IN SEARCH OF “PROVIDENCE”:
The Notion of American Exceptionalism in the Rhetoric of
the United States Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter

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## Abstract

The thesis studies the rhetoric of two United States presidents, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, through the historically developed idea of American exceptionalism which states that the United States is qualitatively different from other countries. The main objective of the thesis is to show how both presidents, Ford and Carter, used the language of American exceptionalism in their rhetoric in order to unite the American public behind the policies of the presidents after the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal that eroded the American public’s trust in the integrity of the government.

As primary material, the thesis studies the public speeches of the two presidents from the day of Gerald Ford’s inauguration on August 9, 1974 to Jimmy Carter’s last day in office in January, 1981. By qualitatively analyzing the speeches and studying them within the theoretical framework of constructivism and the rhetorical “premises” between the presidents and the public, it is shown that invoking American exceptionalism rhetorically was a useful tool for both presidents when they encountered political problems with regards to economy or foreign policy crises.

American exceptionalism is studied in this thesis with the help of the United States foreign policy traditions described by Walter Russell Mead (Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, Hamiltonian, Wilsonian), along with the more conventional dualistic description of realism and idealism. Analyzing the speeches and foreign policy goals of Ford and Carter, it is possible to place Ford under the group of Hamiltonian realists, whereas Carter will fall securely under the grouping of Wilsonian idealists.

Both presidents used the language of American exceptionalism to attain their political goals even though they represented different political parties, and even though Carter was vehemently trying to set himself apart from the previous Nixon/Ford administrations. The results of this thesis suggest that when it comes to using the notion of American exceptionalism in rhetoric, the party affiliations of the presidents do not matter to a considerable extent. They also suggest that since the idea of American exceptionalism has its roots in the historical tradition of the formation of the United States, it is also a tempting tool for presidents to use to rally the public around the policies of the presidents.

## Keywords
- Political rhetoric
- American exceptionalism
- presidents
- United States
- constructivism

## Where deposited

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1. In search of “Providence”

1.1. Road to exceptional rhetoric

“God has a special providence for fools, drunks, and the United States of America.”

No matter whether the origin of this quote can be traced back to the 19th century Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck (as it allegedly is) or not, it definitely makes one reflect the current role of the United States of America in the world, and how it actually got its unprecedented and privileged status as a political, economic and military superpower.

However, the aim of this study is not to trace the origin of the dominant role of the United States in the world politics, or for that matter even to trace the origin of the idea of “American exceptionalism”. Rather, I will try to find out how this vague idea of United States dominance or exceptionalism has framed the policies and the rhetoric of two United States presidents in the 1970s (Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter).

My main focus will be on the rhetorical side, although the public papers and the speeches of the presidents also delineate policy goals of the presidents reasonably well. Rhetorical analysis makes this kind of constructivist approach possible since one cannot any more deem rhetoric as “merely rhetoric”. The aim of this approach is not that much to define how presidents Ford and Carter succeeded in fulfilling their policy formulations, but rather, to find out what these formulations were, and how they were linked to the notion of the United States being “exceptional”.

1970s was a decade of high turbulence in American politics. The United States was trapped in the Vietnam War debacle well to the beginning of the decade, with finally helicopters evacuating the United States embassy personnel amidst the fall of Saigon. After the

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2 The United States of America is referred to in this study by “The United States” and “America”.
Watergate scandal, which forced Richard Nixon to resign from the presidency, Gerald Ford's administration inherited huge economic challenges relating to the rampant inflation and the oil price increases of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The potential dividing force of the civil rights movement was not that far from the historical memory either. After Watergate, the trust in governing officials was also low.

Obviously, 1970s was a time of breakthrough in the development of the most powerful nation in the world at the time, the United States. And obviously, these kind of breakthroughs also make for good topics for academic research. Obviously, the Vietnam fiasco and the dependence on foreign oil were also a serious blow to the dominant superpower. So, how did presidents Ford and Carter manage to hold up the notion of American credibility and all-pervasiveness in world politics in their rhetoric after the quagmire in Vietnam?

The fact that makes this breakthrough period even more interesting is the difference of party affiliations that the two presidents under study represented. How did the Republican Ford and the Democratic Carter express their views on American exceptionalism in their rhetoric if they did, and how did this manifest itself? The hypothesis of this study is that the rhetoric of Ford and Carter may have differed from each other in their content, even radically, but nonetheless represented, by their “core”, the underlying tradition of American exceptionalism, and the notion that the United States was morally or spiritually a nation that other nations should have been modeled upon.

When it comes to the study of rhetoric, the Cold War atmosphere seems to be an ideal object of analysis since it is so full of semantics, symbols, metaphors and social constructions. Although “hot” warfare was at play as well, namely in covert operations or proxy wars between the two blocs, the Cold War era was, for the most part, a matter of symbolic action. The weapons of war were not that much guns, bombs, missiles, and the like, but words and images.³

Promoting the idea of American exceptionalism seems to be a legitimate way for presidents in trying to unite their nation in a time of turmoil. The basis for a strong national unity can be traced from the history. The signs of presidents' “exceptionalist” thinking can be delineated from their use of singular words or concepts, i.e. references to the 17th century Puritan settlers of America, or to the at the time 200 years old United States constitution. However, this study is not based on a quantitative content analysis of the presidents' rhetoric. The goal is not to count the words of the presidents and make oversimplified conclusions based on that. The aim of this study is to set the presidents' rhetoric in its historical context and to plunge beyond the rhetoric into the world of larger, more symbolic, and more socially constructed meanings.

The data of this study are the public papers of the presidents, namely the Inauguration Addresses and the annual State of the Union Addresses, but also, for example, the more selective addresses of the presidents on some specific topics in a time of crisis or other preoccupations, which in Ford's time included for example addresses on inflation and national energy policy, and in Carter's time the American embassy workers held hostage in Iran, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The focus while analyzing the data is on the “big picture” provided by the State of the Union addresses, although the aim is also to take account of all the public papers where the elements of public speaking and rhetorical devices are present.

1.2. Previous research

There seems to be a reasonably small amount of research focusing on Gerald Ford's rhetoric from the time he was president, whereas much more has been written about Jimmy Carter's time in office, some studies even analyzing his rhetoric in the context of American values or the mythical American Dream.⁴

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Ford was never elected to the highest office, but as a vice-president, inherited the presidency after the resignation of his predecessor, Richard Nixon. It is possible that Ford's interim presidency has made some scholars to treat his two-and-a-half-year presidency as some sort of a caretaker government, especially when it comes to rhetoric. Some textbooks covering United States foreign policy do not even grant Ford an own chapter, and instead put him under the chapter of Nixon's term in office.5

There have been, however, some takes on Ford's oratorical endeavors as well, although they are not specific studies on Ford or his rhetoric, but some all-encompassing textbooks on the United States presidents as orators. Craig Allen Smith maintains the view that Ford's focus on economic matters in the aftermath of the Vietnam nightmare was a way of increasing national unity by redirecting the American people's focus on non-Vietnam-related issues. According to Smith, Ford's early pardon of Nixon also supports this view. By setting the record straight early on case Nixon, so that the country avoided highly publicized and humiliating trial procedures, Ford was able to stop the wounds of Vietnam from dividing the country even more. Smith also states that since Ford's nearly entire staff familiar with the policy apparatus were made up of Nixon holdovers, the pardon decision was politically necessary for Ford as well.6

Bernard L. Brock has analyzed Ford's inaugural address in 1974 and agrees with the view that Ford affirmed a united nation and, for that matter, peace. Brock does not, however, specifically note any traces of American exceptionalism in Ford's speech. He focuses in his article more on Ford's political standing after pardoning Nixon. Brock states that Ford had troubles separating himself at least rhetorically from Nixon after the pardon.7

Texas.

Trevor McCrisken states that Ford's time as president was “a time for healing”. This healing included restoring the faith of the American people in the moral legitimacy of its leadership. According to McCrisken, Ford was relatively successful in this task. As an example, McCrisken uses Ford's “exceptionalist” rhetoric when it came to the South Vietnamese refugees seeking asylum from the United States.  

There seems to be more studies on Jimmy Carter. After all, he was an elected president who served a full term. He was also the first Democrat in the White House in eight years after Republicans had controlled the presidency since 1969. Carter also had a new vision of America's role in world affairs, and that was promoting human rights globally.

According to Richard Melanson, “the fundamental task for his (Carter's) administration was the restoration of the faith of the American people in themselves, their government, and their foreign activities.” The aim of restoring this faith was to achieve national unity once again, and this was to be achieved by Carter's vision of human rights. In Melanson's words: “Carter saw foreign policy largely as the external manifestation of American life.” Melanson states that overall however, Carter's rhetoric on foreign policy was sloppy. At least during the first two years it exuded optimism about the future, but by 1980, after the Iran hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it had turned negative.

Mary E. Stuckey agrees with the view that the purpose of Carter was to unify the nation. Human rights was the natural extension of history, ideology and political practice that unified Americans. The renaissance promised by human rights had to begin at home.

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9 Melanson, 90.
Betty Glad has, for her part, traced some exceptionalism in Carter's foreign policy. She states that Carter “pursued a foreign policy that was in the old “city on the hill”\textsuperscript{13} tradition, sharing some of its virtues as well as flaws.”\textsuperscript{14} According to Glad, there can be detected exceptionalism in Carter's rhetoric, in the vein of Woodrow Wilson.\textsuperscript{15}

Also Davis and Lynn-Jones maintain the view that Carter's rhetoric invoked American exceptionalism, especially in his Inaugural Address, but in the summer of 1979, when the Iranian revolution had contributed to an impression of failure for Carter's vision of the United States-led moralistic world order, he undermined his faith in the American people by speaking of a deep malaise among them.\textsuperscript{16} However, according to McCrisken, Carter’s rhetoric stayed “exceptional” since that seemed to be the only way to revive the American belief in exceptionalism.\textsuperscript{17}

In a similar fashion, John Kane has argued that Carter did not reject the exceptionalist tradition, but intended rather to save it by his own means. Carter's human rights initiative was a direct response to the crisis of American values after the Vietnam war, Watergate and the revelations concerning the dubious activities of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The attraction of human rights was that they were not precisely American, but could be turned into universal values, despite having much in common with traditional American values of freedom and liberty. Kane states that Carter's resort to human rights, which bore international currency, was a way of avoiding imperialistic connotations.\textsuperscript{18}

In the vein of Kane, Marilyn J. Young is of the view that Carter tried to steer away from the

\textsuperscript{13} “City upon a Hill” was the phrase by which an early Puritan settler John Winthrop described the role of the new colony in the world in his sermon on the Arbella ship in 1630. Winthrop, John (1630): A Model of Christian Charity, edited as a web document by The Winthrop Society. http://winthrop society.com/doc_charity.php (accessed 17.4.2016).


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 280.


\textsuperscript{17} McCrisken, 75.

