

# Grand strategy, grand rhetoric: The forgotten covenant of campaign 1992

Politics  
2021, Vol. 41 (1) 80–94  
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DOI: 10.1177/02633395720935782  
journals.sagepub.com/home/pol



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## Abstract

The presidential campaign of 1992 is remembered for its focus on the US economy, as George Bush, Ross Perot, and Bill Clinton proposed solutions for the state of the nation's finances. A key challenge for the Clinton campaign was to present their candidate as a viable commander-in-chief, with a viable foreign policy, without betraying the campaign's focus on the domestic economy. A consideration of key speeches reveals the evolution of the candidate and his foreign policy, as the campaign served as a training ground for power. What emerges is Clinton's adoption of foreign policy as a positive force in American domestic political life, in contrast to his many predecessors and successors, who regularly utilised foreign policy to assail foreign nations and entities. In doing so, parallels and contrasts with the Trump's 2016 message emerge, enabling a greater appreciation of the use of campaign rhetoric in the development of US grand strategy.

## Keywords

1992 presidential election, 2016 presidential election, Anthony Lake, Bill Clinton, Donald Trump, George H. W. Bush, New Democrat, rhetoric, US foreign policy, US grand strategy

Received: 23rd September 2019; Revised version received: 5th November 2019; Accepted: 21st November 2019

Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 US presidential election appears set to divide academic and political opinion for years to come. As Lacatus and Meibauer (2021) observe in their introduction to this special edition of *Politics*, 'Trump's rhetoric on foreign policy, his electoral success and his subsequent foreign policy performance as president have challenged and continue to challenge many of our assumptions we hold about US foreign policy-making'. In addition, his campaign and subsequent administration have undermined long-held norms of presidential behaviour and expectations regarding rhetoric, tone, and responsibility. Trump's narrow victory, secured on the basis of 46.9% of the vote, was due, in part, to his appeal to disaffected blue-collar voters who deserted the Democratic Party. Twenty-four years earlier, Bill Clinton secured the presidency with

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43% of the popular vote having also utilised campaign rhetoric to appeal to a similar group of disenchanted voters. Despite their differing tones and policy aspirations, both candidates sought to overcome their lack of foreign policy experience by using this area of policy to address domestic economic conditions that proved essential to their election.<sup>1</sup> Fisher and Taub (2016: A15) argue that Trump's campaign 'hacked the politics of foreign policy', while the 1992 Clinton campaign manipulated the definition of foreign policy 'by redefining its parameters [to] benefit from the appearance of a grand vision' (Boys, 2015: 18). Both candidates addressed the issue of globalisation, a concept embraced by Clinton and whole-heartedly rejected by Trump. While Clinton extolled the virtue of globalisation, however, he was not above blaming foreign competitors, including Germany and Japan, for US economic decline. Trump took campaign rhetoric to more robust levels by highlighting what he saw as the danger from illegal immigration and, in contrast to Clinton, the threat from globalisation. Separated by 24 years, both candidates pledged to 'make America great again' in their own way, as they attempted to use 'foreign policy rhetoric to further domestic political themes and slogans' (Lacatus and Meibauer, 2021). This article will, therefore, consider the use of political rhetoric in the formulation of US foreign policy during the presidential campaigns of Bill Clinton and Donald Trump to consider similarities and contrasts in tone and substance. The article finds similarities between the two campaigns in regard to content, but that rhetorical tone emerges as a key determinant between them. Despite these differences, however, the successful blending of foreign and domestic policies, and the use of foreign policy as a vehicle to address domestic economic conditions, was a winning rhetorical device shared by both campaigns.

The 1992 presidential campaign focussed on the state of the US economy, as President George H. W. Bush, Governor Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot advocated policies to move America out of a recession. A white board in Clinton's campaign headquarters reminded the candidate to focus on three issues: Change versus More of the Same, The Economy, and Stupid, Don't Forget Healthcare. George Stephanopoulos (1999: 88) viewed this as 'a campaign haiku – an entire manifesto condensed to nineteen syllables'. Notable in its absence was any mention of foreign policy, despite an appreciation that Clinton's lack of experience in this area was a shortcoming that President Bush may exploit as he sought a second term. Addressing this, and devising a new direction for US grand strategy, was essential to position Bill Clinton as a potential commander in chief, but without betraying the campaign's focus on domestic affairs. The Clinton campaign overcame this through an astute use of rhetoric; advocating the benefits of foreign policy for the domestic economy as it positioned their candidate as a credible successor to President Bush.

