

© 2002, International Association for Greek Philosophy  
“The Art of War: Aristotle on Rhetoric and Fear,” in [The Philosophy of Communication, vol. 2, ed. Konstantine Boudouris and Takis Poulakos, Studies in Greek Philosophy, no. 40 \(Athens, GR: Ionia Publications, 2002\): 45-57.](#)

Available online with the generous permission of the International Association for Greek Philosophy, 5 Simonidou Str., 174 56 Alimos-Greece, tel: 99-23-281, fax: 72-48-979  
<http://www.hri.org/iagp/>

The published Conference proceedings in which this paper appears are available at  
<http://www.hri.org/iagp/books/>

KEVIN J. AYOTTE

### THE ART OF WAR: ARISTOTLE ON RHETORIC AND FEAR<sup>1</sup>

When Aristotle refers to the “art of war” in the *Politics*, he, along with a majority of contemporary international relations (IR) scholars, sees little of the artistic in foreign policy analysis; it is very much a political *science*. Aristotle writes that “the art of war will by nature be in a manner an art of acquisition...that is properly employed both against wild animals and against such of mankind as though designed by nature for subjection refuse to submit to it”(1.3.8).<sup>2</sup> Aristotle’s emphasis upon the naturalness of certain modes of behavior, as “proper” in light of essential characteristics of weakness and strength, implies that the phenomenon of international conflict might be understood scientifically according to natural laws regarding the geopolitical implications of power. At the same time, Aristotle’s analysis of the “means of persuasion” in deliberative rhetoric suggests that the political outcomes of foreign policy deliberation are shaped by all sorts of very unscientific appeals to, among other things, emotions like fear. In light of recent attention to discourse in IR theory and foreign policy analysis,<sup>3</sup> this paper examines rhetorical appeals to fear in classical and contemporary discussions of war as

thoroughly unscientific artistry in the service of persuasion. Against theories of international conflict that claim to discern essential laws of geopolitical behavior, this paper argues that the rhetorical qualities of such analytical discourse are constitutive of the knowledge thereby made available for foreign policy deliberation. An examination of the persuasive force of fear in defining the “facts” of international (in)security demonstrates the need for rhetorical criticism in understanding the discursive artistry that is contemporary foreign policy analysis.

The archetypal analysis of war in antiquity is Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*. His account of the conflict between Athens and Sparta is still considered part of the international relations canon by many political scientists, and is often referenced as a foundation for contemporary IR theories based in political realism. To be sure, Thucydides’ *History* cannot be identified with the “origin” of realism, but it is cited by many of the most prominent realist and neorealist theorists as exemplary of the ways in which states are motivated by trans-historical, natural *laws* of international relations.<sup>4</sup> Nor can the Greek historian be blamed for the epistemological conceit that political science is capable of adequately apprehending a natural system of interstate power dynamics, although he did hope that his work would be useful for those seeking “an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it”(1.22).<sup>5</sup> Realist scholars have similarly tended to approach the phenomenon of war, and foreign policy analysis in general, positivistically; they posit that the causes of state conflict can be determined, and thereby predicted, with almost scientific precision if only one ascertains the necessary variables. Although realist theories of power balancing and hegemonic war, for instance, seek to explain the behavior of states by testing hypotheses against empirical evidence of state actions, all such theories proceed from certain philosophical assumptions about international relations as a *system*.

According to Robert Gilpin, “realism...is essentially a philosophical position; it is not a scientific theory.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the epistemological claim by realist foreign policy analyses to know the system of geopolitics derives from particular ontological premises regarding the objective “reality” of international rivalry.

Different realist theorists emphasize different assumptions about the geopolitical system, but two foundational tenets of political realism can be traced directly to Thucydides. First, the premise of international anarchy identifies the absence of any kind of metaphysical or moral order directing interaction between states.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say state action is not rule-based, according to realists, but rather that there is no juridical constraint governing interstate action. For example, Thucydides cites the Athenians saying to the Lacedaemonians, “it has always been the law that the weaker should be subject to the stronger”(1.75), defining international relations as regulated only by relative power differentials. The second broad assumption in political realism is that humans, and by extension states, are instrumentally rational, acting strategically and selfishly to acquire (or at least preserve) power.<sup>8</sup> The self-interested nature of states is proclaimed at several points by the Athenians in Thucydides’ *History*, during both the Congress at Lacedaemon (1.75) and the Melian Dialogue (17.105). The instrumentally rational behavior of states is said to be motivated by a fundamental interest in survival and pursued by the calculated examination of objective security threats and related material conditions. This is not to suggest that realist IR theories suppose international actors always have perfect knowledge of all relevant information; misperception and misunderstanding are always possibilities. Such outcomes would be identified as reasoning or intelligence failures on the part of foreign policy makers, however, rather than as an indictment of the premise of instrumental rationality. As a philosophy of international relations, political realism tends to discount or ignore the role of

