

## Metaphors That Kill

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*The 2003 version of this chapter appeared just before the start of the Iraq War. It is reprinted here to provide a sense of what the study of framing brought to an understanding of that war before it happened.*

**M**etaphors can kill.  
That's how I began a piece on the Gulf War back in 1990, just before the war began. (See [georgelakoff.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/metaphor-and-war-the-metaphor-system-used-to-justify-war-in-the-gulf-lakoff-1991.pdf](http://georgelakoff.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/metaphor-and-war-the-metaphor-system-used-to-justify-war-in-the-gulf-lakoff-1991.pdf).) Many of those metaphorical ideas are back, but within a very different and more dangerous context. Since the Iraq War is due to start any day, perhaps even tomorrow, it might be useful to take a look before the action begins at the metaphorical ideas being used to justify the Iraq War.

One of the central metaphors in our foreign policy is that a nation is a person. It is used hundreds of times a day, every time the nation of Iraq is conceptualized in terms of a single person, Saddam Hussein. The war, we are told, is not being waged against the Iraqi people, but only against this one person. Ordinary American citizens are using this metaphor when they say things like “Saddam is a tyrant. He must be stopped.” What the metaphor hides, of course, is that the three thousand bombs to be dropped in the first two days will not be dropped on that one person. They will kill many thousands of people hidden by the metaphor, people that we are, according to the metaphor, not going to war against.