The development of grand strategy during the 1992 presidential election has gone under-examined, while broader studies of the Clinton presidency have largely overlooked the use of rhetoric to develop grand strategy during the campaign. This has helped perpetuate the belief that Governor Clinton cared little and understood less about international affairs, resulting in works that are critical of the administration's foreign policy (Hyland, 1999; Mandelbaum, 1996; Miller, 1994; Muravchik, 1996). Studies of campaign rhetoric and foreign policy have not been aided by former members of the Clinton administration's national security team. Christopher (2001), Albright (2003), Soderberg (2005), and Lake (2000) do their utmost to justify their actions in office but provide little consideration to the development of foreign policy on the campaign, or the use of rhetoric to convey policies. Waldman (2000) comes closest to providing an insight into the rhetorical development of policy in the Clinton White House, however, his recollections avoid direct reference to the 1992 campaign.

This article utilises discourse analysis to reflect upon key speeches given during the Clinton campaign to reveal how these developed into policies that became US grand strategy, while remaining true to its focus on domestic affairs. George (1994: 191) observed that studies of discourse analysis were united by a commitment to understand how ‘textual and social processes are intrinsically connected and to describe, in specific contexts, the implications of this connection for the way we think and act in the contemporary world’. Clearly, any methodological approach has its limitations, and discourse analysis is no exception. As noted by Doty (1993: 302), discourse analysis is a ‘system of statements in which each individual statement makes sense’, however, it also produces interpretative possibilities. This article concedes that while language is crucial to the notion of discourse, politics is not reducible to language or linguistic analysis alone and that problems exist within this analytical approach.

Particular challenges present themselves in regard to under-analysis; by poorly summarising a statement rather than quoting directly, fixating upon an isolated quote, or conversely by simply over-quoting. To address these challenges, this article draws directly from campaign speeches delivered by Governor Clinton that referenced foreign policy; the October 1991 announcement address; the December 1991 Georgetown University address; the April 1992 Foreign Policy Association address; the August 1992 World Affairs Council address; and the October 1992 University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee address. Where material has been drawn from contemporary reportage, it is to convey the words of the candidate, not journalists. This selection process has been initiated to ensure that the exact words of the candidate are considered, enabling an insight into the stylistic and political choices that contributed to campaign rhetoric on foreign policy.

As Weldes (1998: 217) observed, studying political language is vital, since it ‘actively produces the issues with which policy makers deal and the specific problems that they confront’. By drawing on the specific text of Clinton’s 1992 public statements, it is possible to present an accurate rendering of the campaign’s core foreign policy principles, which were advocated to win over a sceptical electorate. Doing so also enables an opportunity to compare and contrast the rhetoric and policies of the 1992 campaign with those from 2016, providing a more acute context within which to analyse tone, content and intent.

Selection bias is clearly a challenge in any use of discourse analysis. As Van Dijk (1990: 14) noted, the methodology requires ‘explicit and systematic analysis’ to ensure an accurate and fair rendering of the sourced material. Accordingly, in selecting material, this article has drawn on Clinton’s exact phrasing, rather than on material interpreted by third parties. While speeches made during the Clinton administration are widely available in the *Papers of the President* series, campaign speeches are a different matter. Thankfully, many have been assembled by Stephen A. Smith (1996) to form an invaluable source for students of the Clinton era. Denton and Holloway (1996) added to a broader appreciation of Clinton’s use of rhetoric and communications, which manages to address both foreign and domestic policies in a wide-ranging text.

Policy implementation in office has traditionally followed campaign policy pronouncements. Discourse analysis can, therefore, further an appreciation of how key concepts, such as the democratic peace process and the linkage of foreign and domestic policies, were advanced rhetorically on the campaign before being implemented as official policy after Clinton’s election. The use of political rhetoric, as Tulis (1987: 4) reminds us, is vital for the successful communication of ideas and concepts and is ‘a profound development in American politics. The promise of popular leadership is the core of

dominant interpretations of our whole political order, because such leadership is offered as the antidote for ‘gridlock’ in our pluralistic constitutional system’. Discourse analysis, therefore, helps reveal the manner in which the 1992 Clinton campaign, through the use of language and location, addressed foreign policy in such a way as to ‘show the logical weakness of an opponent’s intellectual position’, and gain political support ‘by revealing the opponent’s weakness and implying thereby [his own] strength’ (Riker, 1986: 7). It also reveals the gulf between campaign rhetoric and implemented policy and provides a framework within which to compare and contrast two seemingly polar opposite presidential candidates: Bill Clinton and Donald Trump.

