The Constraining Power of Entrenched Force-Dynamic Patterns

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how neoconservatives control debate and manipulate public opinion, thereby averting a true discussion of the issues. Through a contextual force dynamics approach, the study analyzes cognitive framing exploring how entrenched force-dynamic patterns (Talmy, 1985; Talmy, 1988; Talmy, 2000a) constrain political discourse, influence the actions of those contending for power and mediate the construction of meaning in American politics. It complements approaches like Lakoff's work (2006) on the power of the war metaphor, adding depth to the analysis. Context is understood from the perspective of Van Dijk (2009: 5): what is determined to be relevant by the participants themselves. The nucleus of the *corpus* consists of a series of *Washington Post* and *NY Times* articles written between June 15th and June 21st, 2006, when the war over the war was posited by Bush as the number-one campaign issue in the upcoming November congressional elections. However, it includes follow-up articles written at election time as well as more recent discussions of political confrontations regarding Iraq. Talmy's systemic approach to force-dynamic patterns is a broad generalization of causation including a wide array of interactions such as blocking, permitting and withdrawing of such blockage, as well as steady-state and shifting patterns. It is the comprehensive nature of the system that permits a detailed analysis of lexical, syntactical and pragmatic oppositions.

Key words: *discourse analysis; language and power; cognitive framing; contextual force dynamics; political discourse.*

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Resumen

Este artículo examina la forma en que los neoconservadores controlan el debate, manipulan la opinión pública y logran impedir una verdadera discusión de los asuntos políticos. Mediante un análisis contextual de la dinámica de fuerzas se analiza el encuadre cognoscitivo de sus enunciados y se explora cómo los patrones implícitos, o atrincherados, de dinámica de fuerzas (Talmy, 1985; Talmy, 1988; Talmy, 2000a) constriñen el discurso político, influyen en las acciones de quienes contienden por el poder e intervienen en la construcción de significados en la política estadounidense. El análisis adquiere mayor profundidad al complementar planteamientos como los de Lakoff (2006) sobre el poder de la metáfora de la guerra. El contexto se entiende aquí en el sentido de Van Dijk (2009: 5): lo que se determina relevante por parte de los participantes. El núcleo del *corpus* consiste en una serie de artículos del *Washington Post* y el *NY Times* escritos entre el 15 y el 21 de junio de 2006, cuando la guerra sobre la guerra fue planteada por Bush como el tema número uno de la campaña electoral por el Congreso de los Estados Unidos. Se incluyen también artículos escritos durante las elecciones, así como algunas discusiones de confrontaciones políticas más recientes acerca de Irak. El sistema de la dinámica de fuerzas de Talmy es una generalización de la causalidad, que abarca una amplia gama de interacciones como interponer, permitir y eliminar obstáculos, y que incluye tanto patrones de equilibrio como de cambio. La naturaleza integral del sistema permite un análisis detallado de oposiciones léxicas, sintácticas y pragmáticas.

Palabras clave: *análisis del discurso; lenguaje y poder; marcos cognitivos; dinámica de fuerzas contextual; discurso político*.

Introduction

Key moves by Bush and Republican politicians during June 2006 thwarted the will of the American public to listen to congressional leaders debate the highly unpopular war in Iraq, at the same time that *the war over the war* was posited by Bush as a key congressional campaign issue. This article pretends to analyze cognitive framing in an attempt to explore how the use of entrenched force-dynamic patterns (Talmy, 1985; Talmy, 1988; Talmy, 2000a) constrains political discourse, influences the actions of those contending for power and mediates the construction of meaning in current American politics. The nucleus of

the *corpus* consists of a series of *Washington Post* and *NY Times* articles written between June 15th and June 21st, 2006. However, it also includes follow-up articles at election time as well as more recent discussions of political confrontations regarding Iraq. The power of a force dynamics analysis to explain how Bush in particular and Republicans in general frame debates, caused me to zero in on the moment Bush announced his campaign strategy for the Congressional elections. The follow-up articles were selected upon the basis of the light they shed on the central opposition that Bush constructed.

An analysis of the constraining power of entrenched force-dynamic patterns is consistent with the point of view that language can be used as a force for social domination. Recently this view has been expressed by writers like Wodak and Meyer (2001: 11):

> […] language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and long term. Language provides a finely articulated means for differences in power in social hierarchical structures.

From this perspective, an analysis of the syntactic, lexical and pragmatic oppositions of the *corpus* is undertaken.

Although the study relies heavily on the fine analysis of causation underlying Talmy's (1985; 1988; 2000a) force-dynamic system, all oppositions are viewed in their broad discourse context—and context is understood from the perspective of Van Dijk (2009: 5): "[…] a context is what is determined to be relevant by the participants themselves." From this standpoint, it is fundamental to recognize that contexts are subjective entities:

> Definitions of the situation are cognitive objects, for instance a mental representation. It is this representation, and not the "objective" social situation", that influences the cognitive processes of discourse production and comprehension (*Ibid.*).

Van Dijk further underlines that only cognitive phenomena can influence cognitive processes. It is these mental representations viewed as

force-dynamic oppositions that the present study pretends to analyze in an effort to explore the constraining power of language.