rhetoric in communicating the truths gleaned from philosophical inquiry; a system of statist self-interest amidst international anarchy need only be recognized and analyzed, while communication and rhetoric within that system are ultimately incidental to the ontological drive for power.

Some commentators on global politics have read Thucydides from a very different perspective on human communication, seeing in the Greek historian's attention to various political speeches a recognition that foreign policy outcomes like war are ultimately determined by the persuasiveness of deliberative rhetoric. Rather than describing the world "as it really is," rhetoric in this view is given greater weight for its role in persuading audiences (ancient and modern) that the world is in fact a certain way. As Laurie Bagby observes, "Thucydides departs from the realist position in both outlook and method by...showing the importance of political rhetoric for action and treating what we call realism as another argument in political rhetoric."<sup>9</sup> Athenian appeals to fear throughout the *History*, in positing a system of inherently competitive and threatening states, appear in the rhetorical context of public speeches. Rather than a transparent description of the "truth" of geopolitical reality, the persuasiveness of Athenian orators can be recognized as productive of certain deliberative outcomes (i.e., the amalgam of political decisions ultimately leading to war). Reading Thucydides as a stark challenge to the systemic determinism of realist theory, Daniel Garst argues that "the speeches emphasize the direction exercised by human agents over conflicts both by drawing attention to the fact of deliberation and by setting forth its content."<sup>10</sup> The theory of communication implied by these readings of Thucydides, one that views rhetoric as instantiating rather than merely describing socio-political relationships in the "real world," presents obvious challenges to the predictive

aspirations of a realist political science that purports to discern a coherent system of international relations somehow beyond the reach of language.

If we are to take the role of rhetoric seriously in the philosophy of communication, however, even the increased awareness of deliberative rhetoric in Thucydides' *History* called for by Bagby and Garst appears inadequate. By exempting from rhetorical criticism the analytical narrative about classical geopolitics offered by Thucydides himself, such readings reproduce the positivist conceit that the analyst's observations remain outside the bounds of language. The epistemological premises of geopolitical realism slip back in when, as Beer and Hariman observe, "[t]he realist speaker gives us a real world by contrasting it to a textual world."<sup>11</sup> Bagby's and Garst's focus upon the "textual world" of political speeches implies that the remainder of the analyst's (in this case, Thucydides') narrative regarding world events is somehow less rhetorical, less artistic, and therefore capable of scientifically objective insight. In one sense, the theory of rhetoric assumed by these readings is essentially Aristotelian. For Aristotle, rhetoric serves an epistemic function by persuading audiences about the truth of natural systems. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains evaluations of probability in deliberative oratory with examples from the natural sciences—thunder following lightning, clouds as a sign of rain (2.19.22-25).<sup>12</sup> As George Kennedy suggests, the examples chosen demonstrate Aristotle's assumption that "human actions and events follow predictable natural patterns."<sup>13</sup> The persuasive purpose of rhetorical appeals to probability, for Aristotle, is primarily to convince audiences that the world of human affairs is governed by natural laws. Immediately preceding the discussion of examples as proof via paradigm (rhetorical induction), Aristotle affirms that "generally, future events will be like those of the past"(2.20.8), suggesting that rhetoric merely communicates the truth of pre-structured systems. A similar view of rhetoric as the oral

articulation of science can be seen in Hobbes' praise of Thucydides' crafting of the "deliberative orations" for "having so clearly set before men's eyes the ways and events of good and evil counsels that the narration doth secretly instruct the reader, and more effectually than can possibly be done by precept."<sup>14</sup> While admitting the persuasiveness of rhetoric in the context of public oratory, such approaches fail to account for the rhetoricity of ostensibly neutral descriptions in foreign policy analysis.