## The 1992 campaign

When Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton declared his intention to seek the presidency in October 1991, few imagined he would prevail. The thought that a 46-year old, little-known governor from the second poorest state might defeat George H. W. Bush, a successful wartime commander-in-chief, appeared unlikely. During Bush’s 4 years in office, US forces had removed General Noriega from Panama and restored freedom in Kuwait. The era had also witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the re-unification of Germany. These events contributed to Bush’s 89% approval rating, ensured that leading democrats, including New York Governor Mario Cuomo and Tennessee Senator Al Gore chose not to enter the 1992 campaign. The president’s son, George W. Bush, joked with reporters, ‘Do you think the American people are going to turn to a Democrat now?’ (Beschloss and Talbot, 1993: 434). As Clinton announced his candidacy, this appeared unlikely. To many, including presidential aide David Gergen (2000: 255), it appeared that Clinton was positioning himself for a more viable run against Vice-President Quayle in 1996.

There was, however, a downside to the Bush tenure; the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) talks had stalled; Europe was beset by recession and dissent over further integration; Japanese financial pre-eminence appeared inevitable; China had crushed pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square; and Yugoslavia had collapsed into civil war. Fears of ‘The Churchill Parallel’, gripped President Bush’s advisers, who noted that ‘leaders are not necessarily re-elected for their foreign policy and wartime successes’ (Goldman et al., 1994: 621). In a move designed to prevent a coup in Moscow, Bush refused to claim victory over the USSR, or to ‘dance on the Berlin Wall’ (Schlesinger, 2008: 375). This was at odds with modern campaign strategies and the belief that presidents ‘have a duty constantly to defend themselves publicly, to promote policy initiatives nationwide, and to inspire the population’ (Tulis, 1987: 4). The international virtue of this approach betrayed Bush’s poor domestic political touch, as he failed to utilise a vital justification for his re-election for fear of destabilising the international situation (Boys, 2015: 14).

The president’s position was further undermined by Patrick Buchanan’s decision to challenge Bush for the Republican nomination, a move that forced Bush to the right and embrace more conservative policies than he found agreeable. Buchanan advocated a ‘Fortress America’ calling for a withdrawal of US troops stationed abroad, a cultural war for the soul of America, and a clamp down on immigration, as he foreshadowed the populist rhetoric and policies that Trump embraced in 2016. In addition, Texan billionaire Ross Perot launched an independent bid for the presidency in a move that haemorrhaged support from the president in a three-way race. In yet another harbinger for Trump’s eventual candidacy, Perot drew remarkable support by offering simplistic

solutions to complex dilemmas, ultimately securing 19% of the popular vote. Bush's political challenges, therefore, provided opportunity that his opponents were happy to exploit for their political advantage.

As the 1992 campaign began, Governor Clinton had no particular philosophy upon which to base what became his grand strategy initiative. His exposure to international affairs had been academic; he studied at Georgetown University, worked in Senator Fulbright's office during the Vietnam War, and studied at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, yet was seeking to 'succeed a president who probably knew more about foreign policy and had more foreign policy experience than many presidents in a long number of years' (Author interview with Sir Malcolm Rifkind, British Foreign Secretary, 2013). Clinton needed to establish foreign policy credentials to inoculate himself from critics, including Pat Buchanan (1992), who charged that his international experience consisted of having 'had breakfast once at the International House of Pancakes'. He did so using foreign policy as a vehicle for addressing domestic policy in a series of keynote addresses and by blending foreign and domestic policies over the course of the campaign.

Clinton needed to unite not only the nation, but also his party, which in 1992 had been absent from the White House for all but four of the previous 24 years. Running as a 'New Democrat' to distinguish himself from the perceived failings of past Democratic candidates, Clinton sought to reposition his Party at the centre ground of American politics. As noted by From (2013: 4), the key to Clinton's success 'was to win over the working and middle-class white voters . . . who had deserted the Democratic Party in droves in the three previous presidential elections'. The Party was also divided over foreign policy. Advocates of New Internationalism embraced multilateralism, the promotion of democracy, and 'an activist approach rooted in classic American values but with the cost mitigated through burden sharing with others' (Hames, 1999: 127). In contrast, proponents of Retrenched Internationalism believed the end of the Cold War enabled the United States to commence a 'deliberate but moderate scaling back of U.S. foreign commitments – but not an abandonment of them – to provide time, energy and money to concentrate on long-term domestic problems' (Hames, 1993: 315). Clinton's campaign was supported by the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI), which espoused a New Internationalist philosophy. Its president, Will Marshall, believed the United States had to 'erect a whole new conceptual basis for foreign policy' (Dettmer, 1992: 8), since a new age had clearly dawned in regard to defence issues. Bringing the concept of triangulation to foreign policy, Clinton's emerging strategy blended elements of New Internationalism and Retrenched Internationalism as he positioned himself as a New Democrat who could be trusted with nation's security and its finances.