On September 11, 2006, George Lakoff and Evan Frisch posted an article on <*www.alternet.org*> explaining how Bush has used the war metaphor to support a war against Iraq:

> The war metaphor was chosen for political reasons. First and foremost, it was chosen for the domestic political reasons. The war metaphor defined war as the only way to defend the nation. From within the war metaphor, being against war as a response was to be unpatriotic, to be against defending the nation. The war metaphor put progressives on the defensive. Once the war metaphor took hold, any refusal to grant the president's full authority to conduct the war would open progressives in Congress to the charge of being unpatriotic, unwilling to defend America, defeatist. And once the military went into battle, the war metaphor created a new reality that reinforced the metaphor.

This is similar to the logic underlying a contextual force-dynamic analysis. However, Talmy's (1985; 1988; 2000a) force-dynamic system is a generalization of causation in all its complexity, accounting for interactions not normally included in the literature, like blocking, permitting and withdrawing of such blockage, as well as parameters for steady-state and shifting patterns. It is the comprehensive nature of the system that permits a detailed analysis of the lexical, syntactical and pragmatic oppositions in the *corpus.*

This study is situated within the general framework of cognitive linguistics which focuses on the *patterns in which and the processes by which conceptual content is organized in language, stressing how language structures conceptual content* through an analysis of *such basic conceptual categories as those of space and time, scenes and events, entities and processes, motion and location, and force and causation* (Talmy, 2000a: 2).[1]

A central concept of cognitive linguistics pertains to the notion of *conceptual substrate.* Langacker (2001: 15) states that:

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[1] The two volumes *Towards a Cognitive Semantics*, published in 2000, provide a comprehensive view of his previous publications. The work quoted in this paper provides a means of comprehensive access to his thought, in contrast to his earlier research that appears in multiple articles published in different academic journals.

> […] linguistic meaning rests on a vast and multifaceted *conceptual substrate*. The conceptions explicitly encoded by formal elements are merely the "visible" portions of far more extensive conceptual structures that support them and provide their coherence.

The importance of this tenet derives from the fact that language is viewed as part of general cognition, and thus subjective selections and interpretations on behalf of both speakers and hearers underlie the conceptual content of their communications. Conceptual structures supporting utterances include *presupposed viewing arrangements, the nature and force of speaker-hearer interaction, and how expressions relate to the current discourse state* (*Idem.*).

This approach underlies the force dynamics analysis undertaken in this paper in that the study examines various subjective lexical, syntactic and pragmatic choices made by politicians to frame campaign issues, focusing on a central dynamic conflict immersed in a dense network of macro/micro interrelated oppositions. At times the visible portion of this conceptual substrate is the focal opposition; but at others, it may be macro or micro interactions.

Dynamic oppositions can be analyzed in terms of three parameters: the intrinsic force tendencies of each entity, their relative strength and the results of the interaction (Talmy, 2000a: 413-415). The combination determines how a dynamic interaction is classified. Tendencies and results have binary values: +*movement*/+*action* or -*movement*/-*action*. An entity's force-dynamic capacity is expressed in relation to its intrinsic tendency that in the case of physical interactions is either towards *movement or rest*; whereas in the social sphere the intrinsic tendency is either towards *action* or *inaction*. For example, the intrinsic tendency of Bush and his Republican supporters regarding the war is towards *action*, whereas that of the Democrats is towards *inaction*, both from the perspective of their disagreements and their desire for the withdrawal of troops to end the conflict. A force dynamics analysis permits pinpointing precisely how dynamic interactions are framed cognitively.

I have adopted Talmy's symbols: an arrowhead for an intrinsic tendency towards *motion/action*, and a dot for *rest/inaction*. See Appendix.

Protagonist[2] and Antagonist always possess contrary tendencies, and for this reason Talmy only indicates the intrinsic tendency of the focal force (the opposing force having the opposite tendency). A circle is used as a symbol for the focal force I have termed as *Protagonist*; and a concave figure for the Antagonist. A plus is placed on the stronger entity. This parameter designating relative strength determines the result of the dynamic interaction. An arrowhead on a line indicates that the result was *motion/action*; a dot on the line signals *rest/inaction*.

Variations in the three basic parameters (intrinsic tendency, relative strength and results) produce a broad generalization on the diverse forms of causation, including both steady-state and shifting interactions which can in turn be characterized as basic when the opposing force-exerting entities are engaged, and secondary when relevant forces are disengaged. This vast array is not limited to those prototypical interactions where a stronger force produces a dynamic change from *motion/action* to *rest/inaction*, or the contrary. It also covers non-prototypical interactions where a weaker Antagonist exerts a force, but is unable to alter the protagonist's tendency. Thus, an analysis of political oppositions from a force-dynamic perspective provides a wide variety of patterns that can be used to portray the exact nature of these interactions and better understand the process of cognitive framing.

From a totally different perspective, the force-dynamic opposition to be analyzed in this paper can be viewed as oversimplified or misrepresented conceptualizations of identity. The way civilizations and cohesive groups construct their identity has been studied extensively by the Indian scholar Amartya Sen. Problems stem from the practice of categorizing opponents from the perspective of a single trait, thus ignoring the multitude of characteristics that diverse groups might have in common. Although he accepts that a sense of identity can lead to strength and confidence, he states:

> […] identity can also kill—and kill with abandon. A strong —and exclusive— sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with

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[2] Following anatomical terminology, Talmy refers to the forces in opposition as Agonist and Antagonist. I prefer the more common term *Protagonist* for the focal force.

it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups (Sen, 2006: 1-2).

