CRY DECEPTION AND LET LOOSE THE DOGS OF WAR: THE RHETORICAL ETHICS OF COLIN POWELL'S "DENIAL AND DECEPTION"

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On Monday, November 15, 2004, the man who had been hailed as "one of the great public servants of our time" stepped down as Secretary of State (Bumiller and Stevenson A1). Colin L. Powell stated in his letter of resignation that he was "pleased to have been part of a team that launched the Global War Against Terror, liberated the Afghan and Iraqi people, and brought the attention of the world to the problem of proliferation" (Bumiller and Stevenson A20). The list continues with the Bush Administration's varied accomplishments. However, one issue still weighs heavily on Powell: the war in Iraq.

Recently, in an interview with Barbara Walters, Powell admitted of his speech to justify the war in Iraq, "It's a blot. I'm the one who presented it on behalf of the United States to the world, and it will always be a part of my record. It's painful now" (ABC News). Powell did not blame CIA Director George Tenet for the false evidence presented, but said, "There were some people in the intelligence community who knew at the time that some of these sources were not good, and shouldn't be relied upon, and they didn't speak up. That devastated me" (ABC News). As a speaker, to what extent should Powell be held to an ethical standard to verify his information? Powell will be forever associated with the validation of war in Iraq.

Powell's address to the United Nations on February 5, 2003, called "Remarks to the United Nations Security Council," was pronounced as "the single most important moment in the march to war" ("AP Staffer"). Over one billion people worldwide watched and listened as Powell stoically gave the United States' justification for war (Klaidman and Wolffe 32). For the UN and for the worldwide audience, Powell was "the embodiment of overwhelming forces" due to his accomplishments in Desert Storm, attempting to "arm-twist a reluctant world to go to battle" (35). Powell succeeded in the United States and "changed so many minds that one-half of all Americans [were] ready to go to war immediately, compared with only one-third [from the month prior]" (36). With many prominent world leaders still unsupportive of the war, the rest of the world was less convinced. One day after Powell's speech, President Bush declared, "the game is over" (qtd. in Klaidman and Wolffe 37). Bush began to set the wheels of war in motion on February 6, 2003, but Congress did not officially declare war on Iraq until Wednesday, March 19, 2003.

Despite growing skepticism, many Americans likely believed the United States declared war on Iraq based on solid factual evidence: it was a war fought because of nuclear programs, chemical and biological weapons, unmanned aircrafts, and terrorism. The American public believed Iraq was a threat, an opinion created by Powell's address to the UN. Because of the speech's importance and the inescapable repercussions of lost lives, it is essential that we examine this speech not only rhetorically, but also ethically. To what extent did Powell cry deception in his claims against Iraq?

After analyzing Powell's speech within the framework of "just war" rhetoric, I examine Powell as a political figure and a man of the people to begin the ethical evaluation of his speech. The four habits of ethical communication outlined by Karl Wallace are appropriate for this evaluation as they best model the same principles that are at the core of democracy: freedom of speech, respect for individuals and their ability to govern themselves, and the belief in equality.

Just-War Rhetoric

Powell's speech focused on weapons programs and Iraq's ties to terrorism. He began by stressing the breach of UN resolution 1441, which forced Iraq to disarm, and the treatment of the inspectors carrying out the resolution: "inspectors are inspectors; they are not detectives" (Powell "U.S. Secretary" 1). Powell used Iraq's lack of compliance with resolution 1441 as his main justification for war and presented the grievances against Iraq in increasing intensity. His speech flowed from the deception of the inspectors to the denial of facts about subsequent biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons programs, concluding with terrorism and Saddam's treatment of his own people.

Powell stated that experts believed aluminum tubes Saddam was attempting to acquire were a sign of his attempt to revive his nuclear program of enriching uranium to build a nuclear bomb. Powell also claimed Saddam Hussein had 8,500 unaccounted liters of Anthrax. However, according to the Associated Press, "Energy Department experts and Powell's own State Department had already dissented from the CIA view . . . no centrifuge program has been reported found" ("AP Staffer"). Further, "No anthrax has been reported found post-invasion. [Additionally], the Defense Intelligence Agency, in a confidential report [five months before Powell's speech] said that although it believed Iraq had biological weapons, it didn't know their nature, amounts, or condition."