Clinton faced a serious challenge, however, not only in the content, but also in the delivery of his foreign policy rhetoric. As noted by Kondracke (1991: 18), Clinton was 'known to the general public, if at all, for his legendary bad speech to the 1988 Democratic National Convention (when the only applause he got was for the words "in conclusion")'. Although he was a 'man who spoke not only in complete sentences, every word chosen with intelligence and vision, but in fully articulated paragraphs, seamlessly arranged' (Grove, 1993: B1), Clinton's attempts to present complex foreign policy initiatives in a comprehensible manner ran the risk of being perceived as 'mere rhetoric . . . self-serving, predictable [and] irrelevant' (Getz, 1994: 24). Overcoming this was vital as Clinton sought to use foreign policy rhetoric to establish a relationship with voters. In doing so, it is possible to see the influence of scholars, such as Kenneth Burke (1969), who discussed

the power of identification as a tool of rhetorical persuasion in his text, *A Rhetoric of Motives*. In his subsequent work, *On Symbols and Society*, Burke (1989: 191) noted:

a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience.

Developing such a rapport was essential for Clinton who struggled to distil his message into a winning soundbite. As Muir (1994: 348) observed, 'Given his understanding of issues and his interest in clearly communicating his plans to the voters, Clinton was never very good at encapsulating his ideas into brief phrases that would work on the nightly news'.

To ensure that he was taken seriously in this vital policy area, Clinton made a series of speeches addressing foreign policy. A detailed analysis reveals the importance of their content, location, timing, and tone. Over the course of these speeches, the three pillars of Clinton's eventual grand strategy emerged: the maintenance of a strong national defence, advancing American economic competitiveness, and democratic enlargement. Clinton (2004: 381) noted that the speeches were opportunities 'to articulate the ideas and proposals [he] had developed over the previous decade as governor and at the Democratic Leadership Council'. They were delivered at locations designed to augment the message, including prestigious universities and foreign policy think tanks. The speeches were deliberately timed for maximum effect, since Clinton 'was very strategic about his foreign policy speeches, going to the right of Bush [and doing] slightly more than the minimum necessary to give himself foreign policy credentials and heft' (Author interview with JFO McAllister, Time White House Correspondent, 2014). As Campbell and Rockman (1996: 2) observed, at a time when President Bush offered 'a limited presidency in a rather unusual time of limited expectations' Clinton's foreign policy speeches offered a fresh alternative following the Cold War. Governor Clinton's rhetorical and political challenge was to present himself as George Bush's equal on foreign affairs, without betraying his campaign's focus on domestic issues or his own lack of personal experience in this area, while also uniting the Democratic Party, which remained ideologically divided over foreign policy. Only by doing so, could he hope to end the Democrats' exodus from the White House.

### **Delivering Clinton's rhetorical grand strategy**

A pattern of weaving international relations into speeches that ostensibly addressed domestic policy began as Governor Clinton announced his presidential aspirations on 3 October 1991. Although the speech dealt predominantly with domestic issues, Clinton (1991a: 80–81) charged that President Bush was prepared to 'celebrate the death of Communism abroad with the loss of the American Dream at home'. Clinton addressed the end of the Cold War in economic terms, insisting that 'national security begins at home . . . the Soviet empire never lost to us on the field of battle. Their system rotted from the inside out, from economic, political and spiritual failure' (Clinton, 1991a: 80–81). The language used presented history as a warning, as Clinton noted the risks of ignoring domestic affairs due to an excessive focus on foreign policy. The address introduced Clinton's (1991a: 80–81) concept of linking foreign and domestic policies, as he argued

the United States could not ‘build a safe and secure world unless we can first make America strong at home’. The candidate stressed his familiarity with trade issues in Arkansas and promised to bring this experience to the world stage. Speaking in the midst of a recession, he warned that the competition for the future was ‘Germany and the rest of Europe, Japan and the rest of Asia’, and that the United States risked losing its role as a global leader ‘because we’re losing the American dream right here at home’ (Clinton, 1991a: 80–81). Blending foreign policy with warnings of a threat to the domestic economy enabled Clinton to redefine the parameters of foreign policy to benefit from the appearance of a grand vision for the nation he hoped to lead.