The way Republicans construct their identity, especially regarding their view on the international scene, has grave consequences for the United States and the world at large. Thus it is pertinent to view Bush's choice of language as an attempt to challenge, alter or even subvert power. The manner in which he constructs conservative Republican ideology locks those participating in electoral discourse into entrenched force-dynamic patterns from which they find it difficult to disengage without seeming un-American.
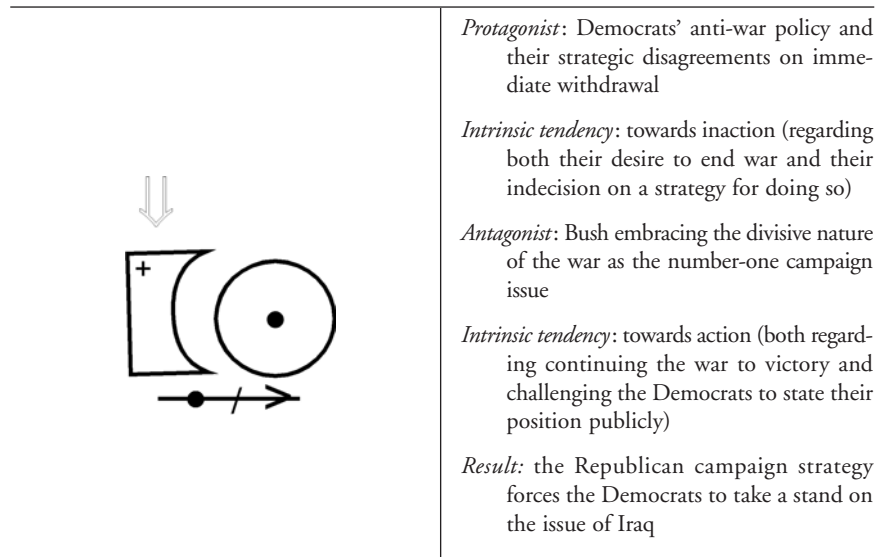
I. The focal force-dynamic confrontation

According to special correspondent to the *Washington Post*, D. Froomkin (June 15th, 2006), in an article entitled "The War over the War", President Bush made it clear that *not only was he set in his path regarding his overwhelmingly unpopular war in Iraq*, but also that he was […] *embracing the divisive nature of the war and declaring it the No. 1 campaign issue of the 2006 mid-term election*. According to the *Post* in the same article, it is Karl Rove, the mastermind of the *war over the war*, who is *trumpeting the new Republican battle cry against Democrats*: *They may be with you at the first shots, but they are not going to be with you for the last, tough battles.* Highlighting the Democrats inconsistencies, Rove's game plan is *Don't defend—attack!*

In the same article, Froomkin goes on to quote Wallsten and Reynolds of the *Los Angeles Times*:

> The Iraq War is the most immediate foreign policy problem besetting the Bush administration. But as a political issue, the White House and top Republican strategists have concluded that the war is a clear winner. […] *GOP officials intend to base the midterm election campaign partly on talking up the war, using speeches and events to contrast President Bush's policies against growing disagreement among leading Democrats over whether to support immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops.*

Discurso, teoría y análisis 29 (primavera, 2008): 113-138.

Future events bear out the truth of these media predictions and Bush's proclamation as it is his effort to put the Democrats on the defensive concerning the war issue that frames the political climate for major confrontations between congressional candidates contending in the 2006 election. Therefore, it is fundamental to analyze Bush's force dynamics move to focus the congressional campaign on the divisive nature of the war (figure 1).

Figure 1

Bush's declaration of the War in Iraq as the no. 1 campaign issue

Protagonist: Democrats' anti-war policy and their strategic disagreements on immediate withdrawal

Intrinsic tendency: towards inaction (regarding both their desire to end war and their indecision on a strategy for doing so)

Antagonist: Bush embracing the divisive nature of the war as the number-one campaign issue

Intrinsic tendency: towards action (both regarding continuing the war to victory and challenging the Democrats to state their position publicly)

Result: the Republican campaign strategy forces the Democrats to take a stand on the issue of Iraq

Since the declaration of war four years earlier, there had been no serious extended congressional debate over either the origins or the conduction of the war in Iraq.[3] Thus, Bush's political decision declaring the war the number-one campaign issue corresponds to a shifting force-dynamic move,[4] signaled by the double arrow in figure 1: the Antagonist enters a state of impingement forcing the Democrats to defend their antiwar policy and take a public stand on this issue.
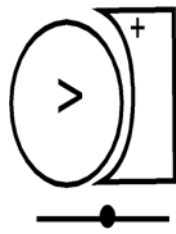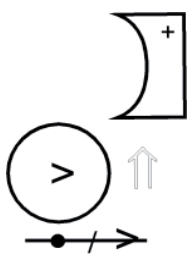
[3] J. Weisman, *Washington Post*, June 15th, 2006.
[4] Talmy, 2000a: 417-418.