After the speech to the UN, over half the American people watching were swayed by Powell's appeal to go to war with Iraq. Why did Powell's speech primarily affect the audience watching in the United States and not have the same effect on the rest of the world? Since September 11, Americans had been saturated with "just-war" rhetoric. Anthony Burke explains, "rhetoric of justice and injustice, humanity and inhumanity, civilization and barbarism, were repeatedly invoked by US officials in the tragedy's [9/11] wake" (2). Americans collectively viewed their tragedy and understood the world in terms of justice and injustice, making the just-war rhetoric employed by Powell very effective. Americans had been taught to understand the language of the "just," which "sees force not merely as a rational response to an act out of injustice [but as a] response which is moral to make" (6). At the time of Powell's speech, the UN had not been subjected to just-war rhetoric to the same degree and did not have the moral perspective of "just war" rhetoric.

To understand the UN's opposition to war in Iraq, we must look into the Bush Administration and Powell's past records and policies. This record was not emphasized to the American people but was very prevalent to the members of the UN. The United States "passed through distinct stages in regards to its policy towards the Iraqi regime and its predilection for WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. Attempted accommodation during the 1980's was followed by containment in the 1990's and concluded with the more belligerent approach in the 2000's" (Freedman 14). The containment theory did not come to a halt until September 11, 2001, the day America received its most aggressive home ground attack since Pearl Harbor. Before September 11th, the Bush Administration rejected Iraq as an

immediate threat and only addressed Iraq as a "long term threat" to "justify the investment in ballistic missile defense, at the time, their top priority" (15). Powell's statement in March, 2001 described the stance of the Bush Administration: "even though we know he [Saddam Hussein] is working on weapons of mass destruction, we know he has things squirreled away, at the same time we have not seen that capacity emerge to present a full-fledged threat to us" (qtd. in Freedman 7).

Iraq was not considered specifically until the Administration needed a tangible target. On September 15, 2001, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz questioned if attacking Iraq was justified (Strasser 94). The shift in the United States' policy towards Iraq was a result of Iraq's alleged connection to terrorism. A war on terrorism was declared following the September 11 attacks, and Iraq was portrayed as terrorism's new face. The United States needed a more specific "them" than the mysterious Al-Qaeda to carry out "justice" demanded in the "just-war" rhetoric officials had been feeding their citizens.

Burke defines just war rhetoric as a "language which creates an irrevocably divided moral universe, in which all virtue lies within the United States and all inequality with "the terrorists" (6). This type of rhetoric creates an "us versus them" mentality and creates an order of belonging. For there to be an "us," an organization or institution must exist that organizes and defines the "us." To include most of the world in the "us" category as opposed to "them" or Iraq, Powell used the common ground of the UN to unify his audience. He centered his arguments around UN Security Council resolution 1441, passed by a unanimous vote and supported by most of the world except Iraq. In his address, Powell reminded the council of their unanimous decision against Iraq in his third sentence, "Last November 8, this council passed Resolution 1441 by a unanimous vote" ("U.S. Secretary" 1). Throughout his entire presentation, Powell kept his audience conscious of their unanimity. In reference to Saddam's refusal to permit U-2 reconnaissance flights, Powell concluded, "this refusal to allow this kind of reconnaissance is in direct, specific violation of operative paragraph 7 of our Resolution 1441" (6). The phrase "our Resolution" unifies the audience and aligns them with his perspective.

Throughout the speech, Powell is careful to use "we" in most of his arguments, as in "we saw this kind of house cleaning at close to 30 sites" ("U.S. Secretary" 6). Powell did not say the United States Intelligence Agency witnessed, or the inspectors witnessed. Powell arranged a deliberate dichotomy between the rest of the world and Iraq to "paint [Iraq] as black as possible, without any shades of gray let alone glimmers of white" (Freedman 1). To strengthen his argument, he wanted to include the UN with the United States and to advocate their actions as a community against Iraq. Powell portrayed Iraq as deceptive, aggressive, and inhumane when he argued, "Nothing points more clearly to Saddam Hussein's dangerous intentions and the threat he poses to all of us than his calculated cruelty to his own citizens and to his neighbors. Clearly, Saddam Hussein and his regime will stop at nothing until something stops him" ("U.S. Secretary" 18).