Despite the use of foreign threats to engender domestic support, Clinton’s refusal to embrace a nationalistic approach was in contrast to the approach being adopted at that time by Pat Buchanan, and later by Donald Trump. As Lacatus (2021) notes, while Clinton presented the competition from abroad as a wakeup call for America, Trump promised ‘to bring to an end nation building abroad and mocked U.S. allies as free riders’, proposed banning Muslims from entering the country, and insisted that Mexican immigrants were a threat to national security; ‘They’re not sending their best . . . They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists’ (Green, 2017: 161). Despite these clear tonal and political differences, there were direct echoes of the Trump campaign in Clinton’s address. At the climax to his announcement address, Clinton (1991a: 86) insisted, ‘Together we can make America great again and build a community of hope that will inspire the world’. In using the phrase ‘make America great again’, Clinton was not only foreshadowing Trump, but was also adopting a line from Ronald Reagan, who used the line in his speech at the 1980 Republican Convention. Neither Reagan nor Clinton, however, trademarked the expression, which Trump did in November 2012. As noted by Tumulty (2017), in 2016, Hillary Clinton insisted, ‘I don’t think we have to make America great. I think we have to make America greater’. Her husband went further and stated that Trump’s use of the phrase was a racist dog-whistle, seemingly forgetting that he had used the expression in his carefully crafted announcement address of 1991.

In addition to the use of the same phrase, Reagan, Clinton, and Trump, all made successful bids to win disaffected voters that had deserted their respective parties. In 1992, Clinton’s strategy of courting blue-collar voters resulted in a pledge to forge ‘a New Covenant of change that will honor middle-class values, restore the public trust, create a sense of community, and make America work again’ (Clinton, 1991b: 97). As Holland and Fermor (2021) observe, Donald Trump prevailed in 2016 due, in large part, to his ability ‘to engage ‘left behind’ or ‘forgotten’ white working-class voters’ whose support helped elect Bill Clinton in 1992. In contrast to Trump, however, Clinton’s campaign rejected the notion that economic isolationism was a solution to America’s financial situation. Protectionism, Clinton (1991c: 108) warned, was:

a fancy word for giving up; we want to compete and win. That’s why our New Covenant must include a new trade policy that says to Europe, Japan, and our other trading partners: we favour an open trading system, but if you won’t play by those rules, we’ll play by yours.

The tone and content of his remarks made it clear that Clinton intended to fight for American workers and to use the threat of foreign economic competition as political leverage.

Not all rhetorical devices worked as Clinton had hoped (Hammer, 1996). He referred to his campaign manifesto as *The New Covenant*, with echoes of Wilson’s *New Freedom*,

FDR's *New Deal*, and JFK's *New Frontier*. It also combined echoes of Woodrow Wilson's use of the term 'covenant' to refer to specific policies, including the League of Nations. As Jamieson (1988: 91) observed, 'Phrases, or small units of discourse . . . can come to stand for an entire presidency or period of history', and Clinton's use of *The New Covenant* was a clear attempt to position his candidacy in a broad historical narrative. It was not, however, an expression that captured the public's imagination. Muir (1994: 347–348) recognised that Clinton's 'limited ability to turn a phrase into a memorable one that could stay with the public provided an important rationale to get his message out through non-traditional media forms'. The Clinton campaign repeatedly struggled to convey a slogan that was succinct enough to be understood by the voting public, in either domestic or foreign policy. The failure of *The New Covenant* to resonate ensured that there was no 1992 equivalent to Trump's 'Make America Great Again' slogan.

Having woven foreign policy into his announcement address, Governor Clinton delivered his first dedicated address on the subject at Georgetown University on 12 December 1991. Speaking at his alma mater, delivering an address drafted with the help of his foreign policy aide, Tony Lake, Clinton's speech was constructed to avoid alienating potential supporters and to attract as much political, intellectual and financial support as possible. Speaking with the ease of a challenger, Clinton (1991d: 118) attacked Bush for rushing 'to resume cordial relations with China barely a month after the massacre in Tiananmen Square'. Linking foreign policy to trade, Clinton promised a more assertive approach towards Beijing, with serious implications for China's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) trading status with the United States. The focus on China was another example of both continuity and change in regard to Clinton and Trump. While Clinton campaigned in favour of renegotiating MFN status in return for improvements in China's human rights record, Trump sought more direct economic leverage to improve the lives of American workers. Trump (2015: 43) accused China of having 'destroyed entire industries by utilizing low-wage workers, cost us tens of thousands of jobs, spied on our businesses, stolen our technology, and have manipulated and devalued their currency, which makes importing our goods more expensive—and sometimes, impossible'. Regardless of the differences in tone and intent, the focus on China was indicative of the identity politics that emerged following the Cold War and evidence of Siddi's (2018: 37) conclusion that national identities are 'complex, malleable, and contested'. The use of China as an emerging threat in the 1990s was one the Clinton campaign was comfortable to engage with, believing that Beijing was open to a new trade relationship and a re-appraisal of its human rights policies. Attacking China in 2016 was an obvious line for the Trump campaign to adopt as it sought to highlight the threat posed by outsourcing American jobs to overseas markets. Following their respective elections, however, neither Clinton nor Trump found dealing with Beijing to be as fruitful as either had hoped.