Thucydides' references to fear in the *History* appear both in his recounting of political speeches and in the historian's analytical narrative. He quotes the Athenians defining "three of the strongest motives, fear, honour, and interest"(1.75) during a speech of the Congress at Lacedaemon. Earlier in Thucydides' account, however, the historian implies an almost law-like necessity to the conflict between Athens and Sparta as the predictable result of a competitive state *structure*. He writes that "[t]he growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon, made war inevitable"(1.23). Political realists have read the "alarm" ("fear" in some translations) as merely reflecting the systemic operation of power dynamics between Athens and Sparta, rather than as constituting those dynamics. These readings would require an essentially referential theory of language, as if the talk of fear merely presents emotional descriptions of objective conditions. In contemporary theories of political realism, the ontological status of fear as an objective condition of the world system allows the political analyst to posit deterministic causes of behavior in geopolitical laws. Thus, according to John Mearsheimer, because states "fear each other," they perceive interstate competition as always potentially dangerous, each state acts to ensure its survival, and states act to maximize relative power by pursuing military advantage.<sup>15</sup> Closer attention to Aristotle's discussion of fear in the

*Rhetoric*, however, reveals the epistemological problems that arise in a philosophy of international relations that fails to account for the rhetoricity of all language.

As Aristotle argues in Book 3 of the *Rhetoric*, the *logos* of enthymeme and rhetorical induction is insufficient to account for deliberative persuasion. Delivery “has great power...because of the corruption of the audience.” If it were not only “just” to argue “by means of the facts”(3.1.5), as Aristotle claims, but also *sufficient* to persuade audiences, *ethos* and *pathos* would be irrelevant to persuasion. Yet emotion, particularly the appeal to fear, is intimately involved with deliberative rhetoric; Aristotle notes, for example, that “fear makes people inclined to deliberation”(2.5.14). The discussion of fear in the *Rhetoric* describes the persuasive influence that results from an orator’s identification of danger and representations of both the subjects and objects of threat. Of greater interest, perhaps, is the manner in which Aristotle’s attempt to analyze the rhetorical qualities of fear demonstrates the impossibility of disarticulating analytical narrative from discrete instances of public oratory. Aristotle defines “fear” as “a sort of pain or agitation derived from the imagination [*phantasia*] of a future destructive or painful evil”(2.5.1). His choice of the word “*phantasia*,” an “appearance” that is “visualized,”<sup>16</sup> is significant in light of his subsequent claim that “even the signs of such things are causes of fear; for that which causes fear seems near at hand. (This is danger: an approach of something that causes fear)”(2.5.2). Aristotle, with this parenthetical definition of “danger,” unwittingly illustrates both the persuasive power of fear and the need for self-reflexive applications of rhetorical criticism to the ostensibly objective foreign policy analysis offered by political realism.

If we accept the claim that the emotion of fear makes its cause “seem near at hand,” descriptions of the material condition of “danger” transform *phantasia* into a rhetorical

phantasmagoria. This is not to suggest that the destructive potential of a particular threat does not exist, but rather that rhetorical appeals to fear operate emotively like an optical illusion where the potential for destruction appears to rush toward the audience, growing disproportionately in magnitude instead of size. The “reality” identified by any (presumably frightening) analysis of “danger” in the form of international security threats, then, is always and already “approaching” the audience of such discourse. The urgency of action in war, including the “inevitability” of war between Athens and Sparta, is at least partly a function of the fundamentally rhetorical effect of fear in constructing the knowledge available to decision-making audiences. Recalling Mearsheimer’s description of the state behaviors said to follow from the philosophical assumptions of political realism, we can see one instance of this rhetorical phantasmagoria embedded in realist theory itself. Mearsheimer writes: “states in the international system fear each other. They regard each other with suspicion, and they worry that war might be in the offing. They anticipate danger.”<sup>17</sup> In this formulation, fear is taken to be an essentially ontological condition given the possibility of danger to a state. A rhetorical analysis of this claim, however, suggests that fear plays a fundamentally persuasive role in defining the dangerous conditions upon which state behavior is supposedly based.