Powell employed the language of just-war rhetoric to bring the UN and the televised audience of over one billion to the same unanimous conclusion:

> My colleagues, *we* have an obligation to our citizens, *we* have an obligation to see that *our* resolutions are complied with. . . . *We* wrote 1441 to give Iraq one last chance. Iraq is not so far taking that one last chance. *We* must not shrink from whatever is ahead of *us*. *We* must not fail in *our* duty and *our* responsibility to the citizens of the countries that are represented

by this body (18, emphasis added).

The UN is a body unified in resolutions, duties, and responsibilities. The only country outside this body is Iraq. Powell gave the UN a sense of belonging to a greater body, a sense that was intended to heighten their sense of patriotism to the UN and further outrage them over Iraq's lack of adherence to their resolution.

Was It an Ethical Speech?

The selection of Powell by the White House administration to deliver the UN address was a calculated attempt to secure the credibility of the information delivered. Powell was perceived as one of the most respected members of President Bush's cabinet, both domestically and internationally. Additionally, he was portrayed as an example of the Horatio Alger myth, personifying the American Dream. As he states in his autobiography:

> Mine is the story of a black kid of no early promise from [a Jamaican] immigrant family of limited means who was raised in the South Bronx and somehow rose to become the National Security Advisor of the United States and then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [and later Secretary of State]. It is a story of hard work and good luck, of occasional rough times, but mostly good times . . . It is a story of faith, faith in myself, faith in America. Above all, it's a love story: love of my family, of friends, of the Army, and of my country. It is a story that could only have happened in America. (qtd. in Mezzacappa 85)

The world, and especially America, applauds and respects individuals who overcome adversity to succeed. Powell's resume gained further credibility in his success with Desert Storm and his experience commanding over one million troops. The call to war from the mouth of a respected, battle proven soldier is powerful, especially if the speaker is as eloquent and persuasive as Powell (Mezzacappa 77). Powell had the ability and the power to influence world leaders and the citizens of the United States. By giving the UN address, Powell's ethos automatically gave the content more credibility: "the internal proof, ethos, is arguably Powell's strongest trait" (Danhauer 55). The illusion of credibility also exists in Powell's carefully orchestrated arrival; he appeared with CIA Director George Tenet so the two could be photographed in obvious solidarity (Klaidman and Wolffe 37). Tenet sat directly behind Powell throughout the presentation to show a united front.

Powell's speech can be examined ethically using Wallace's four habits: search, justice, preference of public to private motivations, and habit to respect dissent (21-22). The habit of search requires a speaker to have a thorough knowledge of his subject. The speaker should be sensitive to relevant issues and their implications, should sift through his sources and choose only trustworthy facts, and should acknowledge the complexity of public issues. Powell's "Remarks to the United Nations Security Council," which accused Iraq of "denial and deception," was filled with inaccuracies. Six months after Powell's speech, an Associated Press staffer analyzed the UN address for errors and found inaccuracies in Powell's statements on the following arguments: Iraq's revived nuclear program, decontamination vehicles, bio-weapons trailers, desert weapons, unmanned aircraft, amounts of VX (a nerve agent), "embedded capacity" of chemical weapons, SCUD missiles, as well as the aluminum tubes and biological weapons such as Anthrax ("AP Staffer"). On February 5, 2003, the world heard,

"We have no indication that Saddam Hussein has ever abandoned his nuclear weapons program. On the contrary, we have more than a decade of proof that he remains determined to acquire nuclear weapons" (Powell "U.S. Secretary" 12). The assertion of "more than a decade of proof" suggests large amounts of evidence, not just defector information and speculations. CNN reported on July 24, 2003 that Spain's Foreign Minister "said there was 'no evidence, no proof' of a nuclear bomb program before the war (according to his intelligence information)" ("AP Staffer").