In a sign of the changing tide of international economic success, Japan, rather than China, was a major focus of Governor Clinton's remarks during 1992. He noted that following World War II, the United States had rebuilt vanquished nations and regions. Now, at the end of the Cold War, he insisted, 'we must rebuild our own nation, retrain our people, re-tool our factories, revitalize our business sector, restore our ability to compete. Surely, we can do for America what we once did for Europe and Japan' (Clinton, 1992b: 187). Japan's financial success at a time of US economic slowdown was returned to time and again on the campaign as Clinton. Using rhetoric that foreshadowed Trump's 2016 remarks, Clinton (1992c: 220) demanded that 'American companies must act like American companies again – exporting products not jobs'. In a sign of the continuity in



rhetoric, if not necessarily tone, Trump (2015: 87) stressed the need to ‘bring jobs back from places like China, Japan, and Mexico. We have to stand up and be tough’. The Arkansas governor insisted that it was vital to ‘devise and pursue national policies that serve the needs of our people by uniting us at home and restoring America’s greatness in the world’ (Clinton, 1991d: 123). Both candidates benefitted from the fact that in 1992 and 2016, voters expressed a preference for economic policies, rather than grand international initiatives. In both cases, it was a case of ‘the economy, stupid’, as both Clinton and Trump successfully threaded voter’s economic concerns into their wider policy initiatives.

In stark contrast to Trump, however, Clinton embraced the concept of democratic promotion, which he introduced during his Georgetown University address. This promised new markets for US exports, resulting in more American jobs and enhanced global security. The concept blended Clinton’s advocacy of economic expansionism with calls to enlarge democracy. It also combining foreign and domestic policies, enabling Clinton (1991d: 123) to insist that ‘our national security is largely economic . . . Our “foreign” policies are not really foreign at all’. The influence of Immanuel Kant’s democratic peace theory, espoused in 1795, was evident as Clinton (1991d: 118) insisted that, ‘democracies don’t go to war with each other . . . don’t sponsor terrorist acts against each other’. The end of the Cold War enabled Governor Clinton to advocate the potential for democracy itself to be utilised as a vehicle for peace, a philosophy that became central to his strategic thinking (Russett, 1993). In his adoption of this concept, Bill Clinton ushered in a post-Cold War embrace of globalisation, which Trump sought to end as part of his ‘America First’ approach 24 years later. In 1992, however, utilising this rhetorical approach to foreign policy allowed Clinton to argue that the spread of democracy was more than reassuring to Americans; it was of the utmost importance to US national security.

Clinton’s Georgetown University speech was important for four reasons. First, it demonstrated Clinton’s mastery over a range of foreign policy issues including economics, trade, geopolitics, and defence. Second, it allowed Clinton to demonstrate he was not a ‘failed governor from a poor southern state’ and helped him ‘cross the threshold of understanding and competence in foreign affairs’ (Clinton, 2004: 383; Matalin and Carville, 1994: 86). Third, the speech brought New Democrat thinking to foreign affairs, stressing the linkage of foreign and domestic policies and introducing his embrace of the democratic peace theory. This approach permitted Clinton to challenge Bush on the incumbent’s apparent strongest asset, while providing the governor with an opportunity to highlight his own record and distinguish himself from a president whose repeated rhetorical errors were presented as a sign of a lack of vision and purpose by the Clinton campaign (Hammer, 1996: 70). Finally, it was made 2 months before the New Hampshire Primary, at a time when all other Democratic Party candidates were focussed on domestic issues. This enabled Clinton to establish himself as a candidate capable of addressing foreign policy and gain the support of the Democratic Party’s foreign policy elite, before addressing domestic issues vital to the electorate in the primaries. Clinton’s rhetorical approach to foreign policy on the campaign enabled him to establish credibility in the area, to redefine the subject, distinguish himself from his opponent, and to highlight the areas he cared about most of all (Johnstone and Priest, 2017: 4).