\textsuperscript{18} Kane, 775–777.
traditional notions of American exceptionalism by emphasizing human rights in his rhetoric. Young in a way puts Carter's foreign policy rhetoric in a Cold War continuum by stating that Carter was trying to disassociate himself from the rhetorical burdens of the Cold War, and so attempted to leverage détente.¹⁹

There are also some quantitative, computer-based content analyses on presidential rhetoric, although they will probably not be of any significant use to my study. Elvin Lim, while not strictly specifying on Ford's or Carter's rhetoric, has come to the conclusion that “presidential rhetoric has become more anti-intellectual, more abstract, more assertive, more democratic, and more conversational.”²⁰

In a similar study, by focusing on certain keywords in presidential speeches and then analyzing them quantitatively, Rico Neumann and Kevin Coe have concluded that Jimmy Carter did not use the word “America” that often as his predecessors or successors. This does not imply, however, that Carter's rhetoric was not exceptional. As Neumann and Coe themselves make clear, their quantitative approach is certainly limited in captivating rhetorical nuances needed to construct presidential rhetoric in historical context.²¹

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Social constructivism

Rhetorical analysis is based on the idea that social reality is constructed linguistically.²² As highlighted by Nicholas Onuf, human beings make the world as it is by talking, since they

¹⁹ Young, 170.
are “social beings”. Saying is doing. This naturally links the words of the presidents to what they have done.

Social constructivism could be of methodological use in international relations because of the different concepts it provides. What these concepts have in common is that they stress the supervenience of culture over nature in the age-old philosophical dichotomy between idealism and materialism.

From these concepts in the international relations environment one can discern “norms” which are, according to Jepperson et al., collective expectations about the behavior of particular actors in a particular environment. These norms function in the environment of “identities”, which refer to the images of individuality and distinctiveness projected by an actor and formed over time through relations with significant “others”. Thus the concept of “identity”, by convention, references mutually constructed and modifying images of self and other.

The ontology of social constructivism is best conceived as a triangle encompassing three concepts: intersubjectivity, context, and power. At the heart of the concept of intersubjectivity is the idea of a relation between individual or group agency, and the surrounding structure. Individuals and groups are not only shaped by the surrounding world, but can also change it through their agency. The constructivist view does not, however, grant ontological priority to either agency or structure, but rather view both as “mutually constituted”.

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As Fierke and Jørgensen note, identities and interests are contingent and changeable.\textsuperscript{27} Thus they are dependent on the context as well. In studying remarks and addresses made by the presidents from the perspective of American exceptionalism, one has to treat the audience of the speeches, the foreign policy traditions and the situation in world politics as forming the context. From a constructivist perspective, it could be helpful to conceive the rhetorical presidents as the “agents”, and the audience and the policy environment as “structure”, although this is not necessary since, in a constructivist sense, every actor could be defined as part of the “structure”.

The role of rhetoric in this all-approaching constructivist structure is the linguistic one, the one that guides the structure by molding different meanings, and thus directing the social order. Kratochwil writes about everyday language and “language games” as providing the basic and leading elements of the conceptual structure, and somewhere along these “language games” is also the presidential rhetoric situated.\textsuperscript{28}

Although the presidential rhetoric could be seen as having a guiding or dominant role in determining the conceptual structure, its success is definitely not an easy task to achieve. In a social structure of conflicting meanings, the presidents are trying to create and propagate their own meanings and agenda. In a sense, they are trying to reduce the existing conflicts between them and their audience to make their proposals for policies look more righteous. The purpose of rhetoric is to find common premises for the speaker and the audience alike.

The idea of American exceptionalism is one of these premises that has the potential of bridging the possible conceptual gaps between the presidents and the audience. It appeals to the American audience since Americans know their national identity, even if they did not agree with the president or were not that aroused by nationalist rhetoric. The first step of convincing rhetoric is to find a common premise or a number of premises, so that the


audience is aware of what is being talked about.

Adler states that even the most enduring institutions in society are based on collective and socially constructed understandings. These understandings were at first conceived by human consciousness, then diffused and consolidated until they were taken for granted. Collective understandings are thus something that presidents might wish and expect their speeches to achieve.

Finally, along with intersubjectivity and context, there is the element of power in the constructivist structure. According to Wendt, power and interest have the effects they do in the constructivist environment because of the virtue of ideas that make them up. From a constructive perspective, power is thus first and foremost defining power. It is power to fill the constructivist structure with ideas and set the agenda. Naturally, the president of the United States has, and had in the 1970s, a fair amount of power in world politics, and was thus able to use his position to mold the constructivist structure to his liking.

2.2. American exceptionalism

American exceptionalism is an idea or a concept that the United States is qualitatively different from other states. According to this concept, the country was envisaged by the Founding Fathers as a nation with a mission to propagate its special form of political morality. This morality included a set of propositions held to be “self-evident”, that is life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Humanity was visualized by these “American” rights of man. These “American values” were cast in universal language, which concerned the whole humanity, not just Americans. The concept of “American exceptionalism” has been

30 Wendt, 135.
sometimes divided into “exemplar” and “missionary” strands, but since the purpose of this study is to compare rhetoric, not political goals, the two strands are just treated as “American exceptionalism”.

The idea of exceptionalism first sprang from the “foreign traveler” literature. These are accounts written by visitors dealing with the way in which the United States works as compared with their home country or area. Perhaps the best known of these, and still widely influential, is Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. The French aristocrat traveled through the United States in the 1830s to find out why the efforts at establishing democracy in his native country after the French Revolution had failed, while the American Revolution had produced a stable democratic republic. Eventually, Tocqueville's comparison turned out to be broader, comparing the United States to the whole of Europe, and in the process he was the first to explicitly refer to America as “exceptional”.

The idea of American uniqueness and moral superiority had been, however, hatched long before de Tocqueville had materialized the “exceptionalism” into his writings. It is also referred to in the earliest writings of the Puritan colonists. The Great Migration of Puritans in 1630 consisted of pilgrims leaving the old continent with a positive mission, of being a chosen people blessed by God. Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor John Winthrop described the Puritan mission to be “a City upon a Hill”, a moral beacon for the world upon whom the eyes of all people were cast. The Puritan vision combined a sense of destiny with a sense of moral obligation to others. And even when the Puritan influence

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33 “Exemplar” exceptionalism provides a model path for other nations to follow, whereas “missionary” exceptionalism tries actively to convert other nations to follow the example of the “exceptional” nation. Restad, Hilde Eliassen (2015): American Exceptionalism: An Idea that Made a Nation and Remade the World. Routledge, New York, 35.
34 Lipset, 17.
on American culture had subsided in the 18th century, its legacy provided the United States a secular moral exemplar, a “civil religion”, which is at the root of American exceptionalism even today.\footnote{McEvo-y-Ley, 24; Merelman, 7; Gebhardt, Jürgen (1993): Americanism: Revolutionary Order and Societal Self-interpretation in the American Republic. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.}

The Puritan idea of exceptionalism became more layered with the help of the Enlightenment ideas of the late 18th century. Previously the idea of exceptionalism was, in the vein of Winthrop, justified by God, but now, the Founding Fathers could veto on reason as well. The independent United States of America for which they fought for, was to be based on reason, freedom, virtue, and equality before the law, all things that they found lacking in the old Britain of aristocracy, feudalism and intolerance.\footnote{McEvo-y-Ley, 24–25.} In the heart of “Americanism”, was the idea that in the new continent, one could make one's self, instead of just continuing the past.\footnote{Bell, Daniel (1975): The End of American Exceptionalism. National Affairs, 41, 206. \url{http://www.nationalaffairs.com/doclib/20080527_197504111theendofamericanexceptionalismdanielbell.pdf} (accessed 18.4.2016).}

It is to be noted, however, that the sermon that Winthrop gave was more of an empowered cry for liberation for the persecuted people rather than an overture in establishing a nation state.\footnote{Söderlind, Sylvia (2011): Introduction: The Shining of America. In Söderlind, Sylvia Carson – Taylor, James (ed.): American Exceptionalisms: From Winthrop to Winfrey. State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 4.} The nationalist character of exceptionalism established itself in the 19th century in the form of Monroe Doctrine\footnote{The Monroe Doctrine was a policy introduced by the fifth president of the United States, James Monroe, in 1823. It stated that the Western hemisphere was closed to any further European colonization and that the United States would protect the American continent as a space destined for democracy. Over the next century, these ideas provided the framework through which Americans understood their role in the world militarily and diplomatically. Murphy, Gretchen (2005): Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire. Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina.} and “Manifest Destiny”.\footnote{“Manifest Destiny” is the belief by which it is the role of the United States, because of its virtuous people and institutions, to redeem and remake the world in the image of America under God's guidance. Miller, Robert J. (2006): Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, and Manifest Destiny. Greenwood, Westport, Connecticut, 120.} According to McEvoy-Levy, the
perception of European “threat” at the time further spurred separation from Europe and legitimized expansion in the Far East. By this time, the idea of exceptionalism had fueled the United States participation in the imperial geopolitics of the late 19th century. The idea of “Manifest Destiny” echoes in the “frontier thesis” of an early 20th century historian Frederick Jackson Turner who argued that the settlement of the vast hinterlands of the American west formed a distinctive American character and democracy.

After the Second World War, the notion of iron curtain dividing the world into two ideological blocs fortified the growing sense of American exceptionalism. This notion was naturally heightened by the fact that the world was in ruins after the destructive war, except the United States of course, with its powerful economy and military.

In a sense, the notion of American exceptionalism has formed a coherent narrative from Winthrop’s time to the Pax Americana, or even to the 21st century and its war on terrorism. The notion of American exceptionalism permeates every period of the history of the United States, and seems to be a powerful, if even the most powerful, agent concerning the identity of the United States and its political and social culture.

An interesting point in the development of the notion of exceptionalism are the value judgments that the term has collected over the centuries. When he was writing about America in the early 19th century, Alexis de Tocqueville simply seemed to understand the exceptionalism as denoting a difference, not that the United States were anyhow better or superior. It was only later that the ethos of exceptionalism provided justifications for the

47 Young, 160–161.
48 Söderlind, 4.
United States to differentiate from established norms, rules and laws.\textsuperscript{50}

Scholars have disagreed whether American exceptionalism amounts to an ideology as such.\textsuperscript{51} It does not have a coherence of an ideology in a traditional sense. It has neither been codified as a means towards some definable political end. But it is certainly “ideological” since it underwrites so much of the United States history and foreign policy. Since the idea of American exceptionalism is so pervasive, Siobhán McEvoy-Levy has described it as a “para-ideological umbrella” covering all the related concepts and phrases as “manifest destiny”, “city on a hill”, “American dream” and “new world order”.\textsuperscript{52}

Academic work has been devoted to the propagation of the idea of exceptionalism, even if it was not its direct purpose. These studies, known as the work of the “consensus historians”, are, for the most part, written during the 1950s, and they certainly echo the spirit of that great unipolar moment that the United Stated had right after the World War II.\textsuperscript{53} In the absence of a discernible ideology, the leading consensus historian Richard Hofstadter put it aptly: “it has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies, but to be one.”\textsuperscript{54}

Whether American exceptionalism is an ideology or not, it definitely is a useful tool for Americans to make sense of the complex world they live in. Individuals and societies need to reduce that world to finite terms, and in the process, a sense of identity and purpose is needed.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, the notion of American exceptionalism is heavily based on socialization and constructivism. The United States is, in the words of Benedict Anderson, an “imagined

\textsuperscript{50} Söderlind, 3; Lipset, 18.
\textsuperscript{51} McCrisken, 6.
\textsuperscript{52} McEvoy-Levy, 23.
\textsuperscript{54} Quoted in Lipset, 18.
community”, which has built the idea of a shared national community by invoking national symbols. These symbols have not always been around of course, and had to be “invented” in the centuries following the time of the Puritans.