An analysis of the focal force-dynamic confrontation, embedded in a dense contextual network of associated macro and micro dynamic oppositions —explicitly expressed in the *corpus*— sheds light on the reasons why in the face of the 2006 electoral results, the War in Iraq still continues. Macro oppositions drawn up by Republican imagery include the overall electoral conflict pitting Republicans against Democrats, pro-war *versus* anti-war and a conflation of the issues of the War on Terror with the War in Iraq, in contrast to more rational approaches to the problem of international terrorism. They also depict a strong *versus* a weak defense of national security and defense of democracy against threats to democracy world-wide (as defined by Bush). The dynamic oppositions conjured up by Republican imagery can be viewed in figure 2.

Figure 2
Republican imagery depicts this contrast

Implications of Republican platform	*Implications of Democratic platform*
Protagonist: Iraqi rebels (the terrorist adversary)	*Protagonist*: Iraqi rebels (the terrorist adversary)
Intrinsic tendency: towards action (attacking U.S. interests)	*Intrinsic tendency*: towards action (attacking U.S. interests)
Antagonist: U.S. armed forces	*Antagonist:* U.S. armed forces
Intrinsic tendency: halting Iraqi rebels, *i. e.* threats to democracy	*Intrinsic tendency*: halting Iraqi rebels, *i. e.* threats to democracy
Result: Iraqi rebels defeat U. S. armed forces due to withdrawal: threats to democracy in Iraq and by extension to U.S. national security	*Result*: defend Democracy in Iraq ending terrorist attacks (fight to the end for a U.S. victory)

Discurso, teoría y análisis 29 (primavera, 2008): 113-138.

In contrast to that of figure 1, the force-dynamic pattern corresponding to Republican imagery of the Democratic platform in figure 2 is a steady-state pattern: the engagement of U.S. troops fighting to the finish for a U.S. victory. Like the pattern shown in figure 1, the dynamic pattern corresponding to Republican imagery of the Democratic platform sketched out in figure 2 is a shifting interaction, implicating change—namely defeat in Iraq due to the withdrawal of U.S. troops. In the force-dynamic interaction corresponding to the implications of Republican policy, the Protagonist corresponds to the Iraqi rebels portrayed as the terrorist adversary as well as a threat posed to democracy in Iraq. The U.S. armed forces are represented as firmly engaged willing to fight to the finish to protect democracy in Iraq and defeat the terrorist adversary. This Republican defensive pattern is compared to the Republican perspective of the Democratic withdrawal pattern, a shifting force-dynamic interaction[5] with an Antagonist disengaging from the dynamic interaction: the U.S. armed forces (*withdrawing* as preferred by many Democrats and a large percentage of the U.S. population). In this schema, the Iraqi rebels are victorious, and threats to Iraqi democracy and U.S. national security prevail. The way the Republicans frame the electoral conflict can be summarized as follows:

PORTRAIT OF CONTRASTS DEPICTED BY REPUBLICAN IMAGERY

Republicans	*Democrats*
Hold firm on Iraq and the War on Terror	On the defensive
Pro national security	Fractured, indecisive, incoherent
United front	Without a coherent national security policy
Congressional support for Bush's policies	Weak on terrorism
Aware of the stakes	Pro-withdrawal of troops
	Defeatist policy of retreat

[5] Talmy considers this a force-dynamic pattern because of the potential for interaction of the disengaged Antagonist: U.S. armed forces.
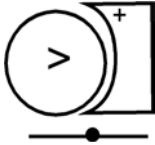
This contrasting perspective is constantly reinforced through the selection of lexical items and the consequences of losing the War in Iraq and thus the struggle for containing terrorism world-wide:

> According to Sheryl Gay Stolberg of the *NYTimes*, President Bush warned Democrats [in mid June] *that an early withdrawal of troops would **set back counterterrorism efforts** and **endanger our country;*** […] and David Jackson and Richard Benedetto *of USA Today* quote Bush that *pulling out of Iraq before we accomplish the mission will **make the world a more dangerous place***, *he [Bush] said* (reported by Froomkin, June 15th, 2006).

The rhetoric in this kind of statement positions the United States as the victim of *terrorism and as an increasingly more endangered country*, even though there was no actual proof of a link between the regime in Iraq and 9/11; besides, it was the United States that attacked Iraq. At the same time, the Republican analogy between *withdrawing* or *pulling out troops* and *advances for terrorists* and *those who endanger the U.S.A.* leaves politicians opposing the war on the side of terrorists and those who endanger the world.

Despite the power of imagery branding opposition to the war as unpatriotic, Republicans lost control of both Houses of Congress (figure 3).
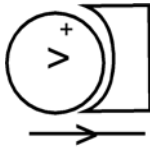
FIGURE 3
REPUBLICANS LOSE CONTROL OF CONGRESS

Protagonist: War as Bush's number-one campaign issue
Intrinsic tendency: towards action (defend national security/win elections)
Antagonist: Growing opposition to war in the U.S. and world as well as crucial indicators in Iraq
Intrinsic tendency: towards inaction
Result: Defeat of war issue/Republicans lose control of Congress

The election results reflect a steady-state opposition where a stronger Antagonist representing growing opposition to the war in the U.S. and world-wide as well as crucial indicators in Iraq (continued violence and low oil and electricity production) causes the electorate to vote against the Protagonist (Republican candidates supporting Bush's position in the war). Bush's electoral campaign is defeated, but as it happens (portrayed in figure 4), the War in Iraq does not end.