The persuasive capacity of fear can be discerned in the manner by which appeals to fear overwhelm traditional rhetorical evaluations of probability in deliberations over foreign policy. Mearsheimer argues, for instance, that “[u]ncertainty is unavoidable when assessing intentions, which simply means that states can never be sure that other states do not have offensive intentions to go with their offensive military capability.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than taking uncertainty as an inherent limit to human knowing, thus requiring the resort to rhetoric as an articulation of probabilities, Mearsheimer’s claim weights the probability that a foreign Other will behave in a

threatening manner to such an extent that the evaluation of probability actually disappears. That evaluation has occurred nonetheless, as Mearsheimer assumes that the conclusion of potential threat always follows from this uncertainty regarding state intentions. Mearsheimer's claim overcomes uncertainty by theoretical fiat, simply assuming that states will always perceive threat in foreign military capabilities. Mearsheimer effectively imputes competitive agency to the material condition of offensive military capacity.<sup>19</sup> His analysis thus masks contingency under the guise of necessity, and so the rhetoricity of his assumption regarding offensive threat perception disappears as well. Attention to the persuasive force of fear, however, highlights the very rhetorical means by which political realism navigates questions of probability to *construct* a threat out of the seemingly neutral description of military capabilities. Aristotle's discussion of emotion suggests that threat perception might better be understood as a rhetorically successful appeal to fear than as a deterministic system of geopolitical laws. The phantasmagoria whereby the cause of fear "seems near at hand" finds its persuasive force in Aristotle's definition of "danger" as "an *approach* of something that causes fear"(2.5.2, emphasis added). The thing that causes fear takes on its character as *threatening* from its relationship to the threatened subject; offensive intent is derived from the proximity or magnitude of offensive capability. The threat attributed to a foreign state's military capabilities must be read as a rhetorical construct to the extent that the fearsomeness of its description is constitutive of the proximal "approach" that transforms capability into "danger."

This extension of Aristotle's early foray in human psychology to political epistemology finds support in contemporary studies on the relationship between fear and cognition. Neta Crawford writes that "[t]he link between emotions and recall goes both ways: particular memories are linked to particular emotions and, conversely, current emotions influence the recall

of memories.”<sup>20</sup> Knowledge does not just produce varying emotions; knowledge is itself shaped by emotional response. Cognitive elements involved in knowledge gathering rely on various aspects of memory, from linguistic association to analogical comparison, all of which may be affected by emotion. The role of fear is particularly acute, as suggested by Aristotle, in the processing of information regarding security threats. Arne Öhman writes that “an anxious mood activates memory information centered on threat, which in turn facilitates processing of threat-related information.”<sup>21</sup> The knowledge thus produced by foreign policy discourses about international security threats is anything but objective, and the prediction of political outcomes anything but scientific. This is not to dismiss the potential utility of empirical research in international relations, nor to suggest that theories based upon political realism are never applicable to certain interstate relationships. Rather, the role of emotion in shaping the persuasiveness of ostensibly neutral foreign policy analyses indicates that such analyses are rhetorical through and through. The science of war might therefore more aptly be termed an art if we wish to foreground the fundamentally artistic process by which foreign policy analysis works to construct the world it describes.

The relevance of rhetoric and fear to foreign policy analysis is not limited to classical antiquity. According to Crawford, “when threatened, decisionmakers may reasonably consider the threatener an enemy, slipping into cognitive schemas and scripts that attribute malevolent intentions to the other, rather than carefully evaluating the circumstances that may have motivated the other’s behavior.”<sup>22</sup> The philosophy of communication, or lack thereof, in realist analytical methodologies risks creating self-fulfilling prophecies of danger. The designation of various countries on the American State Department’s “State Terrorism List” (Iran, Iraq, Cuba, Libya, North Korea, and others) as “rogue nations” offers a timely example. As the denotation

and connotations of “rogue” suggest, the word vilifies countries as renegade criminals, attributing a sociopathic nature to the state as if the label “properly” signified empirical reality.<sup>23</sup> According to several critics, the label “rogue” had become problematic because American policy makers were having trouble treating North Korea as anything but a “rogue” despite North Korean diplomatic overtures.<sup>24</sup> Recent social scientific studies in cognitive psychology seem to confirm the unique persuasive power that accompanies appeals to fear. Paula Niedenthal, Jamin Halberstadt, and Åse Innes-Ker suggest “[t]hings that have evoked fear, for example, may be categorized together and be treated as the same kind of thing, even when they are otherwise perceptually, functionally, and theoretically diverse.”<sup>25</sup> Efforts to negotiate American aid in return for the dismantling of the North Korean nuclear weapons program, for example, were being hampered by emotionally charged calls to punish international bandits.