Even if the notion of American exceptionalism explains the American history and foreign policy to a reasonable degree, there has been critics. Ian Tyrrell has emphasized the more favorable conditions for the idea of American liberty to prosper in the first place. According to this view, being “exceptional” was possible, or at least, much easier since the United States avoided the class conflicts, revolutionary upheaval, and authoritarian governments prevalent in Europe. There is also a more world history oriented school of thought on American exceptionalism which emphasizes European influences on American history and political philosophy, and America's own global entanglements during the last five centuries and the influences they bore upon.

Even if Americans have taken the notion of exceptionalism to extent in a certain sense, as Hodgson suggests, one cannot simply treat it as a nonexistent myth. The idea of exceptionalism has guided the actions of America's leaders for centuries, and is therefore an interesting and valid theme of study. Of course, as Hunt reminds us, ideology does not explain everything. Politics and history are also products of economic and social structures, always part of something larger than one particular nation's identity and ideology. In a global context and the world politics of human reasoning, even randomly occurring coincidences have their own place in the making of history. Perhaps this speaks for American exceptionalism being more of a construction from everything around it rather than an ideology per se.

58 Tyrrell, 1031.
60 Hunt, 239.
After the Vietnam War and Watergate, American exceptionalism seemed to be in a crisis, and the belief in it severely shaken. The United States seemed to have become a nation like all other nations.\(^{61}\) According to a Vietnam War historian George C. Herring, one of the chief casualties of the war was that “pervasive optimism” that was part of the American character.\(^{62}\) Rhetorically, however, American exceptionalism was still a useful tool for the presidents Ford and Carter to pick up the pieces of the “American century”.

### 3. Analysis of rhetoric

#### 3.1. How to define “rhetoric”?

Rhetoric has been a focus of study at least since the age of Plato and Aristotle. In this context, it was for the most part conceived as oratorical skills or eloquence, focus being more on persuasive logic rather than the interplay between the speaker and the crowd.\(^ {63}\) However, one can trace the starting point in the development of rhetoric to Cicero's writings. Cicero, the Roman politician of antiquity, was one of the first to realize rhetoric as a process of argument which did not cover just the act of oration. This process makes it possible to unravel viewpoints that seem by default natural and unremarkable, and is thus closer to the symbolic interplay by which rhetoric is today conceived.\(^ {64}\)

However, in the 20th century, the evolution of rhetorical studies has led to the concept of “new rhetoric” in contrast to the “old” one conceived in classical sense. This new rhetoric is an interdisciplinary field of study, and heavily based on the works of Kenneth Burke (\textit{A Rhetoric of Motives}, 1950) and Chaïm Perelman (\textit{Traité de l'argumentation – la nouvelle}

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However, the classical definition of rhetoric is still as valid, it has just been extended by the notion of more interplay, by studying words by which an actor tries to induce action in others or form opinions. The new rhetoric can be conceived even wider: as a type of instrumental discourse which responds to, reinforces, or alters the understandings of an audience or a social community. Even Aristotle had origins of “new rhetoric” in his thinking, although for him it was more of “dialectic”, a theory concerning the logic of argumentation.

According to Perelman, “new rhetoric” is somewhat a combination of Aristotle's rhetoric and dialectic: it is concerned with discourse addressed to any sort of audience, even examining arguments addressed to oneself in private deliberation. The new rhetoric is persuasion in the sense that it accommodates actively to different audiences. Central to Perelman's thinking are the so-called “premises”, which are, strictly speaking, mutually negotiated agreements between the speaker and the audience. This agreement comes from an “argumentation” between the two. Since the speaker must adapt his or her speech to a given and particular audience, the premises the speaker provides must be accepted by the audience through the process of argumentation in order for the speech to succeed in the first place. Premises thus prescribe the way the speech is structured.

In this study, the most apparent premise is naturally the notion of American exceptionalism. The premise has value since the notion of exceptionalism seems to be easily accepted by the (mainly American) audience in the era of the nation state and in the context of the historical construction of the United States being “a moral beacon” referred to in the previous chapter. But as Perelman states, rhetoric can comprise of numerous premises. Other premises in addition to exceptionalism could thus be for example the

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66 Burke, 40–42.
69 Perelman, 4–5, 21–32.
70 Ibid, 21–32.
mutually conceived status of the United States president as the undisputed leader of the country and his or her role in “agenda setting”.

### 3.2. Tools of analysis

In this study, the concept of rhetoric is defined in a similar vein that Perelman does. President Ford's and president Carter's remarks and addresses are viewed in a perspective of persuasion, and in the light of how the presidents used the premise of “American exceptionalism”. Other factors, which are to be taken into account, are the structures that are framing the main premise and putting it into an historical context (that is, the situation of world politics and the ideological currents in the United States foreign policy thinking).

These two could also be conceived as premises since they feature in the speeches of the presidents as well, whether referencing to historical deeds that previous presidents have done, or describing the hostile world of Cold War threatening America's security. The aim in this study is, however, to keep the focus on the notion of exceptionalism, keeping the other more minor premises in the background helping to paint a more accurate qualitative analysis.

The focus of this study is based heavily on the idea of social constructivism. So, the aim is not to study rhetoric in its traditional and technical sense, studying president Ford's and president Carter's stylistic endeavors. But since the presidents are political figures, and their addresses certainly have persuasive political overtones, the style and structure of the speeches should not be completely ignored.

In the heart of constructivism is language, and linguistic constructs are always rhetorical. The purpose of rhetorical analysis is to find out how linguistic choices and practices construct reality and enforce certain thought patterns.\(^1\) Thinking in terms of constructivism, the preconceived ideas and expectations of the hearing audience thus direct

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the ways Ford and Carter conduct their addresses.

The notion of audience is in an important role in the Perelmanian concept of rhetoric. He maintains that the audience, or the “gathering”, is highly changeable, ranging from private reflections to addressing the whole of humanity. Perelman calls the latter the “universal audience”, and this seems to be the closest to the audience of president Ford's and president Carter's speeches as well since the words of the president of the United States are of interest throughout the world.72 David Zarefsky, a communication scholar, suggests, however, that the main audience of the presidents are other politicians and the media, the latter serving as a filter for dispersing the utterances of the president to a larger public73

In this study, the differentiation between the universal audience and a specific audience as two different concepts is not really of specific concern, except in acknowledging that presidents Ford and Carter most definitely adapted their speeches to fit different audiences. From the perspective of presidents building “national unity”, however, it is more interesting to treat their rhetoric more of as an interplay between them and the “American people”.

It is to be noted as well that the speeches of Ford and Carter are not tied to a certain place or time. Even Perelman's “universal audience” is not necessarily made up of those the speaker expressly addresses.74 The case of president Nixon's resignation speech on August 8, 1974 following the Watergate proceedings provides an illuminating example of an audience not present in time. The audience gathered to hear Nixon's speech awaited a public apology from him for the misdeeds he had done for his country, but instead they heard Nixon defending his actions for the benefit of the future generations of Americans who were not present at the time of the speech, but whom it nonetheless concerned.75

72 Perelman, 14.
74 Ibid.
75 Gill – Whedbee, 163.
While the focus of this study is on the persuasive perspective on rhetoric in the vein of Perelman, it is useful, however, to take into account Kenneth Burke's concept of “identification”. In contrast to Perelman, whose concept of rhetoric is very oriented on argumentation, Burke focuses more on the symbolic interaction between the speaker and the audience. “Identification” is conceived as the process of the speaker identifying the interests of the audience with his own. In other words, the premises that they both form, are mutually accepted.\(^{76}\)

Burke sees rhetoric as a dualistic concept of identification and its counterpart, division. Identification compensates division, which Burke sees as a more natural position among human beings. Rhetorical identification is thus needed to break this division, to attain a national unity, for example. In Burke's analysis, the argumentative techniques are not as apparent as in Perelman's analysis. So the speaker can easily commit to unexpected blunders since the process of identification makes subtle and hidden meanings possible.\(^{77}\)

Burke explores in his analysis how language and linguistic choices can affect the way people think through metaphors and figures of speech. Language can easily build a structure which could then be used to maintain existent power structures in the society or create something new. Thus Burke's work fits perfectly into the social constructivist view of international relations which emphasizes the role of language in the process of forming social reality.

Expressions of American exceptionalism in presidential rhetoric can be ambiguous and symbolic. However, the notion of exceptionalism and the national sentiment, for that matter, are not ambiguous since they are ingrained in the mindset of American politicians and people through its over two hundred years of history as a nation. For the process of identification to work, the audience must accept the premises of the speaker as its own. So, the presidents must know the audience's preconceived premises of American exceptionalism in order their rhetoric to work.

\(^{76}\) Burke, 55–59.  
\(^{77}\) Ibid, 20–22, 26.
3.3. Public papers of the presidents as data

The data used in this study comprise of the remarks and addresses of the presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter during the time when they held the office of the president. Since the aim is to analyze how the presidents used the office of the president as a rhetorical podium to disperse their ideas, the data under study do not include memoirs or any statements that the presidents made when they were for example congressmen or retired from the presidency, although these could be of help as secondary sources. The data does not include the presidents' private discourse either. Thus private negotiations, presidential correspondence, and communication with the White House staff and cabinet members are ignored.

By qualitative analyzing the presidents' speeches from August 1974 to January 1981 it is possible to show how the presidents Ford and Carter set to invoke the notion of American exceptionalism in order to unite the nation suffering from the traumas of the Vietnam War and Watergate.

The president of the United States has an immense amount of agenda-setting power among the American people, and this power has even been increasing in the last decades, partly in the wake of the rise of the modern mass media, but more because of the changing conceptions of presidential leadership.78 The rhetorical president engages in a discourse that soars above the mundane debate and invokes a loftier and more ideological discussion of idealism, and thus expressing an American “public philosophy”.79 Presidents are more and more as one with the words that they utter. It has even been suggested that speaking is actually governing when it comes to modern-day presidents.80 The idea of a

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“communicative presidency” has gone so far as to treat everything that the president says or does with communicative value.\(^8^1\)

According to Jeffrey Tulis, it is common among the students of the American presidency to view the political system of the United States from the perspective of the president. The popularity of this “institutional partisanship” is partly merited on the influential book by Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power*, in which he defined the title of his book first and foremost as a “power to persuade”.\(^8^2\)

Since this study is a rhetorical analysis of the addresses of the presidents, it cannot really escape the institutional partisanship and is thus necessarily president-centered. The polity of the United States and the structures of international politics are, however, taken into account to create a more systemic, and in the process, a constructivist, approach. Rhetoric is after all a two-way process. Examining presidential discourse in isolation is not very helpful because rhetoric exists in a dynamic relationship with people, policies, practices, and circumstances.\(^8^3\) The “presidential approach” is, however, generally valid because of the ability of the president to create and shape political reality.\(^8^4\)

4. Ideological perspectives on the United States foreign policy

4.1. Foreign policy traditions

The rhetoric of the presidents Ford and Carter is analyzed in this study through the framework of the foreign policy traditions of the United States. These traditions direct the


\(^{8^4}\) Edwards, 3; Zarefsky, 611.
thinking and the rhetoric of the presidents and are part of the structure in which the presidents are speaking and in which the rhetorical premises are “happening”. These traditions are in fact “the reality” to which the scholars of presidential rhetoric are referring to when they speak of the power that the presidents have in their words. In this study, the foreign policy traditions are viewed in light of how they relate to the concept of American exceptionalism.

