owing to its distinctive origins, founding principles, historical evolution, and unique political and religious institutions. This perspective aligns with the predominant view that America's values and institutions represent the ultimate achievement of human civilization to date, and that the global system should be shaped to align with American standards. The term "Manifest Destiny", coined by John L. O'Sullivan to denote the belief that America's expansion across North America was divinely ordained, is a geographic and action-oriented articulation of this exceptionalism. These two concepts have engendered a sense of mission predicated on "moral" foundations that supersede national interests, particularly in the domain of foreign policy (Ceaser, 2012; Gomez, 2012; Thimm, 2007).

linked to the possibility of the strategic order unraveling. Thus, discourses of urgency and threat functioned as tools that not only legitimized specific policies but also guaranteed grand strategic continuity.

6. Conclusion

The American Grand Strategy employed during the Cold War persisted until the adversary's capacity to engage in a conflict was effectively neutralized. The fundamental tenets of the Grand Strategy, namely its spiritual component, characterized by exceptionalism, and its material aspect, typified by an "interventionist stance", were sustained until the adversary was eradicated. Despite the elimination of the enemy, the prevailing mindset persisted in order to safeguard the overarching objective, and novel adversaries were confronted through the utilization of the same methodologies. It is evident that the American Grand Strategy remains a persistent concept, one that has persisted since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and continues to inform the basis of interests and the subsequent strategic initiatives directed towards those interests. A rigorous examination of American foreign policy is imperative, with this analysis informed by the aforementioned principles.

From an ontological and perceptual perspective, contemporary U.S. foreign policy discourse demonstrates a strong continuity with the narratives of legitimization and othering articulated during the Truman and Bush administrations. The ontological foundation of the U.S.'s perception of itself as a morally righteous actor, protector of liberal democratic values and "architect of a rules-based order" remains firm. This fundamental identity provides a legitimate ground against "existential threats". Truman's anti-communist rhetoric and Bush's war on global terrorism framed U.S. actions as necessary measures to defend a liberal and moral order against "existential threats", while today's U.S. rhetoric similarly constructs a binary worldview: the liberal-democratic "Us" and the authoritarian "Others".

It appears that the U.S. maintains a worldview in which it perceives itself as a bulwark against moral decline and authoritarian aggression. For the U.S., it is imperative to engage in conflicts that are predicated on this moral dichotomy. This dynamic and powerful nature of the U.S. is the result of its dynamism and power. The global stage will continue to be populated by indistinct "others" who contribute to the preservation of American identity. This continuity shows that the moral and ideological rhetoric of the U.S. foreign policy will continue to serve not only as a justification for actions but also as a central marker of identity in an increasingly fragmented and hostile worldview. It is the persistence of these ontological and perceptual narratives suggests that the U.S. foreign policy will remain committed to a moral and binary worldview in which identity validation through the construction of threatening "others" is as important as material or strategic concerns. As long as the U.S. continues to view its global role through the lens of (moral) exceptionalism, its discourse will reproduce these patterns of rhetoric, shaping not only how it relates to the rest of the world but also how it understands its place within it.

The containment of Chinese maritime projection through the defensive perimeter spanning Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines—effectively the 'First Island Chain'—remains a fundamental and enduring pillar of this Grand Strategy, tracing its lineage to the early Cold War, while contemporary initiatives such as AUKUS[5] and the QUAD[6] should be interpreted as

[5] Since the Second World War, the Asia–Pacific region has occupied a central place in U.S. strategic thinking due to its geopolitical, military, and balance-of-power significance (Liff & Ikenberry, 2014). In the contemporary period, China's rapid military modernization and expanding maritime presence have reinforced the region's importance for American grand strategy. Within this context, AUKUS represents a deliberate strategic initiative aimed at constraining China's military capabilities and preserving U.S.-led regional deterrence in the Asia–Pacific.

[6] The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) functions as a strategic partnership between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia intended to "soft balance" China's rising hegemony in the Indo-Pacific without establishing a formal military alliance. To constrain

modern strategic maneuvers designed to further circumscribe China's operational sphere. Parallel to this, the post-Cold War eastward expansion of NATO into former Iron Curtain states represents a sustained application of this strategic vision regarding Russia—notwithstanding the critique from various policymakers who view such enlargement as strategically misguided—thereby contextualizing the provision of aid to Ukraine and the objective of Russian strategic attrition as logical extensions of this overarching policy; similarly, the approach toward Iran continues to be firmly anchored in the principles of the Carter Doctrine, a commitment visibly manifested by the persistent deployment of a Carrier Strike Group in the vicinity of the Strait of Hormuz.

In essence, the enduring nature of this grand strategy indicates that the United States is less involved in a conventional struggle for survival and more engaged in a constant endeavor to achieve ontological self-affirmation. The material encirclement of China, the strategic attrition of Russia, and the containment of Iran are not merely responses to external realities; rather, they are ritualistic reenactments of a Manichean worldview that requires an adversary to function. Consequently, as long as the American identity is predicated on being the indispensable guardian of a specific moral order, the Grand Strategy will continue to generate the very monsters it seeks to destroy. In this cyclical paradigm, total victory is undesirable because the complete absence of an "Other" would precipitate an identity crisis far more destabilizing to the American Self than any geopolitical rival. Consequently, the United States finds itself ensnared in a paradox of its own creation, compelled to perpetually construct and confront existential threats to not only preserve its hegemony but also its very sense of existence.

Declarations

Acknowledgements: The author do not wish to acknowledge any individual or institution.

Author Contributions: All parts of the study were conducted by the Author.

Conflict of Interest: The author declare no conflict of interest.

Supporting Institutions: This research received no external funding.

Ethical Approval: This research does not necessitate approval of an ethics committee. This study does not involve human or animal participants. All procedures followed scientific and ethical principles, and all referenced studies are appropriately cited.

Plagiarism Statement: The research has been checked for plagiarism using Turnitin, and the plagiarism rate is 19%

Use of AI Tools: The author/authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used in the creation of this article.

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Beijing's maritime expansion, the group reinforces a "free and open" regional order through enhanced security coordination and joint naval maneuvers, such as the Malabar exercises. Economically, the Quad challenges China's Belt and Road Initiative by providing alternative high-standard infrastructure investments and coordinating supply chains to reduce regional dependence on Chinese markets. Furthermore, the alliance seeks to curb China's technological dominance by collaborating on critical emerging sectors, such as semiconductors and 5G, to establish resilient ecosystems independent of Chinese control (Anggarini & Khoirunnisa, 2025).

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