In a surprising turn of events on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2000, then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright formally announced that the states formerly known as “rogue” were henceforth going to be labeled “states of concern.” Albright explained that the label “states of concern” was more appropriate “because we are concerned about their support for terrorist activity, their development of missiles, their desire to disrupt the international system.”<sup>26</sup> To some foreign policy observers, it seemed more than coincidental that the “states of concern” label was codified by the State Department hours before the easing of sanctions on North Korea.<sup>27</sup> And yet, despite the relaxation of some unilateral sanctions on North Korea, American foreign policy toward states suspected of developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or sponsoring terrorism has not changed significantly with the new nomenclature. As State Department spokesperson Richard Boucher remarked, “[t]his is more a change in our description of things rather than a

change in what we've been doing."<sup>28</sup> The new Bush administration has generally preferred "rogue" terminology, leaving American public discourse on the WMD threat a collage of labels.

The absence of any major shift in American foreign policy, despite the temporary change in "rogue" discourse, demonstrates the increasing need for rhetorical criticism in the practice of foreign policy analysis. In particular, the ways in which "rogue" and "state of concern" similarly appeal to fears of threatening foreign Others emphasizes the need for work that examines the persuasive appeals embedded in a foreign policy discourse that will always be incapable of adequately representing the geopolitical "reality" it purports to describe.

Boucher's claim that "states of concern" represented a "better description"<sup>29</sup> of world affairs does not in fact make the language any more adequate to communicating the reality of international security threats. Boucher's claim does, however, belie that essentially Aristotelian faith in the epistemic capacity of language to reveal, at least by a "better" approximation, the essence of these foreign states. If we recognize "rogue nation" and "state of concern" as equally metaphorical figurations of language in American foreign policy discourse, we can discern in both Aristotle's hope for metaphor that "one word is more proper than another and more like the object signified and more adapted to making the thing appear 'before the eyes'"(3.2.13). While obviously not restricted to single words or metaphor, rhetorical appeals to fear that bring the appearance of danger "near at hand" may seem "more proper" to the reality of the thing through its perceptual intensity "before the eyes." Recalling Aristotle's discussion of the rhetorical phantasmagoria effected by emotive appeals to fear, we must account for the artistry in descriptions of reality proffered by foreign policy analysis. To the extent that the "state of concern" label vilifies foreign actors for the same types of behaviors that "rogue" terminology did, where both lexicons invoke appeals to fear, we might look to their similar rhetorical

qualities when seeking to understand how each form of discourse reproduces similar American foreign policy orientations. Against the notion that “state of concern” represents a “better description” of the reality at hand, this paper argues that it is the discursive positioning of North Korea as intrinsically threatening, enmeshed in a natural system of strategic competition, that evokes the meaningful “reality” of the danger against which American foreign policy will be deployed.

For example, to the extent that “state of concern” language relies upon rhetorical appeals to fear similar to those connoted by the “rogue” label, proposed “engagement” policies with North Korea tend to magnify the danger of the North Korean WMD program while deflecting attention from other components of this security dilemma. Richard Haass and Meghan O’Sullivan cite the 1994 Agreed Framework with North Korea as one example of “conditional engagement.”<sup>30</sup> They also claim that “the distinguishing feature of American engagement strategies is their reliance on the extension or provision of incentives to shape the behavior of countries.”<sup>31</sup> Despite the emphasis upon incentives, the militaristic etymology of “engagement” is difficult to escape. One of the common arguments in the foreign policy literature advocating engagement is the expectation of future military conflict; for instance, Victor Cha notes that “engagement is the most practical way to build a coalition capable of meting out meaningful punishment tomorrow.”<sup>32</sup> The logic is that a failed attempt at engagement would demonstrate North Korea’s unresponsiveness to peaceful overtures, thus mobilizing international support for military action. Yet, that particular discourse of engagement imports the philosophical assumptions of political realism in their most deterministic manifestation. The endgame absent North Korean acquiescence to American demands in engagement policies has already been written. Deployment of military force after failed engagement is not predestined, but it becomes

more likely when violence is prescribed as the primary alternative to engagement “incentives.” More significantly, the assumptions underlying engagement mobilize qualities common to both the labels “state of concern” and “rogue” by deflecting all responsibility for the WMD threat onto the North Korean Other. The fearsomeness of rhetoric describing the North Korean threat directs primary attention to the rhetorically effected approach of danger. U.S. culpability in motivating the pursuit of nuclear equalizers (e.g., to counterbalance American troop superiority in South Korea), and the North Korean desire for capital from missile sales, is evacuated at the same time that American military hegemony is vindicated as the ultimate collateral in the “diplomacy” of engagement. The persuasive power of fear in foreign policy deliberation thus helps to produce the “reality” addressed in foreign policy discourse by directing attention toward or away from various elements of the geopolitical situation.