Figure 4
Despite all opposition, Bush continues the war

Protagonist: Bush and his supporters on the war issue
Intrinsic tendency: action (continue the war)
Antagonist: Growing anti-war public opinion; Democratic Congress; protracted violence in Iraq; President's low approval rating
Intrinsic tendency: inaction (immediate withdrawal or withdrawal time-table)
Result: Bush, as commander-in-chief of U.S. armed forces, continues the war

Bush and his supporters on the war issue are the Protagonist and their intrinsic tendency is toward *action*—continuing the war. The Antagonist, represented by the Democratic Congress, growing anti-war public opinion, protracted violence in Iraq and the low approval-rating of the President, has an intrinsic tendency toward inaction: the end of the war by the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Although this dynamic force is opposing the Protagonist, the latter is stronger and its tendency towards motion results: Bush, as Commander-in-chief of U.S. armed forces, continues the war. It is the result of this dynamic opposition that does not follow logically from the confrontation depicted in figure 3, which needs to be carefully explained in light of the dense network of dynamic macro and micro oppositions.
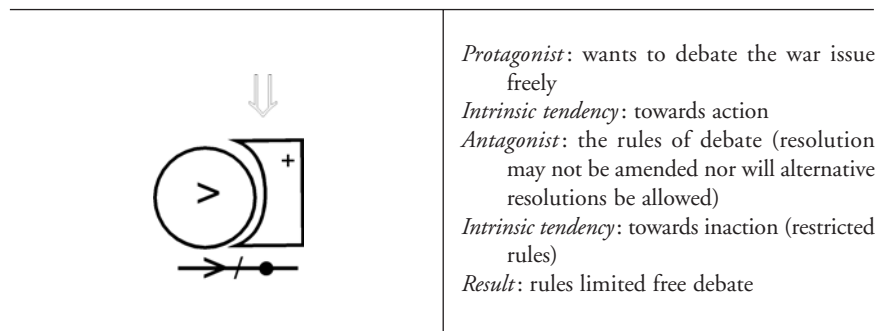
II. Selected micro-oppositions

The first micro-opposition to be analyzed is taken from an article entitled "GOP Measure Forces House Debate on War", by Jonathan Weisman, appearing in the *Washington Post* on June 15th, 2006. Relevant sections dealing with a non-binding resolution passed by the Republicans are as follows:

> Nearly four years after it authorized the use of force in Iraq, the House today will embark on its first extended debate on the war, with Republican leaders daring Democrats to vote against a non-binding resolution to hold firm on Iraq and the war on terrorism […].

The resolution, "declaring that the United Status will prevail in the Global War on Terror and the struggle to protect freedom from the terrorist adversary", was introduced with unabashed partisan overtones. The rules of debate will not allow the resolution to be amended, nor will alternative resolutions be allowed on the floor for a vote.

This is perhaps one of the clearest examples of how Republican rhetoric mischaracterizes force-dynamic oppositions, averting a true debate of the issues (figure 5).

FIGURE 5
GOP measure forces House debate on war on its own terms

Protagonist: wants to debate the war issue freely
Intrinsic tendency: towards action
Antagonist: the rules of debate (resolution may not be amended nor will alternative resolutions be allowed)
Intrinsic tendency: towards inaction (restricted rules)
Result: rules limited free debate

The Protagonist represents the desire of many politicians (mostly Democrats) wanting to debate the war issue freely. But in June, Republicans still have control of both Houses of Congress, and they pass the above-mentioned resolution so as to be sure the debate is on their own terms. The resolution and the rules of debate correspond to the Antagonist, with an intrinsic tendency towards inaction, blocking[6] free debate.

It is relevant to point out several details of the resolution and the rules of debate. The resolution closely associates the Global War on Terror, the struggle to protect freedom from the terrorist adversary and the War in Iraq. It is not possible to censure the war without voting against the War on Terror and the struggle to protect freedom from the terrorist adversary. Moreover, the rules of debate forbid both amendments to the resolution and the possibility of alternative resolutions on the floor of Congress for a vote. This linking of the War in Iraq and the Global War on Terror after the September 11th attacks is a replica of Bush's rhetoric when he requested permission to attack Iraq, claiming the relationship between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, insinuating that the dictator was either one of those responsible for 9/11 and/or a permanent terrorist threat.[7] This equation is one of the most prevalent mischaracterizations in Republican imagery on the war. As the rules of debate may not be amended, nor may alternative resolutions be presented, it is difficult at this time for Democrats to oppose the war without seeming to be soft on terrorism and on national security. Republicans traditionally are more hawkish than Democrats and have constantly accused the latter of being weak on the defense of freedom and on national security. As a result of the way the resolution was framed, in a 256 to 153 vote, the House approved the Iraq War Resolution on June 16th, rejecting deadlines for troop withdrawal (posed by Weisman and Babington in the *Washington* Post on June 17th, 2006).