In terms of Iraq's "embedded capacity," Powell stated, "We know that Iraq has embedded key portions of its illicit chemical weapons infrastructure within its legitimate civilian industry" ("U.S. Secretary" 10). No such infrastructure has been found, and as reported by an AP staffer, "the recently-disclosed DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] report of last September said there was 'no reliable information' on where Iraq might have established chem-warfare facilities" ("AP Staffer"). The abundant SCUD missiles, chemical weapons, and desert weapons have not been found. Two bio-weapons trailers were reported to have been found but without a trace of any biological agents. The Associated Press reported Iraq's claim that "the equipment made hydrogen for weather balloons" ("AP Staffer"). As for the threat of anthrax, the Associated Press reported, "No anthrax has been discovered since invading Iraq, and the Defense Intelligence Agency never estimated the 'tens upon tens upon tens of thousands of teaspoons' of anthrax, it never even estimated Saddam had that specific biological weapon" ("AP Staffer").

A second criterion outlined in Wallace's habit of search is sensitivity to relevant issues and implications. Powell introduced the issue of biological weapons by holding a vial of what appeared to be anthrax and telling a story of an anthrax incident that shut down the United States Senate in 2001: "This forced several hundred people to undergo emergency medical treatment and killed two postal workers, for an amount just about this quantity [as he holds up a vial the size of a teaspoon] that was inside an envelope" ("U.S. Secretary" 8). Powell played on the sensitivity of the subject, putting the estimated "25,000 liters of anthrax" into the measurements of "tens upon tens upon tens of thousands of teaspoons," the amount Powell had made present in the room (8).

Powell used the fear of anthrax again in talking about unmanned aircraft by showing a "video of an Iraqi F-1 Mirage Jet spraying 'simulated anthrax'" ("AP Staffer"). This was one of the more blatant points of deception, as UN inspectors' reports stated: "the video predated the 1991 Gulf War, when the Mirage was said to have been destroyed. . . . No small drones or other planes with chemical and biological capacity have been reported found in Iraq since the evasion" ("AP Staffer"). Visual aids were a key component to Powell's speech, bringing his audience to the desired conclusion that the Mirage video was recent and still a threat; Powell did not mention any dates.

Wallace does allow room for error, arguing that "No speaker can say everything about an issue. All speaking must necessarily be incomplete. The ethical issues are whether information presented is the most relevant available and is as complete as the particular circumstances make feasible" (54). However, the evidence Powell left out raises the question of whether it was left out to make the case for war more believable. Did Powell knowingly deceive the American public? Powell stated inaccurate facts in most of his arguments for war. Thirteen major inaccuracies have been found to date, and as his speech is examined in the future, more may be uncovered.

According to Wallace's habit of justice, the speaker is ethically responsible to select and present

facts and opinions fairly. A speaker "should not distort or conceal data" and "should avoid substituting emotional guilt and language for sound argument" (22). Going before the UN in February, Powell "was gambling that American intelligence could shame and shock the United Nations into signing up for military action" (Klaidman and Wolffe 35). Powell attempted to shock the UN with visual images and numerical data on Iraq, but he also attempted to shame the UN into action: "Iraq now has placed itself in danger of serious consequences called for in UN Resolution 1441. And this body places itself in danger of irrelevance if it allows Iraq to continue to defy its will without responding effectively and immediately" ("U.S. Secretary" 17).

This type of shame, shock rhetoric, is not new in the history of political discourse in the United States. However, that does not make it ethical; instead it distorts facts by playing on one of the most compelling emotions of the human psyche: fear. This type of rhetoric has become standard in the American political arena, and in Washington it is understood "that a high-risk foreign policy requires selling the threat" (Freedman 7). Powell's speech differed from the contemporary high-risk foreign policy rhetoric in that it utilized intelligence data to illicit the shame and fear responses needed to justify the war in Iraq. Data was collected by a variety of sources, many of which were unnamed, requiring the audience to question Powell further.

