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War and/of Words:
Constructing WMD in US Foreign Policy

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This article provides an examination of the use of concepts—specifically "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD)—in security discourse. There are two key aspects to this discussion. First, the paper disputes current perceptions of WMD conceptual meaning. By analyzing the origins of the concept within the context of US foreign policy c.1945–48, it will be shown that, far from the fixed concept this has been assumed to be, WMD has been defined in a wide variety of ways. Second, this paper will demonstrate that these shifts in conceptual meaning are the strategic and intentional product of security actors. In the case of the concept's emergence, US policymakers exploited the concept as a political resource where its selective definition created an opportunity to manipulate and shape the post-Hiroshima arms-control regime. This article will discuss this in relation to the work of Quentin Skinner—in particular, his conception of the "innovating ideologist."

This article provides an examination of the use of concepts—specifically "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD)—in security discourse. WMD comprises one of the most prominent and influential concepts within security studies, not least in respect to the controversial justification of US military action in Iraq. In particular, the question of whether or not Saddam Hussein possessed WMD—whereby an affirmative claim was central to US foreign policy in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks—has characterized an entire generation of politics. Despite the significance of the concept, however, this article will show that current understanding of WMD is fundamentally limited; specifically, the related issues of how the concept is defined and how

that definition plays into the scope of security activities have yet to be fully addressed. Although analysts have attempted to identify a workable conception of WMD, this conception is built on an assumption that meaning can be reduced to a single interpretation or at least that it can be discussed in such general terms as to effectively treat the detail of conceptual definition as irrelevant to wider analysis. In contrast, this article will demonstrate that WMD definition—the selection of weapons as mass destructive—is not fixed; different weapons are included at different times. More specifically, this paper argues that this variation, especially where it relates to the question of why actors recognize certain weapons as WMD within given contexts, is elemental to understanding the concept, and that it challenges existing perceptions of its construction and use in political discourse.

Here, conceptual variation is understood as the product of strategic construction. Distinct versions of meaning emerge as actors seek to define the concept in ways that best serve their own political ambitions. Where the classification (or not) of specific weapons as "mass destructive" sets out different courses of political action, so this creates an incentive for actors to construct meaning—to incorporate or exclude particular armaments—in order to influence which course is adopted. WMD is not merely an expression of extreme threat, but a strategic resource. Critically, this is not to suggest that all incidences of conceptual employment are necessarily acts designed to manipulate security policy. Yet where this article pays special attention to moments of conceptual change and the contextualized construction of meaning, particularly where these overlooked examples of use provide new insight into the WMD concept, it demonstrates the potential for the political exploitation of conceptual definition. Within this context, failing to consider the precise detail of definition means these key moments of linguistic manipulation are lost, and the true nature of the concept's employment ignored. As such, analysis must move away from static assumptions of meaning; otherwise understanding of the concept, as well as wider discussions of WMD-related concerns, can only ever tell a very small part of the story.

In discussing this, the paper focuses on one particular definition frequently held up as definitive. This is a 1948 definition issued by the UN: WMD as chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons (CBRN).[1] More than any other interpretation of meaning, this is the one that has most influenced conceptual understanding. Yet in using archival research to detail the events leading up to this statement on meaning, specifically from the perspective of US foreign policy, the article demonstrates that this understanding is not fixed or absolute. In fact, the UN declaration represents just

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[1] W. Seth Carus, for example, presents this as a landmark definition, specifically setting CBRN as definitive at the international and foreign policy level. See W. Seth Carus, "Defining 'Weapons of Mass Destruction,'" Occasional Paper no. 8 (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction, National Defense University Press, 2006).

one in a series of ongoing reconceptualizations of the WMD concept at this time; there was no clear consensus surrounding CBRN. Specifically, this plurality of use will be explained with reference to security actors' manipulation of meaning. This is the claim that US policymakers constructed the concept to deliberately shape arms-control discourse, especially to restrain Soviet ambitions, as the world descended into Cold War politics. Subsequently, it is concluded that WMD meaning cannot be divorced from the interests of individual actors where this reflected and aided the realization of those interests. In explaining this, the article draws on the work of Quentin Skinner, particularly his conceptualization of the "innovating ideologist."

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

WMD is widely recognized as a problematic concept.[2] Specifically, it is unclear how such diverse weapons can be jointly classified as a distinct concern. Comparison of CBRN reveals a "disparity of effect."[3] That is, the levels of destruction caused by each form of WMD—supposedly the basis of collective categorization—are claimed to be (1) not equivalent and (2) insufficient to justify the "WMD" label. Simply put, not all weapons of mass destruction cause mass destruction. Although it is widely accepted that nuclear weapons are mass destructive, the likelihood that other forms of armament conventionally referred to as WMD will inflict comparable devastation is subject to dispute; non-nuclear devices are not guaranteed to create the extreme impact associated with the WMD classification. Indeed, many analysts describe nuclear weapons as the only "real" WMD.[4] Critically, this disparity is considered so extensive as to invalidate the entire concept, especially where the conflation of such distinct threats potentially leads to miscalculation in security policy.[5]

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[2] Gregg Easterbrook, "Term Limits: The Meaningless of 'WMD,'" *The New Republic* 227, no. 1 (7 October 2002); Philip Morrison and Kosta Tsipis, "Rightful Names," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 59, no. 3 (May 2003); Toby Archer, "The Emperor Has Some Clothes On: Fairy Tales, Scary Tales and Weapons of Mass Destruction," Working Papers no. 46 (Helsinki: Finish Institute of International Affairs, 2004); Allison Macfarlane, "All Weapons of Mass Destruction Are Not Equal," *Audits of the Conventional Wisdom* 5, no. 8 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Center for International Studies, 2004); George Perkovich, "Deconflating 'WMD,'" Paper no. 17, commissioned by Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, Stockholm, 2004; Wolfgang K.H. Panofsky, "A Damaging Designation: The Deadly Semantics of 'Weapons of Mass Destruction,'" *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 63, no. 1 (January 2007).

[3] Jeremy Stocker, "The United Kingdom and Nuclear Deterrence," Adelphi Paper no. 386 (London: IISS, 2007), 46.

[4] Lynn Klotz and Edward Sylvester, *Breeding Bio Insecurity: How U.S. Biodefense Is Exporting Fear, Globalizing Risk, and Making Us All Less Secure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 83–84.

[5] Wolfgang K.H. Panofsky, "Dismantling the Concept of 'Weapons of Mass Destruction,'" *Arms Control Today* 28, no. 3 (January/February 1998); Christian Enemark, "Farewell to WMD: The Language and Science of Mass Destruction," *Contemporary Security Policy* 32, no. 2 (August 2011).

Similarly, it is argued that the concept does not reflect the capacity of conventional weapons to inflict extreme destruction. This capacity is evident in cases such as World War II aerial bombing raids on population centers such as Dresden and the 1994 Rwandan genocide, which has been described as the most "efficient" mass killing since Hiroshima.[6] The high fatality rates associated with these events are problematic within the context of WMD, in that they appear quantitatively consistent with expectations of mass destruction. Indeed, the similarity has seen the language of WMD employed to conceptualize the destructive potential associated with conventional devices. For example, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan described small arms as WMD where they cause approximately 500,000 deaths every year.[7] Moreover, landmines have been repeatedly referred to as WMD or, more specifically, "weapons of mass destruction in slow motion," in order to express their extreme and widespread impact.[8] Analysts, therefore, have argued that CBRN cannot be differentiated from mass-scale conventional assault; the significant overlap in destructive effect is too extensive.[9]

Problems also exist in attempts to classify WMD that do not rely (at least primarily) on destructive capability, specifically that WMD are, in comparison with conventional weaponry, more barbaric in effect, indiscriminate, or inherently immoral.[10] In all these ways WMD are perceived as distinct. In analyzing each in turn, however, none has succeeded in providing a guaranteed basis for definition. In terms of barbaric effect, Ronald Higgins argues, "However dreadful, a death from poison gas or smallpox is not obviously more horrific than a fiery death from napalm or through multiple lacerations from antipersonnel mines or carpet-bombing."[11] Furthermore, it is difficult to understand CBRN as exclusively indiscriminate, especially where conventional devices such as landmines constitute a clear example of weaponry widely accepted to be indiscriminate in motivation as well as effect,

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[6] On Dresden, see Beatrice Heuser, *The Bomb: Nuclear Weapons in their Historical, Strategic and Ethical Context* (London: Longman, 2000), 22. On Rwanda, see Ronald Higgins, "Weapons of Mass Destruction: Rhetoric and Realities" (London: International Security Information Service, 2002), 4.

[7] Kofi Annan, "'We the Peoples:' The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century" (New York: United Nations, 2000), 52.

[8] On landmines as WMD, see "The Honorable John D. Holum, Director U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency Remarks at the United Nations, First Committee, New York, NY," 16 October 1996, available at http://www.state.gov/www/global/arms/speeches/holum/holumun.html. On landmines as WMD in slow motion, see Kenneth Roth, "Sidelined on Human Rights: America Blows Out," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 2 (March/April 1998): 2.

[9] John Sislin, "A Convergence of Weapons," *Peace Review* 10, no. 3 (1998).

[10] On WMD's barbaric effect, see R. Everett Langford, *Introduction to Weapons of Mass Destruction: Radiological, Chemical and Biological* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 1. On WMD's indiscriminate nature and immorality, see Sohail H. Hashmi and Steven P. Lee, "Introduction," in *Ethics of Mass Destruction: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, ed. Sohail H. Hashmi and Steven P. Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9–10.

[11] Higgins, "Weapons of Mass Destruction," 3.

discussed as "weapons of indiscriminate mass terror."[12] This similarity is also reflected in the morality of weapons in that it is "hard to see a moral distinction between being killed by gas and being blown up."[13] As such, the logical conclusion of these criticisms is that any analytic discrimination between the two categories of armament (conventional and unconventional) created by the WMD concept is fundamentally unsustainable.

Of course, the reality is that there is some validity in each of the ways WMD has been defined. These weapons can cause extensive levels of destruction. They do appear to stand out from "traditional" technologies of violence—e.g., guns, explosives—and they can be efficient weapons of indiscriminate killing. Yet there is a fundamental difference between recognizing that WMD can exhibit certain characteristics and using those attributes as the absolute basis of definition—an unchanging criterion of classification that applies in all circumstances—especially where this relates to the exclusion of conventional devices. There has yet to be a satisfactory answer as to what a sustainable and infallible definition should look like. In response, the debate on conceptual meaning has focused primarily on identifying the complexities associated with this failure and the problems that the concept's use introduces into international security discourse.

Yet this article identifies a further issue with WMD conceptual meaning, specifically that this same debate, as well as the wider analysis of WMD more generally, commits to interpretations based on a set group of weapons. That is, it is assumed the concept can be discussed in reference to a specific list of armaments (typically CBRN, although others limit this to nuclear, biological, and chemical devices). Discussion about WMD meaning concerns the justification of a preexisting group of armaments. Interestingly, this not only applies to those who support the existence of an ideal conceptual specification, but also those who seek to show this approach is inaccurate. Both sides tend to rely on the same expectation that, although conceptual specification may be subject to challenge and debate, the weapons included can be discussed in fixed terms, if only as a matter of convenience. As this article will demonstrate, however, the armaments identified as WMD have varied considerably. From nuclear weapons to naval installations, the types of threat discussed as mass destructive are highly diverse. Consequently, the debate on what "mass destruction" itself is or is not has been extensive, but it misses a major aspect of conceptual definition: what weapons are included? More specifically, when are they included, why are they included, and what does the lack of consensus inherent to this reveal about the concept's use?

To put this in context, consider the debate on the stigmatization of WMD. Despite the problems of definition identified above, there remains

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[12] Asmeret Asefaw Behre, "Politicizing Indiscriminate Terror: Imagining an Inclusive Framework for the Anti-Landmines Movement," *The Journal of Environment and Development* 14, no. 3 (2005): 375.
[13] Easterbrook, "Term Limits," 22.

strong evidence of a stigma disassociating these from conventional arms.[14] Indeed, a 2006 report by the WMD Commission, while accepting problematic differences exist between WMD, effectively uses this sense of stigmatization to overcome these and retain the classification: " . . . all three categories [nuclear, biological and chemical] fall under the same stigma, which makes it logical to deal with them as a group."[15] In this way, WMD have clearly been marked as distinct and have political leverage as such. In explaining this, both Nina Tannenwald and Richard Price have written excellent discussions on the normative separation of WMD.[16] Using historical evidence, they demonstrate how certain weapons have become stigmatized as distinct under the banner of "mass destruction," particularly in terms of the use of those weapons. Indeed, Tannenwald argues that the 1948 UN statement on conceptual meaning at the heart of this article was fundamental in establishing the discursive category of WMD from which the taboo emerged.[17] Yet, although both Tannenwald and Price adopt a constructivist approach that allows for a non-essentialist reading of WMD meaning, their actual discussion of conceptual definition is relatively static. The interpretation inherent to the 1948 declaration is assumed to comprise a workable account of conceptual meaning. As such, the histories they construct are ones that detail various uses of the concept—particularly where these continue to draw distinctions within political understanding of weaponry—but do not address whether these individual incidences of employment consistently relate to the same weapons as mass destructive.

This aspect of research is what this article takes issue with. Critically, it does not seek to dispute the work of Tannenwald or Price. Indeed, their research makes a vital contribution in understanding the nature of the concept: how it segregates discourse and the implications this has for how certain weapons are perceived. It is also extremely valuable in explaining conventions in meaning surrounding WMD (discussed in more depth below). But the question this article does ask of this—and the rest of the literature on WMD conceptual meaning—is: What can we learn about the concept if we introduce a detailed focus on definition, specifically the idea that definition can differ at any given time? How does our understanding of the concept change, or at the very least expand, when we prioritize the exact content of

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[14] Richard Falkenrath, "Confronting Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Terrorism," *Survival* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 53.

[15] Hans Blix et al., *Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms* (Stockholm: Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, 2006), 23.

[16] Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Richard M. Price, *The Chemical Weapons Taboo* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[17] Tannenwald, *Nuclear Taboo*, 98, 363. Price makes a similar statement with respect to including chemical weapons in the 1948 document. See Price, *Chemical Weapons Taboo*, 144.

conceptual meaning instead of relying on essentialist, or simply convenient, assumptions that certain weapons are WMD or that those weapons are so typically included as to preclude the need for a case-by-case analysis? What have we missed?

At one level, this is about ensuring that the debate addresses all aspects of conceptual interpretation. Failing to look at the detail of definition sets up boundaries within which we only see part of the picture. Consequently, there are key questions that are not even being asked, let alone answered. For example, in the case of Tannenwald and Price, the idea that the conceptual selection of weapons is unfixed suggests there may be dynamics surrounding the taboo that can be effectively overridden. These weapons still carry with them elements of stigma; however, they can be removed from the classification of WMD (or other armaments included), and the limitations of that stigma can be contested. As such, it must be explained why, or at least the conceptual plurality should be acknowledged.

At another level, however, this relates to our very understanding of WMD meaning. Viewing definition in these detailed terms has significant implications that challenge existing perceptions of the concept. This happens where, in explaining variation, definition is presented as a question of why a political actor adopts one set of weapons as mass destructive over a hypothetical other. Or more specifically, as argued here, what are the strategic motivations for an actor's selection of certain armaments? This article asserts that the identified plurality of use is the product of the strategic use of language—a situation in which specific constructions of the WMD concept are deliberately employed to realize political ambition—and it will be shown that this conceptualization of use is integral to understanding definition, especially where the WMD concept derives meaning from it. Consequently, the real question here is not whether any form of conceptual specification is or is not sufficient to underpin the WMD categorization, but rather what an actor intends the concept to mean, how it is politically constructed, and for what purposes. Ultimately, this is about changing current understanding of WMD to view definition as a political act in itself and not merely a form of conceptual clarification.

CONCEPTUALIZING CONCEPTUAL CHANGE

This understanding of conceptual use is drawn from the work of intellectual historian Quentin Skinner, who argues that actors play a significant role in the construction of meaning. Indeed, meaning itself is the product of contextualized actor intention. Any statement "is inescapably the embodiment of a particular intention, on a particular occasion, addressed to the solution of a particular problem, and thus specific to its situation in a way that it can only

be naïve to try to transcend."[18] This in turn is connected to Skinner's non-essentialist reading of linguistic expression. The construction of language is inherently evaluative: it expresses belief, objectives, and, critically, intent.[19] Consequently, language cannot be reduced to a descriptive function or as a form of "verbal behavior" expressing attitudes and opinions that exist irrespective of language. Language is not purely an instrument for expressing thought, but thought within its own right. Specifically, Skinner discusses this in terms of speech act theory. Taken from J. L. Austin, this is the claim that an utterance—or the manifestation of an utterance within a text—is an intrinsically "performative" act.[20] As the title of Austin's book says (or rather, given the discussion here, "argues"), we "do things with words." Subsequently, actor intention is key to identifying conceptual meaning, where this is understood as the interpretation the user sought to convey and where concepts derive meaning from that use.[21]

Within this context, Skinner's work is not simply a discussion of conceptual construction, but also of conceptual change. Change results from political struggle, moments of conceptual uncertainty termed by Skinner as points of "semantic confusion."[22] "Something" happens to undermine prior understandings by destabilizing existing conceptions of meaning and necessitating the reconstruction of language and ideational understanding in order for the actor(s) to make sense of the new conceptual environment. Critically, these struggles are presented as moments not just of reconceptualization, but of political innovation. "Conceptual change is considered one imaginative consequence of political actors criticizing and attempting to resolve the contradictions which they discover or generate in the complex web of their beliefs, actions, and practices as they try to understand and change the world around them."[23] Conceptual shifts are not merely a reflection of political change or the rationalist reassessment of a material situation, but an agency-driven response by political actors.

Importantly, this construction of meaning can be strategic. Actors may deliberately construct and apply concepts in ways that capitalize on or modify existing conceptual meanings for the purpose of realizing political aims.

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[18] Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 50.

[19] Quentin Skinner, "A Reply to My Critics," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 274; Quentin Skinner, "Rhetoric and Conceptual Change," *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought* 3 (1999): 61.

[20] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 6; Quentin Skinner, "On Performing and Explaining Linguistic Action," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 21, no. 82 (1971).

[21] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding;" Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts," *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (1972): 400–401.

[22] Quentin Skinner, "Language and Political Change," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Terence Ball et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 17.

[23] James Farr, "Understanding Conceptual Change Politically," in *Political Innovation*, 25.

This includes forms of manipulation and the excuse of "untoward social actions."[24] In discussing this, Skinner describes any actor who engages in such behavior as an "innovating ideologist." Actors select or construct conceptual interpretations in ways that serve their political ambitions, promote their own self-interest, and manipulate the political space in which they function. They influence politics through the concepts—and the specific meaning of those concepts—they choose to employ. Indeed, Skinner says that the more actors are prepared to enact shifts in conceptual meaning, the more likely it is they will achieve their ambitions. Actors who allow themselves to be bound by conceptual meanings already in place are those who will be restrained in the scope of their aims.

Critically, it is acknowledged here that this intent-centric approach will not be uncontroversial. For many, attributing meaning to intention is a difficult position to sustain, particularly for those who view the constructed world as constituting the actor, a space in which actors possess little or no agency with respect to discursive understanding. This view differs widely across the many IR divisions that have incorporated discourse analysis—including poststructuralists, postmodernists, some feminists, and social constructivists—although one of the most prominent, and possibly the most relevant to this study (where it effectively deals with a concept based on a division of the conventional and unconventional), has been the adoption of the "play of difference."[25] Drawing on Jacques Derrida's *differance*, this is the proposition that language is a complex system of signs and signification that lie in binary relationship to each other. These effectively supersede intention in that words possess meanings an actor cannot control; what the actor intends is secondary to, if not governed entirely by, an overriding framework of language.

Even for those who accept that intention can influence political outcomes, actors are still perceived as so constrained by social and linguistic forces as to make intention irrelevant to analysis. Ronald Krebs and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson highlight three factors hindering rhetorical innovation: (1) there must be some element of continuity within discourse for political action to occur (even where actors assert that language is ultimately unfixed); (2) rhetorical innovation necessitates a high level of material resources, time, and effort, in contrast to the relatively low-cost adoption of existing discursive resources; and (3) innovative discourses are likely to be drowned out

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[24] Quentin Skinner, "Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action," *Political Theory* 2, no. 3 (August 1974): 293.

[25] Roxanne Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (June 1999); Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2006); Charlotte Epstein, *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an Anti-Whaling Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

or marginalized by existing ones.[26] Their argument is also presented as a case of effective communication in that actors must express themselves in accepted terms, otherwise they will be incomprehensible to their audience. Consequently, Krebs and Jackson recommend that analysts make a concerted effort to move away from intention as an explanatory consideration where such factors "are *analytically* less useful than models in which preferences need not be specified or ranked."[27] Intention may have causal implications, but the scarcity of, as well as the sheer complexity in understanding, agent motivation is so significant as to make this redundant to analysis.

Yet Skinner recognizes these pressures of social and linguistic convention, accepting that they restrict actors, especially where this relates to comprehensibility.[28] Crucially, however, he also portrays it as reductionist to view conventions purely within the context of restraint: "We are of course embedded in practices and constrained by them. But those practices owe their dominance in part to the power of our normative language to hold them in place, and it is always open to us to employ the resources of our language to undermine as well as to underpin those practices. We may be freer than we sometimes suppose."[29] In this way, conventions can also be employed to strategic ends, including making new conceptual interpretations understood by others. Existing meanings are reshaped or applied in creative ways in order to ensure conceptual change makes sense. As such, conventions are the tools of the innovating ideologist in instituting conceptual change and the realization of political ambitions through rhetorical strategies. Language restricts, yet it is also the vehicle of transformation. Indeed, what this article will show is that the moments of rhetorical innovation Krebs and Jackson believe are so unlikely are perhaps not as rare as they assume. Or at least that when they do occur, those moments can have such significant implications for what happens in politics that ruling them out on the basis of scarcity or complexity risks ignoring key developments within security policy.

Although alternative approaches are recognized here, therefore, Skinner still provides an effective basis for explaining strategic use of the WMD concept. Not least where Skinner is committed to an approach that explains the historical development of concepts—a key aspect of this study—his theoretical framework complements this article's demonstration that actors can

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[26] Ronald R Krebs and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "Twisting Tongues and Twisting Arms: The Power of Political Rhetoric," *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 1 (March 2007): 45–46.

[27] Ibid., 41.

[28] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 49; Quentin Skinner, "Conventions and the Understanding of Speech Acts," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20, no. 79 (April 1970): 130; Quentin Skinner, "Hermeneutics and the Role of History," *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 216.

[29] Quentin Skinner. "Seeing Things Their Way," in *Vision of Politics: Volume I*, *Regarding Method*, ed. Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.

manipulate political language in order to fulfill their own political ambi-
tions.[30] Critically, and this point cannot be stressed too greatly, this article
does not seek to show that every act of conceptual use is intentional, manip-
ulative, or strategic. Yet where there is a fundamental focus here on the pro-
cess of conceptual change—specifically a focus that looks primarily at what
actors were attempting to achieve through selective definition, as opposed
to only at a Derridean conception of how the actors' audience understood
them or interpreted their reference to meaning—this is the claim that actors
are capable of modifying, or at the very least attempting to modify, conven-
tional understandings of language during moments of semantic confusion. In
line with this, Skinner's innovating ideologist comprises a beneficial model
for comprehending how actors' motivations can shape the language they
employ. Within this context, this article will now show how and why this
model is so valuable in understanding the WMD concept.

THE NEW WARFARE OF MASS DESTRUCTION

The first documented reference to weapons of mass destruction appeared
in a 1937 *London Times* commentary by William Lang, Archbishop of Can-
terbury. The address was a concerned response to contemporary acts of
extensive destruction, specifically the aerial assault on Guernica during the
Spanish Civil War and military bombing raids on China as part of the Second
Sino-Japanese War. Within this context, the focus was on the future and
the more expansive levels of destruction achievable with new and advanced
forms of weaponry. Lang wrote, "Who can think at this present time without
a sickening of the heart of the appalling slaughter, the suffering, the manifold
misery brought by war to Spain and to China? Who can think without horror
of what another widespread war would mean, waged as it would be with
all the new *weapons of mass destruction*?"[31]

Lang uses these events to identify the emergence of a more destruc-
tive trend in warfare. Indeed, at this time, Guernica was a byword for fears
that conflict had entered a devastating new era. In the attack of 26 April
1937, German Luftwaffe and Italian Aviazione Legionaria planes bombarded
the small Spanish town with incendiary devices for several hours, allegedly
killing around 1,600 people. The use of incendiaries—as opposed to con-
ventional explosives—was critical in that this was seen as an "intention to

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[30] Christian Reus-Smit has already highlighted that Skinner provides a valuable resource in under-
standing historical approaches to IR. See Christian Reus-Smit, "Reading History through Constructivist
Eyes," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (December 2008).

[31] William Lang, "Archbishop's Appeal: Individual Will and Action: Guarding Personality," *London
Times*, 28 December 1937 (emphasis added).

obliterate Guernica."[32] The attackers did not simply want to damage the town: they wanted to annihilate it. There was an inherent and unique desire to create devastation on an extreme scale, a desire that not only exceeded the levels of destruction previously experienced in combat, but also exceeded the boundaries of acceptability through the targeting of civilians. Conflict was no longer confined to the battlefield. Whereas war was previously assumed an act that happened to soldiers within a designated area of combat, it now incorporated—indeed, actively targeted—non-combatants. In this way, Guernica appeared to epitomize the emergence of a very different form of warfare in which the mass-scale extermination of civilian life was now not merely a possibility, but an aim.

Equating this with a specific concept of WMD, however, is difficult. Although Lang drew on a conceptualization of "mass destruction," an idea of the extreme and widespread extermination of life, this was a concept divorced from explicit weapons systems. It was not a statement on identified armaments, but rather a wider expression of how war itself was now waged. As such, although many view Guernica as the first incidence of conceptual use,[33] there is no evidence to suggest the archbishop's inclusion of the word "weapons" was anything other than a personal interpretation or, more likely, the coincidental use of the word to specify technical issues pertaining to the creation of extreme destructive effect. Either way, this was not a conceptual understanding of WMD legitimized by political or public consensus or formalized policy. Yet despite this, the idea of inhumane and indiscriminate mass death would still set the parameters for the weapons-centric interpretation of WMD that would emerge c.1945, specifically where the model of devastation manifest in Lang's commentary distinguished key ideational boundaries relating to the idea that certain forms of harm are intolerable and constitute a discrete concern as such. It was this emergent stigma that would provide a foundation for understanding a weapon that would vastly surpass the horrific devastation envisaged even by Lang: the atomic bomb.

WMD After Hiroshima

> The explosion of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, is thought to have ended an era of history. This event may be of greater concern in the histories of the distant future than World War II.[34]
>
> William Fielding Ogburn

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[32] Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press, 1994), 125.

[33] See, for example, Ido Oren and Ty Solomon, "WMD: Words of Mass Distraction" (unpublished manuscript, 2009), 13.

[34] William Fielding Ogburn, "Sociology and the Atom," *American Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 4 (January 1946): 267.

As Ogburn's quote demonstrates, the use of nuclear weapons at Hiroshima was acknowledged as transformative even at the time of the strike. The consequences were so extreme they "loosened the bolts which held together basic thinking in the social sciences."[35] Specifically, Hiroshima represented a more extensive level of destructive effect than anything experienced before: "The Atomic bomb changed the parameters of lethality forever."[36] This included the terrible destruction associated with aerial bombardment. Forest Waller and Michael George argue that "the nuclear attacks of 1945 reduced the incendiary air raids to an historical footnote."[37] Importantly, this new destructive capacity underpinned claims conflict had (once again) changed. Guernica had questioned the boundaries of warfare; Hiroshima had completely redrawn them. At the heart of this was the recognition by US policymakers that, unlike conventional conflict, nuclear war could not be won: "... if the atomic bomb does not abolish war it will bring civilization down in ashes."[38] Consequently, Hiroshima was understood as a watershed in security.

Specifically, this understanding of nuclear weapons was constructed as a question of arms control. This was not simply the conceptualization of a new and uniquely destructive threat, but the control of that threat. Nuclear weapons were so devastating they could not be divorced from or exist in the absence of restrictive regimes governing their use, whether that was understood as the denial of weapons to states other than the United States in order to maintain the nuclear monopoly, international sharing of nuclear knowledge, or a commitment to universal disarmament. This emphasis on control was a consistent theme in President Harry Truman's rhetoric surrounding the emergence of the nuclear age. For example, in his Potsdam Conference report he said, "The atomic bomb is too dangerous to be loose in a lawless world."[39] Elsewhere, he explicitly presented Hiroshima as a sign that new forms of multilateral cooperation were necessary to address the presence of nuclear weapons within the international system.[40]

Significantly, however, this sentiment would not remain limited to nuclear concerns. Although the atomic bomb instigated a new debate on the control of extreme destruction, this was soon widened out to other weapons. This was first formalized in a November 1945 communiqué issued by US president Harry Truman, British prime minister Clement Atlee, and Canadian

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[35] Philip Jessup, "Development of International Law by the United Nations," *American Journal of International Law* 39, no. 4 (October 1945): 756.

[36] Chris Hables Gray, *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1997), 128.

[37] Forrest Waller and Michael George, "Emerging WMD Technologies," in *Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism*, ed. Michael Howard and James Forest (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), 506.

[38] "From War to Peace," *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 4415 (18 August 1945): 221.

[39] Harry Truman, "The Berlin Conference: Report of the President to the Nation," *Department of State Bulletin* 13, no. 320 (1945): 213.

[40] Harry Truman, "Restatement of Foreign Policy of the United States," *Department of State Bulletin* 13, no. 331 (1945): 655.

prime minister MacKenzie King recommending the establishment of a commission to eliminate "... atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction."[41] A lack of explicit clarification as to what these "other" weapons were is evident here, although the communiqué's author, Vannevar Bush, clearly states in his autobiography he intended this as a reference to nuclear and biological arms.[42] Drawing on Jeanne Guillemin's history of bioweapons, Ido Oren and Ty Solomon attribute Bush's inclusion of biological arms to his dissatisfaction with US policy in this area.[43] Having previously led US research into biowarfare during World War II and as a key scientific advisor, Bush had proposed the creation of a new international organization responsible for policing bioweapons information in a bid to avoid arms racing. Yet this plan was not given serious consideration at the higher levels of US government (possibly due to President Franklin Roosevelt's illness at this time). Within this context, the chance to author the communiqué provided Bush with a golden opportunity to put biowarfare on the political agenda.

As such, the realization of political interest inherent to Skinner's innovating ideologist can be identified in Bush's actions. The strategic use of the WMD concept allowed Bush to fulfill his (previously unsuccessful) intention of securing biowarfare knowledge. Specifically, the concept—where it created a conflation of nuclear and biological weaponry—meant Bush could effectively tag biowarfare concerns onto the extensive attention surrounding nuclear arms. In creating a diplomatic agreement that constructed parity between these two forms of weaponry, Bush not only could overcome the hierarchies within political discourse prioritizing the nuclear threat (and which had distracted from issues such as bioweapons), he could also exploit them. The post-Hiroshima interest in atomic devices could be drawn upon and applied to Bush's aims, particularly where this connection created the perception that bioweapons were a priority comparable to the nuclear threat.

This approach is reflected in Bush's earlier attempts to convince the US Interim Committee on Atomic Energy (an organization established to debate American nuclear policy) of the need for biowarfare controls. Here he claimed there were key parallels between the control of nuclear devices and biological violence: the same problems and threats that had emerged as a consequence of denying other states access to nuclear information—not least tensions between the United States and USSR—could also develop in respect of biological weapons. If, therefore, policymakers were to address

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[41] "United States - Great Britain - Canada: Declaration on Atomic Energy, November 15, 1945," *American Journal of International Law, Supplement: Official Documents* 40, no. 1 (January 1946): 50.

[42] Vannevar Bush, *Pieces of the Action* (London: Cassell & Company, 1970), 297–98.

[43] Oren and Solomon, "WMD," 13; Jeanne Guillemin, *Biological Weapons: From the Invention of State-Sponsored Programs to Contemporary Bioterrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 74.

nuclear arms, then by Bush's proposed logic they would have to address the biological threat also. Bush was not initially successful in making his case within this context, but this same line of intention and threat construction can be seen in his use of the WMD concept. Crucially, this is not to suggest Bush's interest in nuclear devices was purely strategic. In returning to Guillemin's initial analysis, it can be noted that Bush was genuinely—even to the point of utopianism—concerned with creating "a world community united against all weapons of total war."[44] Yet here was also a case in which Bush utilized the concern surrounding nuclear attack to highlight those other weapons. The joint conceptual classification allowed Bush to exploit existing concerns surrounding nuclear weapons information and transpose these onto the issue of biowarfare. By successfully structuring the definition of WMD in this way, he committed US policymakers to moving arms control in a direction that favored his own interests surrounding biological devices.

Elsewhere, however, the WMD concept was used to express another, albeit related, concern about arms control. Bush's construction of meaning lay against a wider belief that nuclear control could not be addressed irrespective of other weapons. This is evident in the first ever UN resolution creating the Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC), which also employs the phrase "weapons adaptable to mass destruction."[45] As to why this reference was incorporated, Benjamin V. Cohen, counselor to the Department of State and advisor to the US delegation to the UN, said it was "... to enable the Commission to produce well balanced recommendations as atomic weapons were only one part of a larger problem. If the Commission made recommendations concerning the control of the atomic bomb alone, such recommendations would be lop-sided if in fact there were other important weapons on which similar controls should be placed."[46]

Cohen's comments reflect a broader realization that nuclear attack may not be the only way extreme devastation could be experienced; other weapons may also cause mass destruction. As such, the nuclear threat could not be dealt with independent of any armament deemed capable of similar effect. Comparable threats must be addressed in tandem with nuclear weapons; otherwise, the arms-control system would become skewed, causing major risks to be sidelined. What would be the point in eliminating or placing specific restrictions on the nuclear threat if other armaments could do the same job? Indeed, Leland Goodrich, consultant to the US government and member of the International Secretariat of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, said the 1945 communiqué and 1946

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[44] Guillemin, "Biological Weapons," 74.

[45] UN General Assembly, "Establishment of a Commission to Deal With the Problems Raised by the Discovery of Atomic Energy," Resolution 1(1), 24 January 1946.

[46] In "Minutes of the Meeting of the United States Delegation Members Assigned to the Political and Security Committee of the General Assembly," *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1946. General; The United Nations*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1946), 733.

resolution effectively admitted "that the atomic bomb cannot be dealt with apart from other weapons of mass destruction."[47] Significantly, conceptual meaning was still associated with Bush's selection of weapons at this stage. Although the 1946 resolution did not contain any precise definition of WMD or provide any criteria for identification, Secretary of War Robert Patterson stated this was again a reference to nuclear and biological devices, "but the qualifying words had been left out."[48]

This trend was replicated in the 1946 Baruch Plan, named after its author Bernard Baruch, US representative to the UNAEC. The proposal was effectively an offer by the United States to relinquish its nuclear forces if all other states agreed not to develop or proliferate nuclear weapons and to that effect submit to inspection. Within this context, there was a corresponding desire to expand this concern to all forms of extreme weaponry where the plan's text adopted the same adaptable phrase pertaining to mass destruction: "If we succeed in finding a suitable way to control atomic weapons, it is reasonable to hope that we may also preclude the use of other weapons adaptable to mass destruction. When a man learns to say 'A' he can, if he chooses, learn the rest of the alphabet too."[49]

In effect, Baruch's intention in using the concept related to the preservation of US national security; he believed "that there never would be a chance of nuclear disarmament unless states could be satisfied that chemical and biological weapons had been ruled out of court first."[50] His decision to explicitly incorporate weapons other than nuclear arms as WMD, therefore, was to secure the United States at a time when its nuclear monopoly was under threat and to avoid the creation of a loophole surrounding the use of other terrible weapons. Where it was his belief that a focus on nuclear weapons only could potentially create new insecurities within the international system, Baruch's use of the concept—as a joint classification—was to limit the arsenals that could be used against the United States, particularly if forced to concede to nuclear disarmament.

Importantly, this commitment to disarmament was highly complex and not always believed to be genuine. Indeed, for Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko, the Baruch Plan was nothing but an attempt by Truman to undermine the Soviets; by creating a proposal the USSR would never accept, Truman could ensure that the United States would avoid disarmament and that the blame for this would lie with the Soviets, who had voted against the

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[47] Leland Goodrich, "The Amount of World Organization Necessary and Possible," *Yale Law Journal* 55, no. 5 (1945): 958.

[48] In "Minutes of a Meeting of the Secretaries of States, War, and Navy," *FRUS, 1947. General; The United Nations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1947), 382.

[49] Bernard Baruch, "Proposals for an International Atomic Development Authority," *Department of State Bulletin* 14, no. 364 (June 1946): 1060.

[50] Ian Bellany, "Introduction," in *Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Responding to the Challenge*, ed. Ian Bellany (London: Routledge, 2007), 6.

scheme.[51] But even within this wider context, Baruch's application of the WMD concept can still be interpreted as a sign he saw political benefit in installing provisions preventing asymmetries of power. Regardless of whether disarmament was a serious undertaking, the debate still had to be framed within more extensive protections of US military capability.

Significantly, however, the definition employed represented a deviation from that outlined by Bush in that it now incorporated chemical arms, specifically gas weapons.[52] Unfortunately, when discussing the proposal in his autobiography, Baruch does not specify why he chose to include these weapons; however, he does reveal that, in considering the extension of the plan beyond nuclear weapons, it was specifically biological and chemical weapons that were considered.[53] In this situation, the answer as to why these arms were singled out can be found in the intent not of Baruch, but of General Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower took an extremely strong interest in the Baruch Plan and was also Baruch's long-standing personal friend and advisor.[54] In an advisory note to Baruch, Eisenhower expressed his concern surrounding the role chemical weapons could play in the overall question of nuclear control. He highlighted his belief that the destructive power of both biological and chemical arms was sufficiently comparable to nuclear devices as to necessitate a joint approach, saying, "Biological, chemical, and other as yet unforeseen weapons may prove no less effective than the atomic bomb, and even less susceptible to control."[55]

As a veteran of the World Wars, Eisenhower was aware of the dangers of chemical weapons. Most notably, he had been heavily involved in the controversial release of mustard gas during World War II's 1943 Bari air raid in southern Italy, known as "Little Pearl Harbor." German bomber attacks on Allied forces caused the sinking of a US cargo ship carrying secret supplies of mustard gas (in response to uncertainty as to whether German forces would use chemical weaponry). The subsequent dissemination of the chemical agent not only infected military personnel directly at the scene, but poisoned Italian civilians over a widespread area by a cloud of gas the explosion had created. Although Eisenhower denied publicly that anyone was killed, claiming an offshore wind prevented any casualties, he was in fact aware of a high number of fatalities yet agreed to suppress all official reports investigating the incident at the time.[56] It has since been estimated that two

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[51] Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 124–30.

[52] Baruch, "Proposals," 1060.

[53] Bernard Baruch, *Bernard M Baruch: The Public Years* (London: Odhams Press, 1960), 336.

[54] Peter Lyon, *Eisenhower: Portrait of a Hero* (London: Little, Brown, 1974), 430, 61, n.1.

[55] "The Chief of Staff of the United States Army (Eisenhower) to the United States Representative on the Atomic Energy Commission (Baruch)," *FRUS, 1946. General; The United Nations*, 855.

[56] Dwight Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (London: W. Heimann, 1948), 226.

thousand people died in the attack.[57] Consequently, Eisenhower's intent in incorporating chemical devices can be linked to his own personal experience of the horrors of chemical warfare. It was this awareness that filtered down to Baruch through their close relationship.

In this way, Eisenhower proved to be the innovating ideologist. His belief that chemical weapons were sufficiently destructive as to pose a relevant threat, particularly within the wider context of nuclear vulnerability, resulted in the adoption of a definition incorporating these armaments. Significantly, this is not to say that Bush—as the innovator before him—was unaware of the chemical threat, but that these two examples of conceptual employment represented two separate forms of intention. Bush's concern with securing knowledge surrounding biowarfare was a factor that did not apply to chemical weapons. Chemical arms were considered horrific, but their construction was no secret. Their extensive use throughout World War I meant that strategies of restricting or sharing knowledge could no longer be an effective method of control. Quite simply, states already knew how to make them; there was nothing to secure. Consequently, there would also be no incentive for Bush to include them given the nature of his intentions. In contrast, Eisenhower (and, by extension, Baruch) was concerned with limiting vulnerabilities within the system, one in which the inclusion of chemical weapons was seen as the closing of an important loophole. As such, two very different political ambitions produced two different definitions.

PRIORITIZING NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Despite this discussion of other WMD, however, nuclear weapons were still the primary concern to the extent that some policymakers excluded non-nuclear devices from consideration. In 1946, for example, guidance issued by the US Joint Strategic Survey Committee (USJSSC) on the implications of the UNAEC specifically ignored other WMD "since it is considered that their elimination is a somewhat separate problem."[58] Similarly, before the Baruch Plan there was the Acheson-Lilienthal Report. This document was the product of a committee headed by Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson and David Lilienthal and appointed by Truman to clarify US nuclear policy in relation to the UNAEC. (The Baruch Plan emerged after Baruch was asked to make the conclusions of the Acheson-Lilienthal Report a reality, although ultimately there would be significant disparity between the committee findings

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[57] Jules Hirsch, "An Anniversary for Cancer Chemotherapy," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 296, no. 12 (September 2006): 1518–20.

[58] "Report by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee in Collaboration with the Joint Staff Planners after Consultation with the Commanding General, Manhattan District," *FRUS, 1946. General; The United Nations*, 742.

and Baruch's ideas.) Specifically, the report was to answer the key question that dominated discourse on atomic weapons at this time: should the United States be prepared to surrender its nuclear monopoly or protect it at all costs? Even though Acheson's letter tasking the committee adopted the wording of the 1946 UN resolution and referred to "the control of atomic weaponry and other weapons of possible mass destruction," the focus was exclusively nuclear.[59] Indeed, the closest the committee came to referencing WMD was noting the "horrible power of mass destruction" associated with nuclear devices; that is, there was no discussion of other weapons as such.

Significantly, there is nothing to indicate anything strategic here, at least not from the perspective of WMD and the innovating ideologist. The context here was nuclear, and—though this may raise hypothetical questions as to why committee members did not seize the opportunity to extend the scope of their recommendations—it is hardly surprising that, when asked to discuss nuclear weapons, this is precisely what they did. Yet for others, maintaining a focus on nuclear arms—specifically as distinct from other mass-destructive weaponry—was essential. In contrast to Eisenhower, these policymakers believed that nuclear weapons should be the priority, if not the sole, concern. For example, State Department official R. Gordon Arneson reported a meeting between key military actors at which policy references to WMD were discussed.[60] General Matthew Ridgway, US Army representative to the UN's Military Staff Committee, rejected the inclusion of other WMD where this would expand the scope of arms control too far. Likewise, General Leslie Groves, who had headed up the Manhattan Project, said arms control would become confused if efforts were extended at this time. Although the officials accepted that other weapons posed a significant risk, they felt that attempting to deal with these collectively would divert attention from the critical issue of nuclear annihilation. Nuclear controls could potentially fail as a result of taking on too much at once and splitting debate across a number of weapons, specifically controversial weapons that even alone would prove difficult to restrict. Therefore, even though the control of all forms of mass-destructive devices could still be cited as an important goal, this was very much an ideal. It would be the ultimate consequence of an ongoing process of arms control that started with nuclear arms; the rest would follow later.

Within this context, there was one innovating ideologist in particular who sought to exploit the concept of WMD in order to maintain the nuclear focus. Secretary of State James Byrnes, a staunch defender of the US

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[59] Dean Acheson, David Lilienthal et al., "A Report on the International Control of Atomic Energy," available at http://www.learnworld.com/ZNW/LWText.Acheson-Lilienthal.html#text.

[60] "Notes of a Meeting between the United States Delegation to the Atomic Energy Commission and the United States Representatives on the Military Staff Committee," *FRUS, 1946. General; The United Nations*, 885–86.

nuclear monopoly, initially recognized the threat posed by other WMD. Immediately after Hiroshima, he spoke out on the extreme consequences of bioweapons: biological warfare was potentially an even more destructive threat than atomic devices.[61] A year later, however, his view had shifted. Now he insisted that the primary issue of arms control was exclusively nuclear in that attempting to address all weapons at once would be a "serious mistake."[62] In explaining this change, analysis can draw on a report by John Hancock—a member of the US delegation to the UNAEC—in which he recalls a meeting with Byrnes where he raised this apparent contradiction between inclusion and nuclear exclusivity. He said, "It looks frankly as if the intent now is being made to exclude it [the threat of other WMD] so as to simplify our job and that the effort is being made to build up the argument that this reference was a bit of window dressing so far as gaining support for the entire program."[63] In effect, Byrnes presented the situation as a trade-off between desire and possibility. Whatever the concern for nonnuclear forms of mass-destructive threat, the intent had to be framed within what was achievable. And in Byrnes's eyes, progress would be most likely via a strategy prioritizing nuclear weapons. This provided the best chance of success. As Byrnes stated, "There are other weapons of mass destruction but unless we can meet the challenge of atomic warfare—the most dreadful weapon ever devised—we can never meet the challenge of these other weapons."[64]

Byrnes's innovation here can be broken down into a number of factors. First is his exploitation of Bush's construct of conceptual language, where this was structured around a reference to nuclear and other WMD. Although Bush had intended that this reference would apply to all forms of WMD (as he identified them) equally, Byrnes now used this phraseology to develop a hierarchical separation. There were nuclear weapons, and there were other WMD: two distinct categories. And once these other arms were so divorced from the nuclear threat, it could then be argued these should, however temporarily, be sidelined in favor of a priority focus on atomic devices. These were the add-ons, an ambiguous category containing arms that, although worthy of concern, could be deemed a less-pressing risk by their separation. Byrnes's approach was therefore a process of conceptual othering. By exploiting a linguistic structure that could draw a line between nuclear and specifically nonnuclear devices, the latter could be set apart and addressed on a distinct basis in line with Byrnes's aims. Critically, this was not a case

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[61] James Byrnes, "World Cooperation: Address by the Secretary of State," *Department of State Bulletin* 13, no. 334 (November 1945): 784.

[62] "Memorandum of Conversation, by John M Hancock of the United States Delegation to the Atomic Energy Commission," *FRUS, 1946. General; The United Nations*, 803.

[63] Ibid., 815.

[64] James Byrnes, "Address by the Secretary of State," *Department of State Bulletin* 15, no. 390 (December 1946): 1139.

of misinterpretation as envisaged by Derrida. It was not that Bush's intentions had become lost in a system of signification beyond his control, open to miscomprehension. Byrnes had presented a deliberate reinterpretation, intentionally exploiting an existing rhetorical structure for his own political ends.

Second, as part of this othering, Byrnes did not clearly identify these other WMD. At one level, this could be explained as a wider inability to secure consensus on any particular interpretation. Patterson, together with Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, had made a point of officially noting such uncertainty at this time, saying, "There has thus far been no definition, except in the case of atomic weapons, of weapons adaptable to mass destruction, nor has there been any agreement as to which agency or agencies are responsible for reaching such a definition."[65] Yet this was also a case in which there was a clear strategic incentive to avoid even an attempt to clarify conceptual meaning. By blurring the category of the other through a failure to explicitly define precise armaments, in contrast to the indisputable identification of nuclear devices, Byrnes could ensure the prioritization of nuclear weapons was maintained in that those arms were the only definite threat. Where he sought to ensure nuclear weapons remained at the forefront, so obscuring the "rest" of the WMD concept prevented debate from shifting focus. If nuclear arms were the only clear WMD, they would take precedence. And if policymakers did not know what other WMD were, they could not realistically be addressed. Using the concept to set the terms of debate in this way therefore allowed Byrnes to skew attention toward atomic considerations.

To return to Arneson's meeting, a similar strategy can be seen in the innovation of Admiral Richmond Turner. According to Arneson, "Admiral Turner pointed out that if the terms of reference were expanded [from nuclear to all WMD] at this time we would be faced with a very difficult job of definition, that, in fact, the term 'weapons of mass destruction' was as vague as the term 'aggression' which the United Nations has carefully avoided trying to define."[66] Here, Turner (in response to the comments by Ridgway and Groves promoting a nuclear-centric policy) adopted a comparable approach to Byrnes; by highlighting the difficulties associated with conceptual definition, it could then be argued that nuclear weapons must take precedence. Turner was suggesting that, where definition was so complex, then, logically, this problematic and time-consuming question should not disrupt efforts on nuclear weapons control, not least where he personally supported a priority focus on nuclear arms. In not only blurring the category of WMD, but also

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[65] "The Secretary of War (Patterson) and the Secretary of the Navy (Forrestal) to the Secretary of State," *FRUS, 1947. General; The United Nations*, 363.
[66] Acheson, "Notes," 886.

by implying this was beyond immediate resolution, so Turner created an impression that the only appropriate way forward was nuclear.

Consequently, these examples demonstrate that the political construction of conceptual meaning also applies to the absence of definition. Strategic employment is not solely a case of specifying certain weapons as WMD in order to control political discourse, but a situation in which the refusal to define—when political actors exploit the uncertainty of meaning associated with this—can also be intentional. This was also reflected in a 1947 position paper by US policymakers at the UN that argued, "There would appear to be no impelling reason for the U.S. to press for immediate definition except as necessary to prevent the adoption of one which could be interpreted to our serious disadvantage."[67] Although attributing this report to a specific author, in line with a Skinnerian approach, is difficult, it still confirms that key actors believed an absolute notion of WMD could only restrain them at this stage. Consequently, there was no reason for Byrnes and other ideological innovators to commit to an explicit definition. In fact, uncertainty was strategically beneficial.

Finally, the most decisive evidence of Byrnes as an innovating ideologist lies not in his exclusion of nonnuclear WMD, but in their inclusion. Discussing these early Cold War arms-control negotiations in his autobiography, Byrnes talks of WMD as nuclear weapons. He acknowledges that specific documents such as the 1946 resolution refer to "other weapons adaptable to mass destruction;" however, he discusses these only within the context of atomic concerns. Yet in a short section recalling the Soviets' general disarmament proposals, he shifts toward a different interpretation, one that rejects this nuclear-centric approach to recognize explicitly alternative forms of WMD. Here Byrnes is using his autobiography to challenge Soviet criticisms at the time that the United States was concerned only with nuclear controls. He does so by highlighting that the Baruch Plan made provision to consider "other weapons, such as bacteriological weapons."[68] In contrast to his earlier efforts downplaying the mass-destructive status of these other weapons, expressly as a way of separating these weapons from nuclear devices, here he exaggerates a commitment to the control of all WMD where it serves him to undermine Soviet condemnation. Now that Byrnes's political interest lay in defending his political actions, albeit after the fact, his focus on a joint classification of WMD provided a way to counter these criticisms. By emphasizing other forms of WMD and removing the internal conceptual separation he himself had constructed, he could then argue these weapons had indeed been taken seriously (in spite of his own efforts to prioritize nuclear controls). As such, Byrnes's innovation in respect of WMD definition

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[67] "U.S. Position on Armaments and Armed Forces within the Competence of the Commission for Conventional Armaments," *FRUS, 1947. General; The United Nation*, 549.

[68] James Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (London: William Heinemann, 1947), 273.

was not confined to one context of use, but varied according his changing aims. Different aims produced different conceptual understandings.

FORCING A DEFINITION

The prioritization of nuclear concerns, however, would eventually translate into a further dynamic of arms control shaping conceptual understanding, one that would force an explicit definition of WMD. This was the consequence of conflict—largely between US and USSR negotiators—as to how arms control should be addressed. While US policymakers were internally debating the distinction of nuclear from other forms of mass-destructive device, the Soviets maintained that this question was effectively irrelevant. Instead, they advocated a more expansive approach that would apply to all weapons simultaneously and tied the reduction of conventional arsenals to WMD elimination. General disarmament should take precedence over the implementation of atomic controls. This is not to say the Americans rejected the notion of general disarmament, but that—once again—this was a question of priority in which nuclear weapons came first. Similarly, the Soviets did not reject the concept of WMD; they accepted the 1946 resolution establishing the UNAEC, and their proposal for the "General Regulation and Reduction of Armaments" refers on several occasions to "atomic and all other major weapons now or in the future to mass destruction."[69] Yet there was concern that the separation of conventional and unconventional weapons, specifically to the extent proposed by the Americans, would undermine wider arms-control efforts.

This debate was played out through the establishment of the UN Commission for Conventional Armaments (UNCCA), set up to discuss general disarmament. This commission created a potential clash in remit with the UNAEC: which body was responsible for which weapons? In a compromise to US delegates' demands concerning atomic controls, it was decided that the UNAEC and UNCCA would work simultaneously on issues pertaining to arms control, but that the UNCCA would not address any issue that fell within the purview of the UNAEC. Where that jurisdiction had been defined as atomic and all other forms of WMD under the terms of the 1946 resolution, so a precise definition of WMD was necessary to ascertain the division of labor across the two organizations.

Ultimately, this question of definition was framed within a desire by US policymakers to control Soviet ambitions on arms control. Indeed, the permanent Soviet representative to the UN, Andrei Gromyko, openly accused the United States of intentionally using the WMD concept to create an "artificial"

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[69] UN General Assembly, "Principles Governing the General Regulation and Reduction of Armaments," Resolution 41(1), 14 December 1946, 65–66.

distinction diverting attention away from the speedy implementation of general disarmament measures, measures that themselves may have detracted from the international nuclear controls favored by American negotiators, especially where those controls would prevent the USSR from acquiring nuclear weapons.[70] On the other side, US ambassador to the UN, Warren Austin, was equally concerned that it was the Soviets who were exploiting the WMD definition to manipulate the scope of the UNCCA, thereby deliberately disrupting efforts surrounding nuclear control and removing power from the UNAEC.

The basis of Austin's view can be seen more clearly in minutes of a 1947 meeting of the US secretaries of State, War, and Navy. As recorded by the scribe, Patterson commented, "It was obviously to Russian interest to outlaw all scientific weapons. This would mean that the country with the highest scientific development [i.e., the United States] would in security matters be reduced to the level of a barbaric country."[71] Acheson expanded this to argue that, as well as a militarily defensive move, the selective definition of WMD was also a tactic to divert attention from the embarrassment the USSR had recently endured surrounding inspections relating to its atomic capacity. "He thought that Molotov's purpose had been (1) to confuse the public on an issue embarrassing to it before the public, (2) to obtain a strong propaganda position and (3) to bring about the abolition of weapons they do not possess."[72] Within this context, Acheson said the Soviets would potentially define any weapon as WMD, including strategic air forces and even larger naval vessels, where it served their interests relative to the United States. Eisenhower also voiced concern: "Russia wished to make many things weapons of mass destruction and this might prove embarrassing to us."[73]

A Soviet definition of WMD, therefore, posed a major threat to US policymakers. As General Ridgway recalls in his autobiography:

> If we should accede to Russian demands [a definition of WMD encompassing conventional armaments] we should have deprived ourselves of atomic weapons at no cost to the U.S.S.R. We should have abandoned our complex weapons systems and vastly enhanced the relative value of manpower as the determining factor in war—to the great advantage of the Russians. Once these reductions in the military fields in which we held a decided superiority had been attained, the U.S.S.R would then turn to attack on our superior industrial potential.[74]

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[70] Andrei Gromyko, quoted in James Ludlow, "The Establishment of the Commission for Conventional Armaments," *Department of State Bulletin* 16, no. 408 (April 1947): 738.

[71] Quoted in "Minutes of a Meeting of the Secretaries of State, War, and Navy," *FRUS, 1947. General; The United Nations*, 382.

[72] Ibid., 383.

[73] Ibid., 384.

[74] Matthew Ridgway, *Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B Ridgway* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1974), 172.

Consequently, WMD conceptual meaning at this stage was less a cal-
culation as to how other weapons adaptable to mass destruction may be
identified and more the preclusion of Soviet ambitions to undermine the
United States via targeted interpretation. Within this context, there was not
simply one innovating ideologist, but many, all of whom were committed
to the same strategy of ensuring the WMD concept was defined in terms
that did not benefit their Soviet counterparts. Their innovation—the limiting
of the concept to those weapons that would not weaken US conventional
superiority—was a fundamentally strategic move designed to protect mili-
tary arsenals. Where the classification of a weapon as a WMD in this case
would effectively determine the weapon's legitimacy (or not) within the in-
ternational system, so the deliberate and selective application of the "mass
destructive" label had serious implications for future strategy and the alloca-
tion of defense resources. The innovators identified in this section recognized
this and sought to exploit conceptual definition to control these factors. As
such, not only was definition not set, but it was also the very source and
content of political negotiation. Definition was a battlefield in itself. It was a
key site of political power in that its interpretation would have widespread
implications not only for the United States as a wider consideration, but also
for the actors identified here, who as key members of the American military
establishment had strong personal interests in preserving their own political
position.

These interests were drawn together in June 1947, when the USJSSC re-
leased an advisory report outlining a set of five criteria by which WMD could
be identified. These were based on the capacity of nuclear arms in that atomic
weapons were deemed to possess the following characteristics (as distinct
from conventional and other devices): difficult to defend against; indiscrimi-
nate; difficult to minimize effects through preventative measures; substantial
in aftereffects; and "overwhelming" in catastrophic force, specifically without
warning.[75] WMD were weapons that shared these characteristics, identified
as "radioactive, lethal chemical and biological weapons."[76] Admittedly, the
report was keen to emphasize it did not consider these weapons as destruc-
tive or as terrible as atomic devices; the atomic bomb was still the only true
mass-destructive device. Yet there was sufficient similarity between CBRN to
justify their joint classification. In particular, these were distinct from the con-
ventional armaments the Soviets had tried so hard to include, which would
then be assigned to the UNCCA.

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[75] "Study Prepared by the Joint Strategic Survey Committee," *FRUS, 1947. General; The United
Nations*, 535.
[76] Ibid., 534–35.

United Nations, 1948

Ultimately, however, US policymakers chose to leave the responsibility of deciding conceptual meaning to the UN.[77] In understanding this willingness to effectively sacrifice ideological innovation to an international body, the evidence reveals that key actors were now fairly confident about the scope of the definition that would be adopted. Specifically, that this would reflect in some acceptable way the CBRN interpretation outlined above. For example, Patterson and Forrestal openly made assumptions about what this definition would look like, particularly the inclusion of bioweapons.[78] As such, there was no real need to question what the final selection of armaments might be and every reason to ensure that the legitimacy of that definition came from the UN and not solely the United States. This selection was made in August 1948 in a resolution confirming the definitional scope of the WMD concept:

> [WMD are]... atomic explosive weapons, radioactive material weapons, lethal chemical and biological weapons, and any weapons developed in the future which have characteristics comparable in destructive effect to those of the atomic bomb or other weapons mentioned above.[79]

In the end, the UNAEC and UNCCA structures were short-lived. A lack of progress meant the UNAEC was effectively inactive after 1949; and in the UNCCA, Cold War tensions precluded any real activity. By 1950 the USSR would withdraw, citing issues surrounding Chinese representation, a move that made the commission unworkable. In spite of these institutional failures, however, the WMD definition produced was still an important aspect of conceptual understanding.

This importance should not, however, be confused with fixed meaning. In effect, the 1948 definition was the product of specific circumstance. It was constructed to confirm the respective remits of two distinct organizational bodies; it was not intended as a wider definition to be employed more generally within arms-control discourse. Consequently, this was a question of institutional context. Specific actors employed this definition to address explicit issues that existed within their own individual epistemic setting. Moreover, this was set against the more expansive framework of contexts identified here in that the concept was employed in a variety of ways by diverse actors. Different contexts produced very different interpretations as a product of the different innovating ideologists within them. To assume

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[77] "U.S. Position on Armaments and Armed Forces," 548.

[78] "Memorandum by the Secretary of War (Patterson) and the Secretary of the Navy (Forrestal) to the Chairman of the Joint Research and Development Board (Bush)," *FRUS, 1947. General; The United Nations*, 421.

[79] UN General Assembly, "Resolution of the Commission for Conventional Armaments: Definition of Armaments," *Documents on Disarmament 1945–1959* (1948).

universal acceptance of the UN definition outside this narrow scope of use, therefore, exaggerates the relevance of such an exact interpretation. And as such, analysis cannot look to a single interpretation in order to ascertain what the WMD concept means. The 1948 declaration constituted only one understanding, and claims that this was in any way definitive ignore the sheer disparity in the definition's use at this time.

Furthermore, such claims ignore the ongoing reconceptualization of WMD meaning. Where this article has focused on demonstrating the variation in meaning surrounding this key example (in order to break down the perception that WMD definition can be reduced to one particular incidence of use), it could leave itself open to assertions that this disparity was merely a process in negotiating a set definition. That is, actors used different interpretations as they moved toward an "end product" understanding. Yet the concept would continue to be redefined after 1948. Indeed, only a month after the UN declaration, the US Executive Committee on the Regulation of Armaments approved a position paper on the issue of WMD recommending that US objectives at the UN should be to obstruct all debate relating to WMD, especially the technical detail of definition.[80] This decision was connected to ongoing problems within the UNAEC; committee members were concerned that addressing WMD would compromise progress on atomic issues and that parties looking to exacerbate those problems could still abuse the WMD definition to this end. Specifically, many still believed the Soviets would attempt to bring conventional weapons such as missiles and incendiary bombs into the debate. As the position paper stated, "It is particularly possible that the Soviet Union and its satellites may attempt to have the above-mentioned items defined as weapons adaptable to mass destruction since they stand to gain relative to the war potential of the United States on any and all occasions when they are able to limit or curtail the technological superiority of the United States and Western Powers, while, at the same time, not suffering curtailment of their manpower advantages."[81]

Consequently, although this report did not explicitly dispute or replace the definition outlined in the 1948 resolution, it demonstrates a lack of faith in the supposedly definitive nature of that conceptual understanding. US policymakers still believed the concept could be reinterpreted and manipulated by political forces within the international system. The scope of WMD meaning would remain malleable and—equally important—*perceived* as malleable, even when policymakers did not actively seek to manipulate it themselves. Political actors did not recognize the CBRN interpretation as absolute. As US

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[80] "Position Paper Approved by the Executive Committee on Regulation of Armaments: Objectives Re Possible GA Consideration of 'Other Weapons Adaptable to Mass Destruction,'" *FRUS, 1948. General; The United Nations* 1, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1948), 420.

[81] Ibid., 423.

diplomat George Kennan said in 1950, the distinction of weaponry inherent to the WMD concept clearly existed, but it was "inexact and imperfect."[82]

Equally as telling as the adoption of the 1948 interpretation is the fact the UN never officially reaffirmed the definition until 1977, when it was incorporated in a UN resolution.[83] Almost thirty years passed before this particular understanding would receive any further formal recognition, and, even then, this would be highly contextual—limited to that one document—and controversial. Moreover, this interpretation comprised just one instance of conceptual use during the Cold War.[84] To pick an alternative example, the 1967 Outer Space Treaty ignored the radiological devices included in the 1948 statement, focusing instead on nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons only. In combination with a lack of concern surrounding radiological devices, the 1967 treaty definition was also employed for distinct strategic reasons. Members of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff claimed the WMD concept, as opposed to an exclusively nuclear approach, would allow for the emplacement of small anti-satellite nuclear devices in space on the rationale these were not mass destructive in scope (this logic was later ruled out by Secretary of State Dean Rusk). Furthermore, it constituted an attempt to avoid constraints on conventional arms. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Paul Nitze said the concept was diplomatically useful where "there seemed to be no reason to tie our hands on other [conventional] weapons."[85] Consequently, this represents a very different definition, and a very different strategic reasoning, to that seen in 1948.

This diversity in use and meaning is also evident after the Cold War, not least following 9/11. Here the concept has been used in a variety of ways to conceptualize and shape security discourse, most notably the alleged WMD stockpiles of Saddam Hussein. Three key shifts have been identified.[86] First, radiological weapons—largely ignored throughout the Cold War and 1990s—reappeared within conceptual understanding, particularly where the act of flying planes into the Twin Towers and Pentagon raised concern that next time terrorists may target a nuclear reactor, causing a radiological incident. Second, President George W. Bush, in a classic case of the innovating ideologist, obscured definition. Just as Byrnes had used ambiguity to shape arms-control discourse, President Bush exploited it to create a sense of public and political fear in order to bolster support for military action in Iraq,

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[82] "Memorandum by the Counselor (Kennan): International Control of Atomic Energy," *FRUS, 1950. National Security Affairs; Foreign Economic Policy*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1950), 39.

[83] UN General Assembly, "Prohibition of the Development and Manufacture of New Types of Weapons of Mass Destruction and New Systems of Such Weapons," Resolution 32 (84) (A), 12 December 1977.

[84] Michelle Bentley, "The Long Goodbye: Beyond an Essentialist Construction of WMD," *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 2 (2012): 390–94.

[85] "Editorial Note," *FRUS, 1961–1963: Arms Control and Disarmament* 7 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1963), 892.

[86] Bentley, "The Long Goodbye," 394–98.

specifically where that uncertainty allowed him to avoid making any prov-
able claims. Third, there was an explicit inclusion of conventional devices,
for example, within select legal definitions of WMD.[87] These were used to
convict terrorists such as the so-called twentieth hijacker of 9/11, Zacarias
Moussaoui, of conspiracy to use a WMD—i.e., the planes used in the 9/11
attacks—specifically where this guaranteed an extensive sentence. As such,
the strategic redefinition of the WMD concept by innovating ideologists has
been a persistent feature of that concept's employment. Drafting the 1948
definition was not simply a case of policymakers trying to figure out the
boundaries of a new concept, but one in which this trend of conceptual
change and strategic use is inherent to WMD meaning.

Critically, this is not to suggest the 1948 definition had no wider impact
on conceptual understanding. Indeed, the separation of CBRN from con-
ventional devices created by the resolution—the idea that WMD represent
something other than traditional forms of conflict—contributed significantly
to a convention of understanding that would influence future interpretations
of the concept. This should not, however, be overstated to the extent that this
specific version of meaning is considered anything more than one example
in an ongoing series of reconceptualizations. The consensus over definition
that WMD analysis has assumed did not—and does not—exist. In this sit-
uation, failing to acknowledge the individual and contextualized nature of
conceptual use ignores a vital element in understanding security discourse.
Questions as to what certain policymakers understood by the concept and
how this might have played into their wider actions are fundamental to com-
prehending US foreign policy. Adhering to static interpretations of meaning
masks a world of foreign policymaking in which actors' construction of defi-
nition and their intention in that construction are key to understanding WMD
discourses.

A CONCEPTUAL INTERPRETATION OF WMD

The concepts policymakers develop to understand their world—particularly
the new worlds that evolve out of crisis and change—are also the con-
cepts they use to control it. This is evidenced here, where an analysis of
the origins of the WMD concept reveals that US policymakers have used
conceptual definition selectively not only to comprehend how arms control
should be enacted in the post-Hiroshima reality of nuclear devices, but also
to manipulate the terms of arms control in line with their own self-interest.
Here policymakers acted as Quentin Skinner's innovating ideologists. The
WMD concept they used was not self-evident, neutral, or essentialist; it was

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[87] Admittedly, this particular example of this trend is more a domestic issue than a foreign policy
one, although it does play into wider debates about the War on Terror and international terrorism.

a reflection of their own intent in that meaning was constructed to realize specific political ambitions. The inherent uncertainty surrounding definition (even where this drew on conventional expectations as to what meaning should incorporate) was exploited for actors' own purposes. While this is not to state that language is so fluid as to mean anything its user wants and while this line of argument must still accept Krebs and Jackson's assertion that rhetorical innovation is less likely than rhetorical continuity, conceptual change is still a key aspect of security discourse and can have significant implications for politics itself.

These implications are fundamental to the study of WMD as well as more extensive questions within security studies, such as US foreign policy in the post-Hiroshima era. The case analyzed shows that understanding how the WMD concept came into existence and the specifics of its interpretation are not minor issues of semantics, but elemental factors in explaining how political actors comprehended the new security environment and, critically, sought to establish their role within that environment in accordance with perceived interests. Arms control itself was the product of a complex series of ongoing reconceptualizations in which the WMD concept was a governing feature, especially where the precise specification of definition was an intrinsic aspect of its use and strategic exploitation. Understanding definition, specifically as a dynamic and changing process of interpretation, therefore, is essential to understanding international security at this time. Admittedly, this study is limited in that it looks only at conceptual use from the perspective in America, where US policymakers were key players in the concept's emergence and where this narrowing down of analysis allows for a more detailed examination of conceptual construction. Yet it is clear from the discussions outlined here that other actors—especially the Soviets in this case—could also find strategic benefit in redefinition. The conclusions here therefore apply beyond the scope of US diplomacy to the entire debate on WMD.

Within this context, and in terms of taking the debate forward, analysis cannot make assumptions about the scope and content of conceptual meaning without first establishing how WMD has been defined at any given point, by whom, and for what purposes. The tendency has been to think of the concept as a self-evident construct in which meaning as the selection of weapons has been sidelined. Yet ignoring the issue of definition is to ignore the full reality of the concept's discursive function. And where WMD is likely to remain a strong and emotive concept within the security environment, being aware of the full extent of its political use and the causal implications it has for how conflict is waged will be key to the comprehension of issues relating to this important aspect of security studies as well as international relations more widely.