[6] *Not allowing* is a prohibition or the entrance of an obstacle to action.

[7] Bush is not the only Republican falling into this fallacy. Among those Republicans frequently misrepresenting strategic oppositions is the House Majority leader John A. Boehner, quoted in the *Washington Post* by Weisman on June 17th as follows: *The American public deserves to hear how their elected leaders will respond to international terrorism and those enemies who seek to destroy our American way of life. Will we fight or retreat? […] Let me be clear: Those who say this is a war of choice are nothing more than wrong. This is a war of necessity.*

From another viewpoint, Republican imagery continually portrays the United States as the defender of freedom struggling to protect both the U.S. and Iraq from the global terrorist adversary (figure 6).

FIGURE 6
REPUBLICAN IMAGERY ON WAR AS PORTRAYED BY THE RESOLUTION

Protagonist: the global terrorist adversary
Intrinsic tendency: towards action/attack U.S. and U.S. interests
Antagonist: the United States
Intrinsic tendency: towards inaction (protect freedom/eliminate terrorism)
Result: resolution predicts the U.S. will prevail in the Global War on Terror/protect freedom from terrorist adversary

This critical strategy of positioning the United States as an Antagonist fighting against an attacking adversary is carried out both through lexical and syntactic choices. Republican imagery constantly speaks of *protecting* freedom, democracy, the free world, the United States, etc. The sense of the verb *protect* implies a scenario with three distinct entities: a *threat, danger, injury or loss* and a *protector* on the defensive who guards or defends a third entity (that might have partial identity with the protector). This imagery contrasts with the reality of the Iraq War, as it was the United States that attacked Iraq whose armed forces engaged in the conflict to protect its leader and its national territory. (There has not been presented any conclusive proof that Iraq was in collusion with Al Qaeda regarding the 9/11 attacks, nor that Iraq was actually producing nuclear weapons.) Thus, it is the choice of the lexeme **protect** in the above-mentioned resolution that positions the United States as a defender of freedom and makes it difficult for critics to enter into a true debate on the issue. Equally, the choice of the preposition **from** fulfills the same objective, also implying an attack against the U.S. *from* which they must defend themselves. In its sense of protecting from the terrorist adversary as worded in the resolution,

from reinforces a sense of defense (not aggression), contrary to the actual events.[8] Although most of the oppositions discussed are lexical, if not contextual, the power of syntax to reinforce or construct dynamic oppositions should not be underrated.

The intricate dynamic relationships at play can best be perceived if we view the interactions as a dynamic chain of intricate causal relations. The Republican challenge to debate on their own terms with all its unabashed partisan overtones, *daring the Democrats to vote against the resolution*, should be examined in all its complexity: 1) Democratic and popular will to put an end to the war; 2) procedural prohibitions; and 3) a direct provocation (see figure 7).
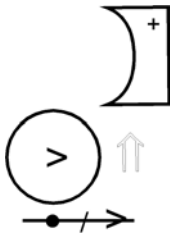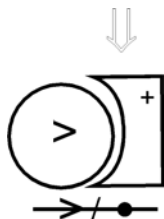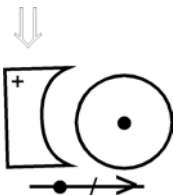
First, it is important to keep in mind the Democratic preference for **withdrawal** of U.S. troops from Iraq: a stronger Antagonist disengaging from the dynamic interaction. Republican imagery frames Democrats as pro-terrorist and anti-national security. Second, the Republican majority in the House of Representatives equates the war on terrorism and the war in Iraq through the wording of the resolution and also prohibits (**will not allow/will be allowed**) both changes in the wording of the resolution and/or a new resolution on Iraq. This constitutes the entrance of an obstacle to free debate. And lastly, the Republicans **dare** the Democrats to vote **against** the resolution; if they accept the challenge, they open themselves to criticism as pro-terrorists and anti-national security. There is a constant interplay between these distinct interactions and the lexical (in this series: *withdrawal, not allow and dare*) and syntactical (*against*) items that reinforce contextual oppositions.

The force-dynamic pattern depicted in figure 6 (also describing the Republican side of contrasting imagery portrayed in figure 2) corresponds to the way Bush's Republican supporters normally position controversy and debate. This leads to problems for their Democratic critics who feel wary of sounding unpatriotic. Hillary Clinton, one of the leading contenders in the Democratic primaries, felt quite reluctant

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[8] The force of the rhetoric and its fallacies were often commented on by journalists like Weisman, who referred to the wording of the resolution as *unabashedly partisan*. Even Republican opponents to the war took up the issue.
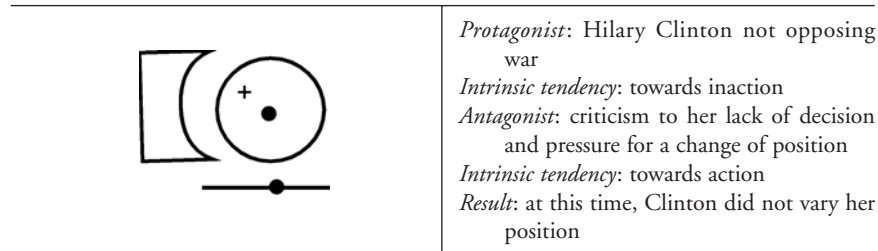
FIGURE 7

