

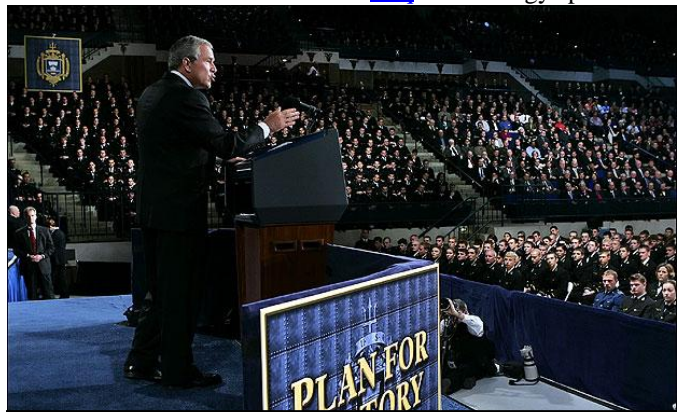
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Bush's Speech on Iraq War Echoes Voice of an Analyst

By [SCOTT SHANE](#)

WASHINGTON, Dec. 3 - There could be no doubt about the theme of President Bush's [Iraq](#) war strategy speech on Wednesday at the Naval Academy. He used the word victory 15 times in the address; "Plan for Victory" signs crowded the podium he spoke on; and the word heavily peppered the accompanying 35-page National Security Council document titled, "Our National Strategy for Victory in Iraq."

Although White House officials said many federal departments had contributed to the document, its relentless focus on the theme of victory strongly reflected a new voice in the administration: Peter D. Feaver, a Duke University political scientist who joined the N.S.C. staff as a special adviser in June and has closely studied public opinion on the war.



President Bush used the word victory 15 times in a speech about Iraq at the United States Naval Academy, reflecting public opinion research.
Photo Doug Mills / New York Times

Despite the president's oft-stated aversion to polls, Dr. Feaver was recruited after he and Duke colleagues presented the administration with an analysis of polls about the Iraq war in 2003 and 2004. They concluded that Americans would support a war with mounting casualties on one condition: that they believed it would ultimately succeed.

That finding, which is questioned by other political scientists, was clearly behind the victory theme in the speech and the plan, in which the word appears six times in the table of contents alone, including sections titled "Victory in Iraq is a Vital U.S. Interest" and "Our Strategy for Victory is Clear."

"This is not really a strategy document from the Pentagon about fighting the insurgency," said Christopher F. Gelpi, Dr. Feaver's colleague at Duke and co-author of the research on American tolerance for casualties. "The Pentagon doesn't need the president to give a speech and post a document on the White House Web site to know how to fight the insurgents. The document is clearly targeted at American public opinion."

Dr. Gelpi said he had not discussed the document with Dr. Feaver, who declined to be interviewed.

Dr. Feaver, 43, who is also a lieutenant commander in the United States Naval Reserve, wrote three books on civilian-military relations. He worked on military issues on President Clinton's National Security Council staff in 1993 and 1994, but he has written critically of Mr. Clinton and other Democrats and sympathetically of President Bush in *The New York Times* and other publications.

Last year in an op-ed article in *The Washington Post*, noting Mr. Bush's determination to invade Iraq in 2003 in the face of doubts, Dr. Feaver wrote, "Determined commanders in chief have the mind-set and the resolve to act in spite of the political climate and military resistance."

He was recruited by the White House this year as public support for the war declined steadily in the face of mounting casualties and costs. A *Newsweek* poll this month showed that just 30 percent of those interviewed said they approved of the president's handling of the war, while 65 percent disapproved - an almost exact reversal of the numbers in May 2003, shortly after the toppling of [Saddam Hussein](#).

A CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll conducted Wednesday underscored the need for a clear, straightforward summary of the administration's Iraq policy. Asked whether they thought President Bush had a plan to achieve victory in Iraq, 55 percent said no and 41 percent said yes.

Based on their study of poll results from the first two years of the war, Dr. Gelpi, Dr. Feaver and Jason Reifler, then a Duke graduate student, took issue with what they described as the conventional wisdom since the Vietnam War - that Americans will support military operations only if American casualties are few.

They found that public tolerance for the human cost of combat depended on two factors: a belief that the war was a worthy cause, and even more important, a belief that the war was likely to be successful.

In their paper, "Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq," which is to be published soon in the journal *International Security*, Dr. Feaver and his colleagues wrote: "Mounting casualties did not produce a reflexive collapse in public support. The Iraq case suggests that under the right conditions, the public will continue to support military operations even when they come with a relatively high human cost."

The role of Dr. Feaver in preparing the strategy document came to light through a quirk of technology. In a portion of the document usually hidden from public view but accessible with a few keystrokes, the plan posted on the White House Web site showed the document's originator, or "author" in the software's designation, to be "feaver-p."

According to Matt Rozen, a spokesman for Adobe Systems, which makes the Acrobat software used to prepare the document, that entry indicated that Dr. Feaver created the original document that, with additions and editing, was posted on the Web. There is no way to know from the text how much he wrote.

Asked about who wrote the document, a White House official said Dr. Feaver had helped conceive and draft the plan, though the official said a larger role belonged to another N.S.C. staff member, Meghan L. O'Sullivan, the deputy national security adviser for Iraq and Afghanistan, and her staff. The official would describe the individual roles only on condition of anonymity because his superiors wanted the strategy portrayed as a unified administration position.

Frederick Jones, an N.S.C. spokesman, said the document "reflects the broad interagency effort under way in Iraq" and "incorporates all aspects of American power," including political and economic as well as military efforts. He said major contributions to the plan came from the Departments of Defense, State, Treasury and Homeland Security, as well as the director of National Intelligence. In his news briefing on Wednesday, the White House spokesman, Scott McClellan, characterized the document as an unclassified, publicly accessible explanation of strategies that the administration has been pursuing in Iraq since 2003.

In a news briefing from Iraq on Friday, Lt. Gen. Martin Dempsey, the top American military official in charge of training Iraqi troops, surprised some reporters by saying he first saw "Our Strategy for Victory in Iraq" when it was released to the public on Wednesday.

The White House official said that while not all top officers in Iraq had necessarily seen the strategy document, Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Thursday, "I have had multiple opportunities to read this document, to critique it, to send it back," with the goal of making "sure that what it says is a) accurate, and b) executable."

The Feaver-Gelpi hypothesis on public opinion about the war is the subject of serious debate among political scientists. John Mueller, of Ohio State University, said he did not believe that the president's speech or the victory plan - which he described as "very Feaverish, or Feaveresque" - could produce more than a fleeting improvement in public support for the war, because it was likely to erode further as casualties accumulated.

"As the costs go up, support goes down," he said, citing patterns from the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Dr. Gelpi, of Duke, said approval of the president's handling of the war was probably close to being as low as it could go, because his core supporters were unlikely ever to abandon him. But he said the poll numbers were likely to improve only if enough Americans saw evidence that the Iraq strategy was succeeding.

Dr. Gelpi added, however, that the speech and the strategy document "hit exactly on the themes our research said they should."