Five months later, Governor Clinton addressed the Foreign Policy Association in New York. Speaking on 1 April, Clinton (1992a: 422–424) argued that President Bush was an impediment to the forces of change in the post-Cold War era, who had ‘poured cold water on Baltic and Ukrainian aspirations for independence’, and ‘invoked a new world order

without enunciating a new American purpose'. As Meibauer (2021) notes, in the midst of a presidential election, 'contenders are faced with the difficulty of signalling commitment to very different ideas simultaneously to maximise their support'. The foreign policy rhetoric that emerged from the New York speech was designed to help Clinton gain the support of the state's Irish-American community in the impending primary election, and of the 40 million voters with an Irish heritage in the November election. Clinton pledged to appoint a special envoy to Northern Ireland, to raise human rights violations with the British prime minister if elected, and to consider issuing a visa to Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams (O'Grady, 1996: 3). Clinton (2004: 401) conceded that this was done in the knowledge that it would 'infuriate the British and strain our most important transatlantic relationship'. Clinton's foreign policy rhetoric helped him win the New York primary, but strained Anglo-American relations until Tony Blair's election in 1997. The US ambassador to London, Raymond Seitz (1998: 321), noted that these 'clumsy little incidents planted the seeds of transatlantic recriminations', which haunted Anglo-American relations for years to come.

By the time Governor Clinton next spoke at length on foreign policy, at the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles on 13 August, he had secured the Democratic Party's nomination. His subsequent foreign policy addresses revealed the evolving nature of the campaign and the candidate, as his speeches became more realistic in tone and rhetorical in style (Boys, 2015: 24). Clinton addressed the job losses caused by defence cuts to demonstrate his linkage of foreign and domestic policies. Clinton (1992f: 274) insisted that the economy had been hurt by 'the lack of a plan to convert defence cuts into domestic economic investments', and promised to help 'retrain defence technicians for work in critical civilian fields'. In language that mirrored Trump's approach to securing blue-collar votes in 2016, Clinton (1992e: 231) lamented that fact that the US economy was 'growing at an anaemic pace, in the last couple of years, at roughly one-third and one-fourth the German and the Japanese rates'. The solution, he insisted, was to give Al Gore and himself 'a chance to bring America back. We will lift the country up. It's time for [Bush and the Republicans] to go and time for us to rescue America' (Clinton, 1992d: 227), presenting himself and his running mate as saviours of a nation wallowing in economic malaise. Clinton (1992f: 269) argued that Bush had 'no serious plan to help our defence personnel make the transition to a civilian economy' and insisted that the nation required a president 'who attends to prosperity at home' if the American people were 'to sustain their support for engagement abroad'. As the challenger, Governor Clinton could campaign on broad statements and promises, rather than on his record in office.

Clinton (1992f: 267) delivered his plan in a point-by-point manner and outlined three tests for foreign policy leadership in the 1990s:

The first is to grasp how the world has changed. The second test is to assert a vision of our role in this dynamic new world. The third test is to summon all our strengths; our values, our economic power, when necessary our military might, in service of that vision.

Utilising this rhetorical format and delivering his programme in a sequential manner enabled Clinton to present a distilled message that could be edited into an accessible soundbite. Clinton (1992f: 268) developed upon this using a 'problem-solution format' to issues, including foreign policy, as he insisted that America's 'first foreign priority and our first domestic priority are one and the same: reviving our economy'. Adopting this rhetorical approach and provocatively redefining the challenge at hand enabled

Clinton to offer solutions predicated on his own area of expertise and interest: domestic economics.

Clinton presented the election as a choice between two opposing outlooks. President Bush, Clinton (1992f: 276) insisted, sought to 'establish his leadership by emphasizing the time he has spent, the calls he has placed and the trips he has taken in the conduct of foreign policy'. Such criteria were no longer sufficient, Clinton (1992f: 276) noted, since 'the measure of leadership in the new era is not the conversations held or the miles travelled. It is the new realities recognized, the crises averted, the opportunities seized'. Seeking to portray himself as an agent of change and to recapture the idealism of the 1960s, Clinton (1992f: 271) promised a Democracy Corps to 'stand up for democracy and help them develop free institutions'. Drawing upon the politics of his youth, Clinton (1992f: 276) echoed President Kennedy's call for a new generation of leadership that was 'strategic, vigorous and grounded in America's democratic values', for a world that was 'increasingly engaged in democracy, tolerant of diversity and respectful of human rights'. The attempt to emulate JFK exemplified Clinton's evolving speech structure, as he utilised rhetoric to define his aspirations for the future. It was noted that Clinton's 'extemporaneous comments were models of eloquence contrasted with Bush's frequent problems with syntax' (Smith SA, 1994: 1), as the Arkansas governor adopted the language of America's past to portray a vision for its future.

Governor Clinton delivered his final foreign policy address of the campaign on 1 October at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. The speech was a final appeal to disaffected Democrats presenting Clinton as a credible commander-in-chief with a credible grand strategy. Much had changed since President Kennedy (1961: 1) promised to 'pay any price, bear any burden, oppose any foe, in order to ensure the survival and the success of liberty', as Clinton carefully avoided calling for a global crusade. Instead, Clinton (1992g) insisted that 'every ideal, including the promotion of democracy, must be tempered with prudence and common sense . . . we cannot support every group's hopes for self-determination'. Clinton (1992g) committed the United States to the promotion of democracy when possible, but pragmatism prevailed as Democratic Enlargement became 'one objective amongst others that would help guarantee America's place in a complex international system'. As Clinton's campaign progressed, his speeches became more refined as he sought to enhance his electoral chances using rhetoric to elevate himself from a rural politician to a credible challenger for the presidency. This was in contrast to the approach adopted by Trump, whose rhetoric and demeanour remained consistently un-presidential throughout the 2016 campaign and into his presidency. Like Jessie Ventura before him, Trump established 'an anti-establishment ethos' as 'straight talkers, marking them as outsider candidates able to act as conduits for political protest by an electorate alienated from mainstream political elites' (Moon, 2020). Clinton and Trump, therefore, adopted differing rhetorical approaches to campaigning, stressing differing character traits; competence and electability for Clinton, strength, and fortitude for Trump. Although both succeeded in their quest for the presidency, neither secured a majority of the popular vote. The presence of third-party candidates in both elections ensured that Clinton prevailed in 1992 with 43% of the vote, while Trump received 46.9% in 2016, losing the popular vote by almost 3 million. Once elected, however, both quickly discovered that delivering grand rhetoric on the campaign had very little in common with the challenges involved in executing grand strategy once in office.

## Conclusion: Clinton's rhetorical triumph

The presidential elections of 1992 and 2016 were separated by 24 years. The victors in both years owed their election, in part, to the time in which they ran. The end of the Cold War created the domestic political conditions for Clinton's candidacy in 1992, while the domestic economic conditions caused, in part by globalisation, aided Trump's 2016 campaign. Despite their vastly differing political aspirations, similarities existed: Both made effective use of rhetoric and altered perceptions in regard to the link between foreign and domestic policies. Trump succeeded by linking perceived threats from illegal immigration to the state of the domestic economy; in 1992, Governor Clinton emphasised the domestic element to foreign policy to highlight his own record in Arkansas and distinguish himself from President Bush. This was done to such an extent that Barnes (1994: 1816) lauded Clinton and his advisors who had 'proved their mastery of modern communication techniques during the 1992 campaign'. The Clinton campaign utilised a rhetorical approach that 'was the antithesis of the traditional ten-second sound bite, which, prior to 1992, had come to dominate campaign rhetoric' (Muir, 1994: 348). By 2016, televised soundbites had been superseded by social media, particularly Twitter. This enabled Trump to convey his campaign rhetoric to his followers, and cable news channels, in an echo-chamber that rewarded alarming rhetoric with increased ratings.

What differentiated the two campaigns most were differences in tone and aspiration. Both candidates promised to 'make America great again' in their campaign rhetoric; both men sought to stress the domestic benefits from a new approach to foreign policy, and both were guilty to one degree or another of scapegoating foreign nations for the decline in the US economy. In 1992, however, Bill Clinton presented an up-beat, viable alternative to the incumbent, as Craig Allen Smith (1994: 89) observed: 'Where Bush decried the 'vision thing', Clinton had a vision . . . where Bush 'went negative' in the campaign, Clinton was positive in his affirmation of American values'. In contrast to the Trump campaign, and 'widespread debates on post-truth politics, conspiracies, fake news, and propaganda' (Chernobrov, 2019: 347), the Clinton campaign utilised a positive, deliberate rhetorical style to advance an activist foreign policy, which stressed the domestic benefits of international engagement. Despite these differences, the successful blending of foreign and domestic policies, and the use of foreign policy as a vehicle to address domestic economic conditions, was a winning rhetorical devise shared by both campaigns.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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### Note

1. Bill Clinton and Donald Trump were not unique in their lack of foreign policy experience prior to their election. Their campaigns have been selected due to the apparent contradictory status of their political standing, a situation exacerbated by the presence of Hillary Clinton (and Bill Clinton's political legacy) on the 2016 ballot.

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