INTERRELATED FORCE-DYNAMIC PATTERNS FROM A REPUBLICAN PERSPECTIVE

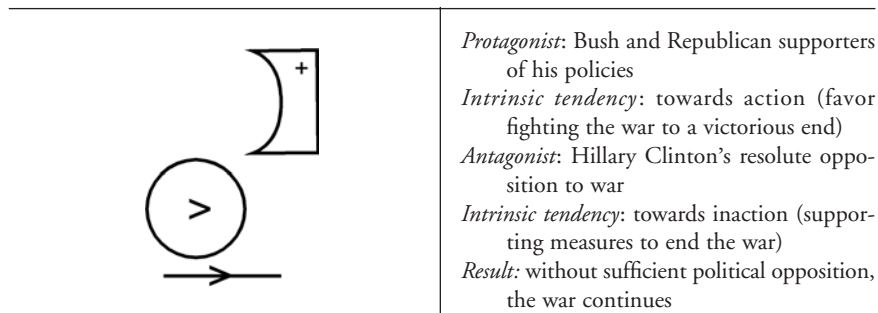| Withdrawal of a force | *Protagonist*: Iraqi rebels (the terrorist adversary) |
	Intrinsic tendency: towards action (attacking U.S. interests)
	Antagonist: U.S. armed forces
	Intrinsic tendency: halting Iraqi rebels, *i. e.* threats to democracy
	Result: Iraq rebels defeat U.S. armed forces due to withdrawal: threats to democracy in Iraq and by extension to U.S. national security
Entrance of a force	*Protagonist*: Desire to debate the war issue freely (Democrats and public opinion)
	Intrinsic tendency: towards action
	Antagonist: Rules of debate (resolution may not be amended nor will alternate resolutions be allowed)
	Intrinsic tendency: towards inaction (restricted rules)
	Result: Rules limited free debate
Entrance of an obstacle	*Protagonist*: Democrats
	Intrinsic tendency: inaction regarding equating the war in Iraq and terrorism
	Antagonist: Republican challenge (***daring*** Democrats to vote against the resolution)/ favoring the continuing of war)
	Intrinsic tendency: action
	Result: Forcing Democrats to debate and vote on their own terms (the House approved the Iraq war resolution)

to come out supporting troop withdrawal. It is pertinent to analyze the force dynamics corresponding to reactions to her reluctance as stated in the *Post* by Weisman on June 15th, 2006 (see figure 8).

Figure 8

Clinton booed by liberals for her failure to resolutely oppose war

	Protagonist: Hilary Clinton not opposing war *Intrinsic tendency*: towards inaction *Antagonist*: criticism to her lack of decision and pressure for a change of position *Intrinsic tendency*: towards action *Result*: at this time, Clinton did not vary her position

In this case Clinton is the Protagonist, with an intrinsic tendency towards *inaction* for not opposing the war. The Antagonist (liberal activists) possesses an intrinsic tendency towards *action*. The activists themselves openly demand immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and expect their candidates to adamantly oppose the war. Although the Antagonist exerts a force, Clinton's reluctance is relatively stronger, and in June 2006 she refuses to take a strong stance.[9] Apparently she seems to be trapped within the Republican rhetoric depicted in figure 6. In turn, her lack of public opposition to the war can be diagramed as figure 8bis.

Figure 8bis

Clinton booed by liberals for her failure to resolutely oppose war

	Protagonist: Bush and Republican supporters of his policies *Intrinsic tendency*: towards action (favor fighting the war to a victorious end) *Antagonist*: Hillary Clinton's resolute opposition to war *Intrinsic tendency*: towards inaction (supporting measures to end the war) *Result:* without sufficient political opposition, the war continues

[9] It is not until May 2007 that Clinton begins to toughen her anti-war efforts proposing Congress repeal the authority it gave President Bush in 2002 to invade Iraq. However, even at this time her aids declared: Mrs. Clinton was not seeking a total withdrawal of troops from Iraq, or a quick pullout that could put troops at risk (Hulse, *NYTimes*, May 3th, 2007). She does, however, vote against the War Funds Bill on May 24th, 2007, after Bush vetoed the bill tying funding for the Iraq war to a timetable for exit on May 1st.

As a potential Democratic contender in the presidential race, Clinton has a public voice that could be used to oppose the continuation of the unpopular Iraq War. However, from the liberal activists' point of view, this voice is silent as represented by the disengagement of the Antagonist in figure 8bis. It is the continued silence of the critics of Bush's policies, as well as their reluctance to be branded as *soft* and *unpatriotic* on national security and anti-terrorism, that is permitting this unpopular war to continue. In effect, Clinton does come out in May 2007 and ask Congress to repeal the authority it gave President Bush in 2002 to invade Iraq (Hulse and Healy, May 4th, 2007). However, even though she states: *it is time to reverse the failed policies of President Bush and to end his war as soon as possible*, she is still not openly supporting troop withdrawal. As her aids later declared: *Mrs. Clinton was not seeking a total withdrawal of troops from Iraq, or a quick pullout that could put troops at risk*.

CONCLUSIONS

Force-dynamic interactions exist at multiple levels, as contextual oppositions are constructed by the speakers' choices of lexical and syntactic items. These cognitive frames constrain political discourse, influence the actions of those contending for power and mediate the construction of meaning in American politics.

1) The focal contrast corresponds to the entrance of a force: Bush's aggressive sales pitch on the war in Iraq as the number-one campaign issue: *Attack—don't defend*. He constantly portrays the Democrats, divided among themselves, as a party without a coherent national security policy and depicts a stance of pro-withdrawal of troops as equivalent to a defeatist policy of retreat.

2) From the beginning Bush mischaracterizes the conflict, associating Iraq as a country with the September 11th terrorist attack and continuing to equate the War in Iraq with the Global War on Terrorism; thus criticizing Democrats who are pro-withdrawal, of being weak on national security matters and the fight against terrorism.

3) This partisan portrayal of the conflict is most prominent in the wording of the resolution governing the first extended congressional discussion in June, 2006. It is both the cognitive framing of 1) and 2) and the entrance of obstacles (*i. e*. not allowing the resolution to be amended, nor permitting alternate resolutions on the floor of the House for a vote) that constrains free debate.

4) Thus the electoral contest is situated within a contextual network of macro-oppositions, including Republicans *versus* Democrats; pro-war (anti-terrorism) against anti-war (neutral on terrorism); strong national security as opposed to a weak stance on this matter; U.S. troops *versus* Iraq rebels; defense of democracy against threats to democracy.

5) Bush's choice of lexical items like *protect* and syntactic structures like *from* portrays the United States as the victim defending its national security against *the terrorist adversary*, even though in fact the United States was the aggressor. This portrayal of the U.S. as the defender structures the debate on the war in a way that makes it difficult for Bush's opponents to criticize his policies without appearing to be antipatriotic. The manner in which the force opposition is represented makes a real debate of the war issue most difficult. Despite an overwhelming opposition to the war in the American electorate, there seems to be no end in sight.

6) The focal conflict and the network of macro-conflicts run parallel to a great number of micro conflicts—those related to Hillary Clinton and the internal divisions that prevailed within the Democratic Party.

7) The focal conflict immersed in this dense network of macro/ micro conflicts seems to color most aspects of current American national politics, *e. g*. the positioning of candidates for the 2008 presidential elections.

8) An appreciation of the system of Talmy' force-dynamic patterns appears to facilitate a clearer apprehension of the forces in opposition. The kind of conceptual content force-dynamic patterns contributing to meaning is similar to the kind of structural meaning provided by syntax. The conceptual content underlying force-dynamic patterns in use is an important part of the message communicated and, at least in this case, seems to condition speech events.

Epilogue

Just after his inauguration day, President Obama met with his national security team to plan for an end to the war in Iraq, although he held off from ordering an immediate troop withdrawal (reported by Baker and Shanker in the *NY Times* on January 22nd, 2009). Although the *Times* editorial published on May 4th, 2009, refers to this conflict as President Bush's unnecessary war in Iraq, the headlines (*Still unfinished business*) refer to recent complications regarding U.S. deadlines for troop withdrawal, due to the surge in violence and bombings in Iraq.

The editorial places the blame on the Shiite-led government and its failure to implement the political changes necessary for holding the country together. Depending on the way relationships among sectarian factions, old rivalries and hatreds play out, the force-dynamic patterns discussed in this article may again constrain public debate on the issues.

During her April visit, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton assured the Iraqi people that the Obama administration was determined to help Iraq to achieve "stability, sovereignty, and self-reliance," as the United States prepares to pull out the last of its troop by the end of 2011. It is important to remember, however, that she has been known to give in to pressure if the advancement of her political career seems to be threatened.
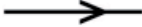
More importantly, the kind of force-dynamic patterns constraining free debate and influencing politics have the potential to play a fundamental role in various conflicts, such as those regarding Pakistan and Afghanistan, for example, and even possible cyber conflicts like those the Pentagon is preparing for by stepping up their plans for digital defense. Obama has wavered in multiple occasions regarding his proposal for judging detainees from the Guantanamo prison. On May 16th, 2009, the *New York Times* quoted Obama as defending military commissions for prosecuting some detainees. Critics stated *this was a sharp departure from the direction President Obama had suggested during the campaign, when he characterized the Commissions as an unnecessary compromise of American values* (reported by William Glaberson in the *NY Times*, May 16th, 2009). The article proceeds to quote Obama:

This is the best way to protect our country, while upholding our deeply held values. Whatever the best solution and Obama's final preference turn out to be, this rhetoric is dangerously similar to Bush's defense of the war on terror which Obama so harshly criticized during his campaign. Regardless of the rights nations have to defend themselves against any attack, it is important to be aware of the way fallacious cognitive framing posits false or ambiguous dynamic confrontations. These cognitive objects (as Van Dijk labels this kind of mental representation) have a potential for exerting power on the political scene.

Appendix
Meaning of force dynamic symbols

Force entities		Relative strength	
◯	Protagonist	◯ +	Stronger protagonist
⊐	Antagonist	⊐ +	Stronger antagonist
Intrinsic force tendency		**Result of the interaction**	
> Towards action / movement		⟶	action / movement
● Towards inaction / rest		•—	inaction / rest

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