In the heart of the foreign policy traditions is the idea of “invented traditions” by Eric Hobsbawm. Hobsbawm defines these traditions as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”

As one can treat the evolution of the idea of American exceptionalism (or nationalism for that matter) as multiple invented traditions accumulated throughout history to cover this “para-ideological umbrella” of exceptionalism, Hobsbawm's concept can also treat foreign policy traditions as “invented” in the sense that they are socially constructed readings from the past. By analyzing these readings it is possible to understand how the past manifests itself in the present.

4.2. The old dichotomy of realism vs. idealism

The foreign policy of the United States is often explained with the help of numerous dualistic opposites. The most common of these has been the dichotomy between realism and idealism, although one can often see references to either hawks or doves as well, or to the position the United States should take in its relation to the world (interventionist and isolationist perspectives).

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86 Hobsbawm, 1.
88 On realism and idealism, see e.g. Houghton, David (2002): Manifest Destiny and Realpolitik: Realism
According to the classical realist view, the contemporary world system is suffering from “structural anarchy”, since there is no central authority, powerful and credible enough, to settle disputes between nations. Thus, national security and balance of power are at the forefront in the realist view of the world. Idealism (or liberalism as the tradition is also known) is, for its part, a worldview motivated by the idea that the state is only one of the most important actors in the international system, and thus it is the general international conditions that should shape a state's behavior.  

These polar opposites of realism and idealism do not, however, represent themselves in the purest and the most manifest sense in the real life of international politics. In practice, no American policymaker ever argues that government should completely disregard moral values, or that it should forgo national interest. There is no denying that Jimmy Carter had national unity and national interest in mind, even though it was not expressed in realist terms. In a sense, moral values were Carter's own “realism”, expressing what was “real” to him, and what his view of the national long-term interest was.

The traditions of realism and idealism can be thus very easily turned around. In fact, the “Realists” during the early Cold War were “idealistic” in the sense that they opposed the communist ideology vehemently. Hans Morgenthau, a realist scholar of international politics, has for his part stated in Politics among Nations that realism, in itself, is the supreme moral virtue in politics since it is based on the realities of diplomacy and the world as it actually works, not on some wishful thinking about how we would like it to

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90 Houghton, 181.

91 Hunt, 225; Houghton, 174.
Because of this fluidity in the original foreign policy traditions, Martin Griffiths has tried to re-evaluate the concept of realism in a more dynamic way. He states that international policy is “dialectical interplay between necessity and freedom, constraints and opportunities”.

Even though the dualistic opposites of conceiving the United States foreign policy seem like simplifications, they nonetheless provide the politicians, the media, the people, and the scholars a way of making sense of the world. Through social constructions it is useful to think of the different federal administrations in the history as representing different branches of the foreign policy traditions. Interestingly enough, the party system in the United States is also centered around a two-party system.

There seems to have been discernible “mood swings” in the history of the United States foreign policy, and these have seemed to last around 20 or 30 years. According to Paul A. Varg, the first years of the republic saw much fluctuation. Idealism was dominant during the Revolution of 1776, decreased under George Washington to the promotion of American superiority within the established international order, and became dominant again under Thomas Jefferson. These mood swings aside, they did not seem to dissolve the broad consensus on the idea of American exceptionalism in the early decades of the republic.

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94 Hunt, 221; Houghton, 172.
The idea of American exceptionalism is not necessarily purely idealistic, however. Walter A. McDougall has viewed American exceptionalism clearly from a realistic point of view since he does not emphasize the role of the idea of exceptionalism in the American expansion in the 19th century, or in the global involvement of the 20th century, for that matter. In fact, both could be explained through geopolitical calculation and enlightened self-interest.98

It seems that a somewhat more dynamic view of the United States foreign relations is needed to break away from the old dichotomy of realism and idealism. This is provided by Walter Russell Mead in his 2001 work *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*. Mead suggests that just viewing the United States foreign policy from the perspectives of realism and idealism does not represent adequately enough the American experience. The Cold War atmosphere of two rigid ideological blocs emphasized the dualistic view of the world and made the United Stated foreign policy decision makers to think in “realist” or “idealistic” terms.99

Mead identifies four different schools of foreign policy traditions, which he has named after four figures in American history and their political legacy. These schools are not “blood types”, as Mead states, but rather typifications of how the ideas and values in American foreign policy are typically manifested. Most Americans combine different elements of different schools in their foreign policy thinking.

Alexander Hamilton's name has been given to the school of foreign policy that sets the role of the American government to promote the interests of American enterprise home and

99 Until the footnote 101 all references are for: Mead, 8–9, 61, 87–89.
abroad. Opposed to the Hamiltonian policy has typically been the Jeffersonian school that has, in Mead's words, “seen the preservation of American democracy in a dangerous world as the most pressing and vital interest of the American people.” Jeffersonian tradition has also “consistently looked for the least costly and dangerous method of defending American independence while counseling against attempts to impose American values on other countries.”

The school most relevant to this study is the foreign policy tradition that Mead calls “Wilsonian”. Named after Woodrow Wilson, who stated in his Fourteen Points that the World War I was fought for a moral cause and who called for post-war peace in Europe, the tradition believes that it is the moral and practical duty of the United States to spread its values throughout the world. The Wilsonians typically emphasize legal and moral aspects of world order instead of economic ones, and believe that American interests require that other countries accept basic American values.

The final school is named after Andrew Jackson, the populist seventh president of the United States, who served as an army general before his presidency. The Jacksonian school represents a deeply embedded, populist culture of honor, independence and military pride among the American people. In this study, the implications of the Jacksonian tradition are somewhat ignored, since neither president Ford nor president Carter explicitly expressed Jacksonian tendencies in their policies. This was in part due to the Vietnam tragedy, which helped to undermine the military honor implicit in the Jacksonian tradition.

There can be noted a clear divide between these four schools provided by Mead. Jeffersonian and Jacksonian schools are clearly more inward-looking, suggesting Americans to fulfill their national destiny by themselves by minding their own business and ignoring the rest of the world. By contrast, the Hamiltonian and Wilsonian traditions are both more interested in either spreading American values abroad or seeing the world in more global terms. In fact, the four traditions provided by Mead somewhat follow the line between isolationists and interventionists, as well as the line between realism and idealism. Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian traditions represent realism, and Jacksonian and Wilsonian
traditions idealism.

With the help of these additions to the foreign policy traditions of the United States provided by Mead, it is possible to form a “kaleidoscope” of the views by which the United States foreign policy process can be comprehended. As Mead has noted, elements of all these schools, Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, Wilsonian, and Jacksonian, can be detected in a single president's policies, and thus in his rhetoric as well. This kaleidoscope is completed by the traditional schools of realism and idealism, and the notion of American exceptionalism which is at the core of this study.

4.3. Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian traditions

In the cases of presidents Ford and Carter, Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian traditions (in addition to the Wilsonian tradition, which is covered in more detail in the next chapter), seem to provide a more relevant tool in the context of American exceptionalism than Jacksonian tradition does. Whereas Carter represented the Wilsonian moralistic tradition, Gerald Ford's policies and rhetoric will find most credentials from Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian traditions.

Mead himself identifies both Nixon and Ford administrations as “Continental realism”, which viewed foreign policy in the sense of the 19th century European states. Moral considerations were not allowed to affect foreign policy decisions if they hindered the long-term strategy of the United States. This suggests that Ford could be seen as a Hamiltonian, although direct references are not made. Since the dismal economic situation and the fight against inflation was on Ford's agenda, it is possible to see more Hamiltonian tendencies in his rhetoric. It is to be noted that even if the United States was eager to retreat to preserve its democracy at home from its global hegemony after the Vietnam War in a Jeffersonian sense, it was much harder than previously because of its Cold War commitments and alliances.

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100 Mead, 72.
The Hamiltonian tradition, although also identified as “realist”, differs from the Jeffersonian tradition in the sense that it seeks to better the United States position in the world by commercial means. The period after World War II could be seen as the age of the Hamiltonians since it saw the United States taking a leading role in the global economy with the formation of the Bretton Woods system.\footnote{Bretton Woods system is the name for the agreements reached between the United States, Britain, Russia and other non-fascist trading nations to establish a set of institutions to reconstruct the world economy after the war. These institutions included the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The Bretton Woods system placed the United States in a position to control exchange rates. See e.g. Woods, Randall Bennett (1990): A Changing of the Guard: Anglo-American Relations, 1941–1946. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 115.}

In contrast to the Jeffersonian tradition, the Hamiltonian tradition is cosmopolitan. After World War II, it supported the world wide web of security treaties, with the object of containing the Soviet Union and of replacing the British Empire, whereas Jeffersonians found it hard to adjust to the decline of the British hegemony and to the new role reserved for the United States in the world.\footnote{Mead, 130, 204.}

Robert Kelley uses the term “Hamiltonian” in a somewhat different sense. He identifies it with the spirit of the Progressive Era of 1900 to 1916 that tried to eradicate links between wealth and government, and tackle corruption. This national progressivism was Hamiltonian more in a domestic policy sense, emphasizing strong elite administration, but was related also to the foreign policy by building up military power.\footnote{Kelley, Robert (1977): Ideology and Political Culture from Jefferson to Nixon. The American Historical Review, 82, 3, 549; Buenker, John D. – Burnham, John C. – Crunden, Robert M. (1986): Progressivism. Schenkman Publication Company, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 3–21.}

According to Mead, Hamiltonians speak the language of Continental realism with phrases like “the national interest” and “the balance of power” being prevalent.\footnote{Mead, 100.} Jeffersonians, by contrast, speak more softly, defining their interests as narrowly as possible in order to have the fewest possible grounds for quarrels with others. Jeffersonians see the cultural, social, and political heritage of the United States as unique and highly worth conserving. The
country could better serve the cause of universal democracy by setting an example rather than imposing a model to other countries.\textsuperscript{105}

\textbf{4.4. Wilsonian tradition}

The Wilsonian tradition is closest to the idea of American exceptionalism since in its core is the notion that it is in America's interest to make the world as its image.\textsuperscript{106} The tradition is linked to the name and character of Woodrow Wilson who, during his presidency, saw that a new world order beneficial to the United States could be better attained by moralism, instead of political realism. Wilson saw that promoting universal democracy and the self-determination of peoples based on the American model was more in the national interest of the United States than the policies of annexation by president William McKinley at the turn of the century, or the realistic vision of Wilson's predecessor, Theodore Roosevelt.\textsuperscript{107}