The third habit defined by Wallace is the habit to prefer public to private motivations, to "uniformly reveal sources of their [the speaker's] information and opinion" (22). Powell gives the illusion of producing sources in his introduction:

> The material I will present to you comes from a variety of sources. Some are U.S. sources. And some of those are other countries. Some of the sources are technical, such as the intercepted telephone conversations and photos taken by satellites. Other sources are people who have risked their lives to let the world know what Saddam Hussein is really up to. ("U.S. Secretary" 2)

Powell repeatedly re-enforced that all of his data were "backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. What we're giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence" (7). Powell never gives complete specifics of his sources and ends with an emotional appeal to lead the audience to believe that "people . . . have risked their lives to let the world know" (2). However, in the sentence following this statement, Powell states: "I cannot tell you everything that we know" (4). One of the sources Powell specifically names is UNMOVIC (United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission), which was created specifically for Iraq to replace the UN Special Commission, but in doing so he weakens his argument. Powell's revealed source was a false source. If UNMOVIC can not validate the claims Powell asserted in his speech, where did Powell's information originate from? The test question that can be applied from the habit of preference to public motivations is "Have I [the speaker] concealed information about either my source materials or my own motives, which, if revealed, would damage my case?" (Wallace 21). The answer for Powell is yes. He did not date videos such as the 1991 video of the destroyed Mirage, and he purposely omitted key information concerning data that would cripple his argument.

A clear example of Powell's omission of data is the claim that Saddam Hussein had four tons of VX. Powell states UNMOVIC as his source of information, but never stated what information UNMOVIC provided. What Powell did not say was that "most of it [VX] was destroyed in the 1990's

under UN supervision. No VX has been reported found since the invasion. Experts at Britain's International Institute of Strategic Studies said any pre-1991 VX most likely would have degraded anyway" ("AP Staffer"). Powell concealed information that would damage his argument, and as a result, concealed his and the Bush administration's other possible motives for war. Powell stated the purpose of his speech was "to share with you [the world] what the United States knows about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction as well as Iraq's involvement in terrorism" ("U.S. Secretary" 1). Powell shared a version of the United States' knowledge, but it was neither thorough nor ethical.

The final habit to critique a speech is the habit of respect for dissent. To fulfill this final stipulation, a speaker must ask, "Can I face and answer the opposing evidence and argument and still advocate my own position?" (Wallace 21). Powell walked into the UN facing a strong anti-war sentiment and could not advocate his position without deceiving his audience and providing misleading evidence. Powell did not concede to any views that opposed his own. Some of Powell's most convincing evidence was the audiotapes that he both played and interpreted for the audience. Regarding the tape on modified vehicles, he asked, "What is their concern? Their concern is that it is something they should not have, something that should not be seen" ("U.S. Secretary" 2). He did not allow the audience to come to its own conclusion after hearing the tapes. Powell further squelched any opposition explaining Iraq's actions when he states, "There's only one answer to the why: to deceive, to hide, to keep from the inspectors" (5). He introduced an opposing opinion about the aluminum tubes: "Other experts, and the Iraqi's themselves, argue that they [aluminum tubes] are really to produce the rocket bodies for a conventional weapon, a multiple rocket launcher" (14). However, he discredited the opposing view in the same statement in which he introduces it by linking it to the Iraqi argument, which he has already stated is one of deception. On all four levels, Powell's address is unethical.

On February 5, 2003, Powell gave the speech that will define his political career throughout history, and on November 15, 2004, Powell stepped down as Secretary of State with friends claiming he was tired and needed a rest. Although his speech centered on Iraq's "denial and deception," ironically, Powell's speech to the UN denied the truth about Iraq's capabilities and possession of weapons of mass destruction and deceived the American people into believing the new face of terror was that of Iraq and Hussein. His cry of deception spat in the face of the values he was supposed to embody and that define the U.S.: the values of democracy.

Political speakers should be held to the highest ethical standards when addressing such grave matters. It is essential that we, as an audience, not only require but demand to be given a fair chance to make an educated decision. If the citizens are deceived and treated unethically, can we truly have democracy? Deception is another form of terror. Powell cried deception and let loose the dogs of war, an act generations will have to try to understand.

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