The argument presented here is not intended to provide a comprehensive critical analysis of American foreign policy discourse regarding North Korean weapons of mass destruction. The rhetorical qualities of foreign policy analysis, however, demonstrate the impossibility of adequately capturing the essence of geopolitical behavior as a structurally determined system of state competition. Emotional appeals to fear, intended or not, in the language of international relations theory and foreign policy analysis inevitably inflect the meaning of the geopolitical “reality” therein described. Aristotle’s discussion of the persuasive effects of fear find additional support in a number of contemporary social psychology studies, and is highly applicable to modes of theorizing and analyzing international politics that emphasize the fearsome threats of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction facing the modern world. Thus, the claim by political realists like Hans Morgenthau to examine “human nature as it actually is”<sup>33</sup> must be revised to account for rhetoric as an unavoidable component of human nature. If humanity has any natural

and essential qualities, one of them is undoubtedly an epistemological inadequacy in relation to the objects of the world; humans lack a referential language and the cognitive faculties required to apprehend reality, including human nature, “as it actually is” in some transparent fashion. As Hans Blumenberg observes, “language is a set of instruments not for communicating information or truths, but rather, primarily, for the production of mutual understanding, agreement, or toleration, on which the actor depends. This is the root of ‘consensus’ as a basis for the concept of what is ‘real.’”<sup>34</sup> Some attention to the rhetorical operation of the language employed in foreign policy deliberation can be seen in critical readings of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, but broader rhetorical criticism of IR theory and policy analysis is necessary to understand the ways in which persuasive discourse constructs our knowledge of contemporary international security threats.

The contrast between the positivist epistemological assumptions of political realism and readings of world politics that emphasize the role of rhetoric in public decision-making demonstrates the very real ramifications of differing philosophies of communication. Attention to the rhetorical dimensions of communication shows how the persuasive force of fear in discursive representations of security threats produces what realists would call our knowledge of objective dangers out of the seeming nearness of a threat, the perceived proximity of which is induced partly by fear itself. In the context of foreign policy discourse purporting to analyze the nature of international conflict, the inevitably rhetorical qualities of ostensibly scientific narrative make a pure science of geopolitics impossible. An *art* of war, perhaps.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Some of the material presented in this paper appears, in different form, in my doctoral dissertation, “The Rhetoric of Terror: The Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction in American Foreign Policy Discourse” (University of Pittsburgh, 2003; available at [www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com)).
- <sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*, ed. Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996); *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor, and Ideology*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst, Robert L. Ivie, Philip Wander, and Robert L. Scott (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997); Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994); *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, ed. James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989).
- <sup>4</sup> See Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed., rev. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 8-9, 38; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 66, 127, 186; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 199-202, 227-28; Laurie M. Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993); Daniel Garst, “Thucydides and Neorealism,” *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (March 1989): 3; Laurie M. Johnson Bagby, “The Use and Abuse of Thucydides in International Relations,” *International Organization* 48 (Winter 1994): 131-32. Cf. Michael T. Clark, “Realism Ancient and Modern: Thucydides and International Relations,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 26 (September 1993): 491-94. There are significant differences among various realist perspectives, as there are between classical realism and neorealism. My concern in this paper, however, is with ontological and epistemological assumptions of interstate competition common to a broad array of realist and neorealist theories of international relations.