Of course, there have been “Wilsonians” shaping American foreign policy even before Wilson set his foot in the White House. Walter Russell Mead traces the roots of the tradition to the missionary movement in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century:

\begin{quote}
“Beginning in 1806 with a handful of Massachusetts seminary students who asked God to guide their lives as they took shelter by a haystack from a sudden thunderstorm, tens of thousands of missionaries proceeded out of the United States to the four corners of the earth, determined to relieve the world's peoples of the burdens of superstition, paganism, feudalism and ignorance; to combat exploitation of the poor; to promote democracy, public health, and literacy; to reform the world's sexual mores; and to end the oppression of women overseas.”\textsuperscript{108}
\end{quote}

These early goals of the missionaries clearly bring forth the idealism of the Wilsonian tradition since they are certainly not limited to foreign policy in a strict sense of international relations.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 175–192.  
\textsuperscript{108} Mead, 133.
The Wilsonians have a lot in common with the British Liberals of the 19th century. British liberalism abolished the slave trade and its emissaries trekked the wilds of Africa sending punitive expeditions to put down the slave trade. In the time of Wilson, at the end of the World War I, when he tried to impose a peace in his own terms, his strongest allies were found in the British Liberal Party.\footnote{Ibid, 135; Kelley, 550.}

In the core of the Wilsonian tradition is the idea that democracies do not go to war with each other.\footnote{Kissinger 2001, 244.} Thus it seems better for the United States to promote American-style democracy to the far corners of the world in order to maintain a United States-led world order, even if that meant interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries. Wilsonians are for the prevention of war, but that is only the second-best object after the promotion of democracy.\footnote{Mead, 138, 165.}

In the daily making of foreign policy, democracies are also more practical to deal with from the American point of view. They make more reliable partners than whimsical monarchies of the past, or dictatorial tyrannies. Wilsonian foreign policy believes in long-term global prosperity, which is naturally of use to the United States as well. Democratic systems provide stability. They are less prone to rapid policy reversals than autocratic systems, and are more likely to represent what is politically popular.\footnote{Ibid, 162–163.}

Since Wilsonianism follows the American liberal capitalist tradition, the congruency with the Hamiltonian tradition becomes clear. Wilsonians believe that democracies are more reliable than autocracies because they tend to prosper. Successful capitalism often goes hand in hand with the rule of law. Democratic governments are more likely over time to develop fair and effective legal systems.\footnote{Ibid, 163.}

The Wilsonian tradition seems to be a double-edged sword. In theory, its chances for
success seem to be limitless. If democracy can take root in what had been Nazi Germany, it could certainly flourish everywhere. On the other hand, Wilsonianism sets a very high bar for American foreign policy success. It invokes the problem of prioritizing. What global crises or conflicts should the United States take into account and what it should ignore? Is there a chance that the United States would seed the plants of its own destruction by “going forth in search of monsters to destroy” and overreaching its imperial responsibilities? 

It should be remembered that one president can represent several different foreign policy traditions in his rhetoric. Thus the notion of American exceptionalism can be invoked in different ways. Joseph Nye suggests that administrations can use different arguments to appeal to different camps.

This emphasizes the view that the dividing lines between the four foreign policy traditions sketched by Mead are extremely blurry. None of the schools is essentially monolithic. Among Wilsonians there are the right Wilsonians who believe that the United States as it currently exists has generally fulfilled the dreams of the Founding Fathers, and the radical Wilsonians who believe that the country is far from living up to its true values as a nation.

Another point of division is the “high flyers” and the “low flyers”. High-flying Wilsonians look for grand programs to press the logic of their vision to its farthest conclusions, while lower-flying Wilsonians tend to be more specific. Even the man after whom the foreign policy school promoting democracy and human rights is named, Woodrow Wilson, had some dubious views on racism, so it is not surprising that the labeled Wilsonians have differences of opinion as well.

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116 Nye, 265.
117 Mead, 91–94.
5. Evolution of Cold War Rhetoric

5.1. From demonization to détente

Presidential rhetoric has to take into consideration its surroundings, especially the audience it addresses. The audience itself has some preconceived notions around which to attach the address of the president. As suggested previously, one strong notion of this kind could be the idea of American exceptionalism, but other than that, there seems to be various ideological currents, or situational elements, in the foreign policy thinking of the United States that affect the audience and the addressing presidents as well. These elements can be enforced by fear, mistrust, or a need to co-operate or reconcile. More often than not, the world was seen on very pessimistic terms during the Cold War. Norman A. Graebner states that the American Cold War was a rhetorical exercise that “emerged and thrived on images of impending global disaster”.\(^{118}\)

President Harry S. Truman has been described as “a staunch exponent of American exceptionalism” who frequently referred to the United States as “the greatest nation that the sun ever shone upon”.\(^{119}\) After the Second World War, Truman laid the rhetorical groundwork for the Cold War era that lasted from 1947 until the early 1990s and the collapse of the Soviet Union. “Truman Doctrine” embarked on an anti-communist crusade invoking “supernation” rhetoric, which implied that the United States had a burden to make the world safe for democracy by fighting communism.\(^{120}\) Along with the geopolitical strategy of “containing”\(^{121}\) the Soviet Union, the rhetorical strategy of the Truman


\(^{119}\) McCrisken, 21.


\(^{121}\) “Containment” was a policy of the United States to prevent the spread of communism abroad. See e.g.
administration was propaganda production and exaggerating the territorial ambitions and the military capabilities of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{122}

Although Truman's successor as president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, represented different political party than Truman, the main focus of presidential rhetoric remained the same. Eisenhower continued waging Cold War through his rhetoric, which served the larger goals of foreign and defense policy. Eisenhower was still intentionally dividing the world into two camps, those who lived in freedom and those who were under the slavery of communism.\textsuperscript{123}

More tangible change came when John F. Kennedy assumed the presidency. Faced with a stalemate with the Soviet Union, Kennedy decided to give a clear message of willingness to negotiate, while at the same time tried to maintain the military strength of the nation. Vito N. Silvestri states that John F. Kennedy was a transitional president who attempted to secure peace by steering away from hardline Cold War positions into situations where negotiating was more plausible. In that process, Kennedy was spreading the idea of freedom and liberty throughout the world, which could be linked to American values and human rights principles.

The focus was more on the individual. One of the most quotable statements of Kennedy was when he said in his Inaugural Address in 1961: “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”\textsuperscript{124} However, he did not forget to use rhetorical devices of exceptionalism in the same speech: “Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any

friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”

Lyndon B. Johnson's foreign policy rhetoric was focused on the war in Vietnam, and the tone was defensive. The president was balancing between securing peace in Vietnam and avoiding humiliating defeat for the United States. According to Windt, Johnson did not declare war against another country, but against those who would threaten America's credibility and those who would challenge Johnson's own will to maintain that credibility. However, traces of exceptionalism could be noted. Johnson suggested that the moral superiority of the United States purpose and the purity of its conduct would ultimately ensure victory for the country in Vietnam: “Because we fight for values and we fight for principles, rather than territory or colonies, our patience and our determination are unending.”

Richard Nixon's rhetoric emphasized the unity of Americans in the tumultuous domestic situation of civil rights demands, and the ongoing battle in Vietnam that a vocal part of American public thought of as vain. As a strategist, rather than political opportunist, he continued the United States presence in Vietnam stating that it served the national interest in the long term.

During Nixon's presidency, the conditions were right for a new strategy of containment.

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127 Windt, 105.

128 McCrisken, 25.

The relationship between the two major communist countries, the Soviet Union and China, was hostile, and by the time Nixon's first term as the president was drawing to its close in 1972, the communist countries were competing for Washington's favor.\textsuperscript{130}

Contrary to his predecessors, Nixon was a realist preaching for the balance of power between nations.\textsuperscript{131} His rhetoric and policies did not serve very well the idea of American exceptionalism in its strictest sense of the United States being qualitatively different from other states. His role as the president was to realize the diminishing status of the America in the world political scene and to guide it through the transition from dominance to leadership.\textsuperscript{132}

The United States had lost its nuclear superiority, and simultaneously the access to nuclear weapons on each side of the Cold War blocs brought the world closer to a nuclear war and a possibility for the annihilation of mankind.\textsuperscript{133} This made way for \textit{détente} to come forth, and the idea of American exceptionalism retreated to the background, although still surviving the Nixon period intact. The ideas of economic freedom, individualism, and liberty still remained central to the American belief system.\textsuperscript{134}

\textbf{5.2. From moralizing to exceptional confidence}

After Richard Nixon resigned from the presidency in August 1974 following the Watergate scandal, his vice-president Gerald Ford took over the presidency. When it came to choose

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Kissinger 1994, 703–704.
\item Gaddis 2007, 81–82.
\item McCrisken, 37, 40.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
between preserving the “balance of power” Nixon had worked on, or cementing his foreign policy on moral imperatives on American exceptionalism, Ford continued where Nixon had left off. The foreign policy of Gerald Ford was largely determined by strategic, political and economic interests.\textsuperscript{135}

After the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, the American public's faith in the moral legitimacy of their nation was severely shaken. Gerald Ford's task as the president was to restore that faith and to boost confidence into Americans. He also had to convince the allies and the enemies of the United States that the country would not retreat into isolation.\textsuperscript{136}

Ford's successor Jimmy Carter acknowledged that Ford had done much to begin the healing process, yet throughout his election campaign he did not believe that Ford had done enough to restore American confidence. Carter believed that the traditional beliefs at the very heart of what it meant to be an American had been thrown into question by years of lies, failure, and corruption by the government.\textsuperscript{137}

The purpose of Carter was to continue the healing process, and to unify the nation in the process. Promoting human rights was for Carter embracing the true American mission and national self. Human rights initiative was also a direct response to the crisis of faith in American values. It was also a purification of sorts. It restored the prestige of the United States.\textsuperscript{138}

In addition to emphasizing human rights, Carter tried to steer away from the old, geopolitical superpower competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was still important for the United States to be ahead of the Soviet Union, but that goal would no longer dominate the agenda of global relations. Nation states in the developing world were acquiring a more important role in world affairs. The rise of transnational organizations, global communication networks, and increasingly interdependent global

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, 40–41, 55.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 40–42.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, 56.
\textsuperscript{138} Stuckey, 42–43, 88; Kane, 775.
economy all forced Carter to approach his foreign policy by trying to cooperate with, rather than dominate others.\textsuperscript{139}

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Carter's rhetoric was swinging to a new hardline. The president retreated from détente, and imposed sanctions for the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{140} This freezing in the Cold War laid the platform open for the next president, Ronald Reagan, who brought back the ideological containment and increased defense spending.\textsuperscript{141}

Reagan subscribed to American exceptionalism wholeheartedly. He believed that the American values and principles were sought after by all the people of the world. Whereas Carter tried to make the nation to accept certain limits to what Americans could rightfully do, Reagan denied the necessity of any redemption. Because the United States was for Reagan a morally superior nation, it followed that whatever it did was for the good for the world.\textsuperscript{142} The phrase “shining city on the hill” became a mantra for Reagan.\textsuperscript{143}

Reagan tried to restore faith in American principles by recovering the military supremacy of the United States, and by encouraging free enterprise.\textsuperscript{144} During his first term as the president, he often emphasized the strength and morality of the United States, and compared it with what he regarded as the morally, spiritually, and economically bankrupt Soviet system.\textsuperscript{145} Reagan described the Soviet Union as an “evil empire”, but since by the year 1984 the American confidence had been restored, and the economic recovery was in full swing, he was now ready for a more conciliatory approach when it came to the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{139} McCrisken, 60.
\textsuperscript{140} Young, 170. These sanctions included halting of high technology sales to the Soviet Union, embargoing grain shipments, and boycotting the 1980 Moscow olympics.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} McCrisken, 85, 92–94.
\textsuperscript{143} Young, 170.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} McCrisken, 98–99.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, 98–102.
The last Cold War era president George H.W. Bush, who was also Reagan's vice-president, did not have a need to present a new, drastic vision to restore any lost spirit or confidence as 1980s turned to its close. His task was to preserve the status quo which Reagan had worked for. Still, many of his speeches contained rhetorical references to American exceptionalism as well.\textsuperscript{147}

6. Gerald Ford's exceptionalism in an interdependent world

6.1. Language of exceptionalism

Before reaching a conclusion on which foreign policy traditions Gerald Ford was closest to in his rhetoric, it is useful to find some patterns in his speeches that fall under the spectrum of using the rhetoric of American exceptionalism.

Ford did not give an “inaugural address” as such that is customary to the new presidents of the United States, since he was not elected as the president. Instead, on August 9, 1974, he addressed the nation with “just a little straight talk among friends”, as he described.\textsuperscript{148}

Taking his oath of office, Ford already gave away snippets of his “exceptional” rhetoric that were to come. He emphasized freedom and the search for peace, and invoked the Founding Fathers by quoting Thomas Jefferson who “said the people are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.” He also stressed God's role in determining what was right for the man: “our great Republic is a government of laws and not of men. Here the people rule. But there is a higher Power, by whatever name we honor Him, who ordains not only righteousness but love, not only justice but mercy.”\textsuperscript{149} Overall, the tone in his remarks on taking the oath of office was very defensive and modest. After all, Ford's

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, 131–133.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
ascendancy to the presidency was an era of all-time low for the United States because of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal.

Ford's first months as president were overwhelmed by a poor state of the economy, which he made clear in his first annual State of the Union Address in January 1975: “...the state of the Union is not good: Millions of Americans are out of work. Recession and inflation are eroding the money of millions more… We depend on others for essential energy.”\textsuperscript{150} Ford used “exceptional” rhetoric in his first State of the Union Address to restore confidence in the American people. He was also now, five months after Nixon's resignation, willing to give the United States its familiar role as the leader of the free world:

“This is not a moment for the American people to turn inward. More than ever before, our own well-being depends on America's determination and America's leadership in the whole wide world. We are a great Nation--spiritually, politically, militarily, diplomatically, and economically. America's commitment to international security has sustained the safety of allies and friends in many areas--in the Middle East, in Europe, and in Asia. Our turning away would unleash new instabilities, new dangers around the globe, which, in turn, would threaten our own security.”\textsuperscript{151}

Using “exceptional” rhetoric in economic matters was useful, since the American public was able to take part in determining the path on which the economy was taking by being informed consumers. Ford encouraged citizens to conserve energy to help the country not being so dependent on foreign oil. The idea was to reassure Americans that they could take matters in their own hands.\textsuperscript{152} Ford emphasized the exceptional spirit of the American people in the fight against inflation:

“The American people have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to submerge personal and group interests to the general welfare. When they know the chips are down, they are really down--and they have done it in the past, and they will do it again--they will respond as they always have. The most important weapon in the fight against inflation is the spirit


\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.

of the American people. This spirit is no secret weapon; it is renowned all over the world.”

The president launched his anti-inflation campaign to rally the nation around his policies in his October 8, 1974 address to the Congress, which came to be known as his “Whip Inflation Now” speech.

In addition to invoking the Founding Fathers when he was taking the oath of office, the president returned to the theme now and then. This was particularly common in 1975 and 1976 around the time when the United States was celebrating its bicentennial anniversary. Ford described the United States Declaration of Independence and the United States constitution as “two of the greatest documents ever devised by man.”

Addressing the Continental Congress of the Daughters of American Revolution Ford declared:

“Call it Divine Providence or call it destiny, 13 small colonies clustered along the Atlantic coast somehow managed to produce one of the most brilliant generations of leaders known to history--the soldiers, the statesmen we know as the founders of this great country.


154 Miezczkowski, 132, 135–136. During the address Ford wore a button with the acronym “WIN” on his lapel. The acronym stood for the phrase “Whip Inflation Now”, and it was developed for Ford by an advertising agency. Also mugs, paperweights, pens, watches, clothing etc. were made bearing the acronym “WIN”.


But even more remarkable than the genius of the founders themselves is the fact that generation after generation of Americans have continued to build on the foundation that they left us. Fortunately for us and for the world, we have never lost sight of their great dream.”¹⁵⁷

Common rhetorical device that helped to bring forth “exceptional” sentiments in the American public was to reference past American presidents and leaders, in addition to the Founding Fathers. Quoting former presidents becomes a ritual to instill nationalistic values and to build familiar continuity with the (successful) past. The former presidents become symbols for America's exceptional past.¹⁵⁸ The device was used by Ford at the end of his State of the Union Address in January 1976:

“I have heard many inspiring Presidential speeches, but the words I remember best were spoken by Dwight D. Eisenhower. "America is not good because it is great," the President said. "America is great because it is good." President Eisenhower was raised in a poor but religious home in the heart of America. His simple words echoed President Lincoln's eloquent testament that "right makes might." And Lincoln in turn evoked the silent image of George Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge.”¹⁵⁹

The underlying idea behind invoking the heroes of the American Revolution was that, in a sense, the revolution was still in process. Ford's America needed new American heroes to survive the low point in America's exceptional status. President's rhetoric was supportive and encouraged confidence: “In a sense, our American Revolution was never ended. We are unique people in that we are at the same time eminently practical and incurably idealistic.”¹⁶⁰

According to Colleen Shogan, the presidents of the United States often use moral and religious rhetoric as a strategic exercise of power. Religious rhetoric is of particularly good use because it has the ability to connect “the pragmatism of policy to the passion of

¹⁵⁷ “Address at the Continental Congress of the Daughters of the American Revolution”.
¹⁵⁸ Hobsbawm, E., 1.
emotions”.

Since the Puritan settlers of the 17th century through American history, religion has played an influential role in American society. According to a study from 2010, Americans have become more religious, not less, since the end of Civil War in 1865.

Shogan states that the use of moral and religious rhetoric can be of effective use if the president wants the nation to rally around a particular cause. President Ford aspired to unite the nation and raise its spirit in the fight against inflation, and to distract the nation's memory from the humiliating legacy of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. Just three days into his presidency on August 12, 1974, he ended the Address to the Joint Session of Congress by saying that “We all need God's sure guidance. With it, nothing can stop the United States of America.” Ford also used a technique of linking the United States pre-Vietnam and pre-Watergate success to God's direction and guidance: “And God helps those who help themselves. On this principle, Americans in two centuries have astonished the world and, time and time again, have confounded the pessimists and the cynics who said it couldn't be done.”

Although quantitative content analysis has not been used in this study to determine how the presidents used American exceptionalism in their rhetoric, it is to be noted that during the latter half of his presidency, Gerald Ford did not refer to religion, or to God, as directly and explicitly as he did during those early months when he was trying to restore the confidence of the American public. From the spring of 1976 onwards, he very often emphasized the exceptional morality and spirituality of the United States. In a speech on March 27, 1976

163 Shogan, 14.
165 “Remarks Concluding the Summit Conference on Inflation”.
Ford declared:

“We have the greatest science and technology capability in the history of mankind. Our military capability is second to none. But there is one thing that is even more important than all of that. America is morally and spiritually number one, and that will be the driving force to keep us moving so that America and all its people, its government, will be number one forever.”

Emphasizing the moral and spiritual strength of the United States was a common reference when Ford was addressing his campaign volunteers in the spring of 1976. In his remarks to his committee volunteers in Milwaukee on April 2, 1976 he stated that “the great strength of America is its moral and spiritual leadership.” In another address on the same day in Wisconsin he stated that “no other nation can match us... in the combined economic, agricultural, technological, military, and more importantly, moral strength of the United States of America.” Rhetoric of this kind repeated itself in Ford's speeches throughout the spring. At a President Ford committee breakfast in Dallas he expressed the linkage between the American spirit and freedom:

“And then there is one final ingredient that I think makes a difference to all of us. In the United States of America, we have a great devotion to spiritual, religious, deep-seated convictions about what we can do and who we believe in and what our feelings are toward something greater than we, greater than anything. And that spiritual religious conviction gives us the inspiration to keep going, to make this freedom secure and this liberty positive and certain and to make America what we want as our dream--the


America that our forefathers gave us but improved and added to and just made better by all of us.”

It is to be taken into account, as Shogan suggests, that much of the genres of presidential rhetoric (Inaugural Addresses, Farewell Addresses, State of the Union Addresses) routinely include moral and spiritual elements. Putting too much emphasis on religious themes in presidential rhetoric does not provide a clear picture of exceptional presidential rhetoric. Although Ford had kept his religious rhetoric somewhat toned down in the latter half of his presidency, he remembered, however, to return to America's religious roots in his last State of the Union Address in January 1977, after having lost the presidential election to Jimmy Carter the previous year:

“My fellow Americans, I once asked you for your prayers, and now I give you mine: May God guide this wonderful country, its people, and those they have chosen to lead them. May our third century be illuminated by liberty and blessed with brotherhood, so that we and all who come after us may be the humble servants of thy peace. Amen. Good night. God bless you.”

There are some phrases or mantras that often feature in “exceptional” rhetoric. The most common of these are usually listed as “manifest destiny”, “city on a hill”, “American dream”, “beacon of light/hope” or “new world order”. In the wake of the downfall of South Vietnam's capital, Saigon, in April 1975, Ford did not accept the beacon to be put out easily:

“Let the beacon light of the past shine forth from historic New Orleans and from Tulane University and from every other corner of this land to illuminate a boundless future for all Americans and a peace for all mankind.”

171 Shogan, 12.
The concept of “American Dream” was a useful rhetorical tool during the times of economic woes:

“Without the dedication of millions of men and women willing to roll up their sleeves and go to work, the American dream would remain only that--a dream. With that dedication and hard work, America has developed over the last 200 years into not only the most prosperous of nations but an enduring example of the democratic process and spirit.”

6.2. Ford, Hamiltonian realist

When Gerald Ford became president after Nixon’s resignation, he had to look at the United States’ status in the world politics through a realistic lens. The Vietnam war was lost, the Watergate scandal had just happened, the economy was bad, and the confidence was low. In his oath of office Ford emphasized freedom and the search for peace, and quoted Thomas Jefferson. It was time to be a Jeffersonian, and take consolation in the cultural, social, and political heritage of the United States.

However, after five months of being president, the tone started to be more assertive again. While the United States could not step down from the world, the defensive and modest rhetoric started to give way to a more confident one. Ford’s rhetoric turned from a more Jeffersonian one, emphasizing deep American values and heritage, to a more Hamiltonian one, with the American global economic leadership at its core. This was still done by sticking to the idea of American exceptionalism.

Talking in the long aftermath of economic troubles after the 1973 oil embargo in February 1975, Ford stated:

”Only by cooperative efforts among the major industrial nations and a constructive dialog
with the oil producers can an equitable oil price be restored. Only by new mechanisms of cooperation and mutual support can the industrial democracies safeguard their economies against a new embargo or international financial disruption. Only if the United States takes the lead now will our partners have any hope of an ultimate solution or an incentive to commit themselves to cooperation with us.”177

As described by Mead, in the interests of Hamiltonianism lies the spreading of American values abroad, and promoting the interests of American enterprise home and abroad.178 Ford was emphasizing that the economic system was becoming more and more interdependent, and the United States had its role in the system as the leader, through foreign aid, for example:

”Developing and developed countries are all part of a single, interdependent economic system… First, foreign aid is a part of the price we must pay to achieve the kind of a world in which we want to live. Let's be frank about it. Foreign aid bolsters our diplomatic efforts for peace and for security. But secondly, and perhaps just as importantly, even with a recession, we remain the world's most affluent country. And the sharing of our resources today is the right, the humane, and the decent thing to do. And we will.”179

The need for the American leadership was taken up at the annual State of the Union Address of 1975 as well, where the president’s words receive the most attention. Ford announced that ”this is not a moment for the American people to turn inward. More than ever before, our own well-being depends on America's determination and America's leadership in the whole wide world.”180

A year on, and the need for American economic leadership was made even more explicit:

”But we have responsibilities around the world that fall on our shoulders. Not that we

178 Mead, 87.
necessarily in every instance want them, but fate has decreed that the United States has a responsibility to work with our allies, to negotiate with our adversaries, to help the less advantaged, to make this globe in which we live not only a better place for us but a better place for all people.”

Looking at the “kaleidoscope” of different foreign policy traditions provided by Mead, it seems that Gerald Ford’s rhetoric, besides invoking American exceptionalism by nature, was falling for the most part within the realm of Hamiltonian rhetoric. Ford’s policy goals were Hamiltonian, and so was the context level of his rhetoric.

There can still be noted traces of Jeffersonianism, especially through the beginning of his term in the office. It seems like after the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, being Jeffersonian was the most natural thing to do. Ford affirmed a healing nation that was looking inward and valuing those things that were said to be dear and unique to the American experiment: freedom, hard work, and God’s guidance.

After a year or so, president Ford’s rhetoric was, however, turning more Hamiltonian, emphasizing the global interconnectedness of economy and America’s leading role in it. Here the historical idea of the United States being exceptional did not play only a small part. It was easy to turn into more assertive rhetoric since the historical belief of America being such a great country was so strong.

7. Jimmy Carter’s Wilsonian exceptionalism

7.1. Language of exceptionalism

Taking a closer look at the language Jimmy Carter used to address the American public, it can be noted that he did not divert from the path of invoking the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. In his Inaugural Address, Carter stated that the United States had

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“exceptional appeal” which also imposed moral obligations to the country.\textsuperscript{182}

In his rhetoric, Carter proposed a spiritual renewal of America’s role in the world, which would again serve as an augmentation of its power. This renewal was to come by emphasizing human rights and human aspirations of all the people in the world.\textsuperscript{183} On assuming office he conveyed a message to the other nations that the United States had a “desire to shape a world order that is more responsive to human aspirations”.\textsuperscript{184} In his first State of the Union Address a year later in January 1978, he reiterated the nation’s identity: “We've restored a moral basis for our foreign policy. The very heart of our identity as a nation is our firm commitment to human rights.”\textsuperscript{185}

As Kane has suggested, Carter made human rights the cornerstone of his foreign policy in order to reinstate and restore popular belief in American exceptionalism.\textsuperscript{186} In his rhetoric, there were clear signs of exemplar exceptionalism: “… to set a new standard in the preservation of human rights throughout the world. I don't intend to yield on this position, because I think it represents what our Nation is and what the world ought to be.”\textsuperscript{187}

Carter also linked American values to human rights when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly: “I believe that this is a foreign policy that is consistent with my own


\textsuperscript{183} McEvoy-Levy, 30.


\textsuperscript{186} Kane, 776.

Nation's historic values and commitments.” To the Organization of American States he promised not to “act abroad in ways that we would not tolerate at home in our own country”. In October 1977, he went as far as comparing the actions of the United States to the work of the United Nations: “our Nation for the last 200 years has, in effect, done what the United Nations has done in the last 32 years. I hope that your organization, the United Nations, can also learn from the great experience of what I still consider to be the greatest country on Earth, the United States.”

Carter was insistent that the United States should again lead by example with a strength “based not merely on the size of an arsenal but on the nobility of ideas”. In Carter’s rhetoric, the United States was “the beacon light” that was to give an example to the world to follow. Addressing the Democratic National Committee on April 28, 1977, he stated that the United States was “… kind of a beacon light for the rest of the world, based on basic human rights and on the free enterprise system and on the right of individuals to make our own decisions and to control our own government”. He also referred to the United States as a “symbol of liberty to all the world”.

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191 McCrisken, 60.


During the year 1977, Carter referred to the “beacon” expression on several occasions, interestingly mostly when he was addressing his fellow party members in various events for Democratic politicians. At a Democratic Congressional Dinner in May he stated: “I think the American people now sense that our country stands for things that are decent and honest and upright; that we have once again become a beacon light for peace and for hope…”\(^1\) And a month or so later: “We've established, working with many other people, a basic commitment to human rights, and now I think our Nation stands as a beacon light so that we can be proud of ourselves…”\(^2\)

According to Carter, the exemplary appeal of the United States was so strong that he used the word “hunger” to describe the willingness of other nations to become like America: “…there's an innate hunger among the human beings who inhabit this Earth for a right to make their own decisions, not to be abused by government, to be free to develop as they choose, to be treated fairly. And I think in this way, our system of government can be exemplary to others.”\(^3\)

Carter did not mention the Founding Fathers as often as Ford, most likely because the 200\(^{th}\) anniversary of the United States had already passed in 1976. Still, referring implicitly to the statesmen who guided the nation through its first years was not uncommon for Carter. To Carter, they were the ones who “200 years ago risked their lives to spell out a unique dream in the world; that America stands for something clean and worthy of protection, yes; of pride, yes; but of trust and emulation”\(^4\)

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\(^4\) “Democratic Congressional Dinner – Remarks at the 14\(^{th}\) Annual Dinner”.
It has been suggested that Carter’s dedication to emphasizing human rights and his high moral principles stemmed from him being deeply religious. Rick Hertzberg, president’s chief speechwriter has stated that “Carter did not have a political ideology. He had a set of moral precepts, he had a moral ideology”.198 Carter’s national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, believes that Carter’s constant commitment to human rights during his presidency reflected his religious beliefs which made him a man of genuine dedication to principle.199

Of course Carter used also religious rhetoric to emphasize the exceptional character of the United States. God had reserved a special providence for the United States, which was used by Carter as a tool in trying to unite the American nation for a common cause. It seems that Carter was referring to God’s guidance more as his term as president went on. On December 17, 1977, Carter addressed the Business Council: “We’ve got the greatest country on Earth. We’ve got the best economic system on Earth. It’s been stable and part of our lives for 200 years. God has blessed us with unequaled natural resources.”200 In Carter’s rhetoric, The United States was blessed by God with “the free enterprise system that encourages initiative”.201 Later, he was being even more specific when it came to God’s blessings:

“God’s blessed us in many wonderful ways, with rich land, a democratic, free government, a pride in the individualism of each person, the right to be different, the right to speak our minds, the right to control our own Government, the right to unify ourselves in times of challenge- and I have to say that this is one of those times when our people must be unified.”202

198 McCrisken, 67.
199 Ibid.
Zbigniew Brzezinski’s view, that Carter’s commitment to human rights was also a politically expedient way to draw a sharp contrast to the policies of Nixon and Kissinger, can be seen in his rhetoric as well:

“But in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate and the CIA revelations, our Nation’s reputation was soiled. Many Americans turned away from our own Government and said, “It embarrasses me.” The vision, the ideal, the commitment that were there 200 years ago when our Nation was formed, have somehow been lost. One of the great responsibilities that I share with you is to restore that vision and that degree of cleanliness and decency and honesty and truth and principle to our country.”

The Iranian Revolution in 1978 and 1979 decreased oil output from the region, and thus affected the prices of energy in the United States. On July 15, 1979, Carter reached out to the American public with his much-anticipated address to the nation on “Energy and National Goals”. He felt it was an occasion to give an honest account of what he considered the “moral and spiritual crisis” that had gripped the nation. He declared that the America and its people were threatened by a “crisis of confidence”.

Thereafter, the speech came to be known as the “malaise speech”. Carter lamented the current landscape of American moral values:

“In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities, and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we’ve discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We’ve learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose. The symptoms of this crisis of the American spirit are all around us.”

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McCriskan, 73.

John Kane has linked the “malaise speech” with Carter’s religiosity: the malaise was the result of the sin into which the United States had fallen by virtue of its Cold War policy.\textsuperscript{206} Although the overall tone of the speech could have been interpreted as quite pessimistic, Carter was again using the language of American exceptionalism in order to end the speech in a positive note, and to unite the nation behind his policies:

“We know the strength of America. We are strong. We can regain our unity. We can regain our confidence. We are the heirs of generations who survived threats much more powerful and awesome than those that challenge us now. Our fathers and mothers were strong men and women who shaped a new society during the Great Repression, who fought world wars, and who carved out a new chapter of peace for the world.”\textsuperscript{207}

For Carter, energy became the “immediate test of our ability to unite this Nation”. He continued: “On the battlefield of energy we can win for our Nation a new confidence, and we can seize control again of our common destiny.”\textsuperscript{208}

As the Carter presidency went on, his rhetoric became more assertive. This seems to be in line with the various challenges and problems that were accumulating simultaneously at the time (Iranian revolution, rising oil prices, inflation, unemployment, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Iran hostage crisis). It became common for Carter to acknowledge the problems America was facing, but at the same time he more often started to emphasize America’s exceptional qualities. In his 1980 State of the Union Address, he declared:

”This last few months has not been an easy time for any of us. As we meet tonight, it has never been more clear that the state of our Union depends on the state of the world. And tonight, as throughout our own generation, freedom and peace in the world depend on the state of our Union.”\textsuperscript{209}

Carter started to refer to the United States more often in superlative descriptions:

\textsuperscript{206} Kane, 783.
\textsuperscript{207} "Address to the Nation on Energy and National Goals: "The Malaise Speech"".
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid.
"We do have some problems with energy, with confidence, with inflation, with some remaining unemployment, lot of other things, but we must never forget that America is the strongest and the brightest and the best nation on Earth, and we’ve got more to be thankful for than we have to complain about."210

On some occasions, he was more specific on America’s qualities:

"Militarily, we’re the greatest, strongest nation on Earth. Politically, we’re the greatest nation on Earth. Our system of economics, based on the individuality of human beings and an innate freedom and competition, is the greatest, I think, on Earth.”211

Besides these qualities, in Carter’s rhetoric the United States was unsurpassed in moral and ethical terms as well, which reflected Carter’s foreign policy strategy of emphasizing human rights: “Our economic strength, our military strength, our political strength, our ethical strength, our moral strength are unsurpassed by any other nation on Earth.”212

Mead suggests that following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Carter’s foreign policy ideology switched from emphasizing human rights and the exemplary qualities of the United States to ideological anticommunism.213 The “Carter doctrine” emerged: it promised to defend America’s vital interests whenever and wherever threatened, militarily if necessary.214


213 Mead, 76.

214 Kane, 786.
Although the foreign policy environment had radically changed within just a few months due to the various foreign policy shocks of 1979, Carter’s rhetoric stayed “exceptional”. One other rhetorical premise had, however, changed. Carter was increasingly being seen as failing to lead the nation. In June 1979, only 28 per cent approved his performance as the president.\textsuperscript{215} Colleen Shogan suggests that in a policy environment like this, it is difficult for a president to serve as a moral leader because of the lack of a steady political regime behind the decisions.\textsuperscript{216}

During the Iran hostage crisis at the turn of the year 1980, Carter’s approval rating increased again to levels between 50 and 60 per cent.\textsuperscript{217} This increase was mainly the result of Carter showing a very tough stance against the Iranians.\textsuperscript{218} But as the hostage situation wore on without a solution, the American public became frustrated at president’s inability to free the hostages, and among other problems facing the nation, it led to Carter’s defeat to Ronald Reagan in November 1980 presidential elections.\textsuperscript{219} In his Farewell Address to the nation, Carter linked human rights again to the American values: “If we are to serve as a beacon for human rights, we must continue to perfect here at home the rights and the values which we espouse around the world.”\textsuperscript{220}

\section*{7.2. Carter, Wilsonian idealist}

Jimmy Carter came to the White House emphasizing human rights promotion internationally as his policy goal. He felt this was necessary after years of foreign policy failures he attributed to the Nixon and Ford administrations.\textsuperscript{221} The world was also

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\textsuperscript{216} Shogan, 80.
\textsuperscript{217} Presidential Approval Ratings - Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends.
\textsuperscript{218} McCrisken, 78.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid, 78–82.
\textsuperscript{221} Carter, Jimmy: ““Our Nation's Past and Future”: Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the
changing radically, becoming more and more interconnected with a variety of new foreign policy actors.

Decolonization had unleashed nationalist movements throughout the world that did not fit neatly into the archaic Cold War bipolar system. India’s testing of a nuclear device in 1974 had raised questions about nuclear proliferation in non-aligned countries. The energy crisis and the OPEC oil embargo had shown that the security interests of the United States extended beyond the traditional rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The rise of transnational organizations, global communication networks and the interdependent global economy all called for a more complex foreign policy that could take these changes into account, but still allowed the continued leadership of the United States.  

All this made drafting a successful foreign policy formula more challenging since events in the global world started to become more and more difficult to predict. Carter observed: “It is a new world that calls for a new American foreign policy… We can no longer expect that the other 150 nations will follow the dictates of the powerful, but we must continue – confidently– our efforts to inspire, to persuade, and to lead.”

In a world like this, Carter was hesitant to impose America’s will on other nations in order to avoid a possible new war overseas, as the Vietnam War was. On assuming office, he declared: “The United States will meet its obligation to help create a stable, just, and peaceful world order. We will not seek to dominate nor dictate to others.”


222 McCrisken, 59–60.


224 “United States Foreign Policy Remarks to People of Other Nations on Assuming Office”.

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Carter’s foreign policy goals were more oriented towards co-operation rather than domination and coercion.\textsuperscript{225} Addressing the United Nations General Assembly, Carter proposed to “build a better and a more cooperative international economic system… to work with potential adversaries as well as our close friends to advance the cause of human rights”.\textsuperscript{226} In his State of the Union Address in January 1979, he stated: “This demand for justice and human rights is a wave of the future. In such a world, the choice is not which super power will dominate the world. None can and none will. The choice instead is between a world of anarchy and destruction, or a world of cooperation and peace.”\textsuperscript{227}

Carter’s new opening in foreign policy thinking also reflected the thawing in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, and made it possible to de-emphasize the confrontation between the two Cold War superpowers.\textsuperscript{228} At the same time it allowed for tactical expediency in accusing the Soviet Union for its human rights violations, thus enabling Carter to wage the Cold war on a different front.\textsuperscript{229} Despite setting a new standard in American foreign policy, Carter could not have let it to infringe upon America’s national interest.\textsuperscript{230}

The core features of Wilsonian foreign policy tradition are America’s interest in making the world as its image, and the supposition that democracies do not go to war with each other.\textsuperscript{231} It has, according to Mead, the “moral and practical duty to spread its values through the world”.\textsuperscript{232} Henry Kissinger states that “(Woodrow) Wilson’s innovation was to translate what had been heretofore conceived as a “shining city on the hill”, inspiring others by moral example, into a crusade to spread these values by an active foreign

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\textsuperscript{225}McCrisken, 60.
\textsuperscript{226}“United Nations - Address Before the General Assembly”.
\textsuperscript{228}McEvoy-Levy, 30.
\textsuperscript{229}Kane, 785.
\textsuperscript{230}McCrisken, 62–63.
\textsuperscript{231}Mead, 88; Kissinger 2001, 244.
\textsuperscript{232}Mead, 88.
\end{footnotes}
Carter’s rhetoric often propagated missionary exceptionalism:

“Our Nation is the strongest on Earth. It’s the strongest militarily, and it’s going to stay that way. It’s the strongest politically, because we believe in the dignity of every human being, the right of people to stand on their own feet, to make their own decisions, to control their own government, to let their own individuality be expressed. And we’re trying to spread this philosophy, this commitment, these ideals around the world.”

Applying Mead’s “kaleidoscope” again to Carter’s rhetoric, the data shows that he falls safely under the Wilsonian tradition. His policy goals were Wilsonian, as well as the rhetoric by which he tried to attain them.

**Conclusions**

Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter both appealed to American exceptionalism in their rhetoric. They both routinely invoked exceptional themes and used exceptional language, although they used them in different ways and with different policy goals. This suggests that in the framework of American politics, it does not matter whether the president comes from the Republican or the Democratic party, he or she will use exceptional rhetoric to his or her advantage.

After Richard Nixon’s resignation as president, Ford stepped up as Nixon’s vice-president to lead the country among a feeling of national embarrassment and division resulting from the failed war efforts in Vietnam. The trust of the American public towards its leaders was also drastically low because of the government secrecy and the Watergate scandal.

Ford started his task of “healing the nation” by looking inwards at the exceptional qualities

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233 Kissinger 2001, 244–245.
that the United States had possessed for 200 years and which it still held in high regard. In his speeches he emphasized freedom, search for peace and God. Since the United States was celebrating its bicentennial in 1976, Ford was often citing the Founding Fathers of the nation or some former presidents, for example Abraham Lincoln.

Besides recovering from the depressed mood of the Vietnam War and Watergate, the economic situation was bad. The first OPEC oil crisis in 1973 had hit the United States hard and the inflation was running high. Ford’s message to the public was a reassuring one: America was a great country, had been that for 200 years, and was now calling on its people to make it great again.

Ford wanted America to take back its status as the unquestionable leader of the free world although its reputation had suffered a blow in recent years. The president made clear how important it was for the United States to act in a leading role in world politics. Applying Walter Russell Mead’s four different foreign policy traditions to Gerald Ford’s rhetoric, it seems that the Jeffersonian outlook of looking inward and appreciating the values of the United States of the first months turned into a more Hamiltonian approach, which is as a foreign policy approach more pragmatic and realist. Ford’s goal was to restore the historical confidence that had always been part of the identity of the United States, and to be confident, the country needed to be united for a common cause.

Jimmy Carter had a similar vision. He acknowledged that Ford had started the healing process, but still regarded him just continuing the policy path set by Nixon. Carter’s foreign policy goals were something totally new. He believed that the United States should build its foreign policy on human rights, human aspirations, democracy and all the people of the world’s willingness to decide upon their own lives. The United States could serve as an example and lead the world by that example since the universal values of human rights were close to the values found in the United States constitution. Moving the focus on human rights was also a convenient way to wage rhetorical Cold War against the Soviet Union whose citizens were denied these human rights.
After the Iranian revolution of 1978 and 1979, Carter’s rhetoric became more assertive. He started to emphasize America’s exceptional strength more often. The second OPEC oil crisis hit the Carter presidency and his popularity, along with the Iran hostage crisis at the United States Embassy in Tehran.

Just like Ford’s, Carter’s foreign policy goal and the goal of his exceptional rhetoric was to unite the nation after the events of Vietnam and Watergate. Only the goals were different. The rhetoric of both presidents invoked American exceptionalism with slight variations. Both used often the metaphorical word “beacon” to refer to the exceptional qualities of the United States as leading the path and shining a light on the world. Both referred to God’s blessings and the privileged and providential role of the United States in the world. The only difference was the policy content in their speeches. Ford was a pragmatic Hamiltonian realist, whereas Carter was a Wilsonian idealist.

The question whether either one of them succeeded in their task in uniting the nation does not fall under the spectrum of this study, but since neither one of them served more than one term as president (although both ran for the second term), suggests that perhaps they did not. Perhaps the country needed a former Hollywood actor, “the Great Communicator”, Ronald Reagan to do that. Finding that out would be part of another study.

In these concluding remarks, it would be also useful to look at the rhetorical devices that both Ford and Carter used to persuade the public behind their policies. Religion played here an important role. Referring to God was a common premise linking the presidents and the audience together. Applying Perelman’s concept of “new rhetoric” to the interaction, it turns out that the concept of “God” was here a mutually negotiated between agreement, which created a process of identification between the president and the audience. This identification was possible for reasons of historical tradition, invention of tradition, and the “imagined community” to which both the presidents and the audience belonged.

Another good premise for presidents to use was referring to the Founding Fathers and quoting former presidents, which especially Ford used excessively. This device was also
applying traditions and the sense of historical community, thus bridging the rhetorical gap between the president and the audience to create unity and support for president’s policies.

The undisputed role of the president as the leader of the nation is also a mutually negotiated agreement between him and the nation. This is seen in various foreign policy crisis situations when the public rallies around the president who is using rhetoric filled with American exceptionalism. Signs of this phenomenon were noticeable when Carter’s job approval ratings soared when he was acting tough on Iran during the hostage crisis from November 1979 to January 1980.

Presidents are actively molding the constructivist structure in ways they think are beneficial to their policy goals. Since nationalistic rhetoric has the history and the tradition and the sense of being behind it, it begs a question whether the presidential rhetoric becomes a cycle which circulates nationalistic rhetoric with more and more force ultimately reflecting more and more nationalistic ideas of the public and becoming increasingly populist. Signs of change to the rhetorical “public philosophy” have already been seen in the European framework with regards to the steep rise of various populist parties successfully invoking nationalistic and xenophobic rhetoric. This trend has been seen recently in the United States presidential election races as well with the rise of increasingly extremist and populist candidates.

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