- <sup>5</sup> *The Complete Writings of Thucydides: The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Crawley (New York: Modern Library, 1951). All citations are from this edition and hereafter identified parenthetically in the text.
- <sup>6</sup> Robert G. Gilpin, "No One Loves a Political Realist," in *Realism: Restatements and Renewal*, 6.
- <sup>7</sup> See John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19 (winter 1994/95): 10; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 88-89; Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 7; Benjamin Frankel, "Restating the Realist Case: An Introduction," in *Realism: Restatements and Renewal*, ed. Benjamin Frankel (London: Frank Cass, 1996), xv.
- <sup>8</sup> See Mearsheimer, "False Promise," 10; Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5-10; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 133-34; Gilpin, *War and Change*, 50-55; Frankel, "Restating the Realist Case," xviii.
- <sup>9</sup> Bagby, "The Use and Abuse of Thucydides," 133.
- <sup>10</sup> Garst, "Thucydides and Neorealism," 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman, "Strategic Intelligence and Discursive Realities," in *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*, ed. Beer and Hariman (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1996), 391.
- <sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). All parenthetical citations from the *Rhetoric* refer to this edition.
- <sup>13</sup> Kennedy, trans. *Rhetoric*, 176.
- <sup>14</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *English Works*, ed. W. Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1839), VIII, xxi-xxii. Quoted in Garst, "Thucydides and Neorealism," 7.
- <sup>15</sup> Mearsheimer, "False Promise," 10-12.
- <sup>16</sup> Kennedy, footnote 43, 139.
- <sup>17</sup> Mearsheimer, "False Promise," 11.
- <sup>18</sup> Mearsheimer, "False Promise," 10.
- <sup>19</sup> One might object here that offensive military capability self-evidently denotes offensive intent. In some cases, this is undoubtedly true, but the issue at hand is the problematic assumption of

political realism that interstate competition is a natural law of geopolitics. Mearsheimer's assumption is almost tautological, such that just about any material asset (mineral resources, labor force, geography, etc.) could be considered as having potential offensive military utility, and becomes infinitely regressive if one attempts to theorize a political goal (however distant) in which everyone is not always already an enemy.

<sup>20</sup> Neta C. Crawford, "The Passion of World Politics," *International Security* 24 (Spring 2000): 140.

<sup>21</sup> Arne Öhman, "Fear and Anxiety as Emotional Phenomena: Clinical Phenomenology, Evolutionary Perspectives, and Information Processing Mechanisms," in *The Handbook of Emotions*, ed. Michael Lewis and Jeanette M. Haviland (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), 524.

<sup>22</sup> Crawford, "Passion of World Politics," 147.

<sup>23</sup> See Michael Klare, *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws: America's Search for a New Foreign Policy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> See Meghan O'Sullivan, "Brookings Institution Press Briefing," *Federal News Service* (13 July 2000), Lexis/Nexis, and "Sanctioning 'Rogue States': A Strategy in Decline?," *Harvard International Review* 22 (Summer 2000): 56-60; Michael T. Klare, "An Anachronistic Policy: The Strategic Obsolescence of the 'Rogue Doctrine,'" *Harvard International Review* 22 (Summer 2000): 46-51.

<sup>25</sup> Paula Niedenthal, Jamin B. Halberstadt, and Åse H. Innes-Ker, "Emotional Response Categorization," *Psychological Review* 106 (April 1999): 338.

<sup>26</sup> Madeleine Albright, "Madeleine K. Albright Is Interviewed on 'The Diane Rehm Show,'" *FDCH Political Transcripts* (19 June 2000), Lexis/Nexis.

<sup>27</sup> Wyn Bowen, "Rogues No More," *The World Today* 56 (August/September 2000): 15.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Boucher, "U.S. Department of State Daily Press Briefing," DPB #61 (19 June 2000), transcript available at <http://secretary.state.gov/www/briefings/0006/000619db.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Richard N. Haass and Meghan L. O'Sullivan, "Engaging Problem Countries," *Brookings Institution Policy Brief*, no. 61 (June 2000), available online at [http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2000/06sanctions\\_haass.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2000/06sanctions_haass.aspx). The Agreed Framework required North Korea to end its nuclear weapons program in exchange for the subsidized

construction of two light-water reactors, supplies of heavy fuel oil from the U.S. until the reactors are completed, and a promise to lift American sanctions.

<sup>31</sup> Richard N. Haass and Meghan L. O'Sullivan, "Terms of Engagement: Alternatives to Punitive Policies," *Survival* 42 (Summer 2000): 114.

<sup>32</sup> Victor D. Cha, "The Rationale for 'Enhanced' Engagement of North Korea," *Asian Survey* 39 (November/December 1999): 859. See also Victor D. Cha, "Engaging North Korea Credibly," *Survival* 42 (Summer 2000): 146-7; Haass and O'Sullivan, "Terms of Engagement," 116.

<sup>33</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Hans Blumenberg, "An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric," in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation*, ed. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 433.

KEVIN J. AYOTTE  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION  
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH