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An Analysis on the Rhetorical Strategies of General Douglas MacArthur:

Defending His Conduct in the Korean War

On April 19, 1951, General Douglas MacArthur delivered his famous “good-bye” address to a Joint Meeting of Congress, arguing for continued action in prosecuting the Korean War. A little more than a week before MacArthur’s address, President Harry S. Truman had relieved him as commander of U.S. forces fighting in Korea. MacArthur had publicly challenged Truman’s leadership by threatening to attack China directly. MacArthur was a revered General of the United States Army, and he was an excellent rhetor. MacArthur employs rhetorical strategies of ethos and pathos in order to convince congress to allow the army to be more autonomous. MacArthur does not want the wars he fought to be in vain.

Early on in his address, MacArthur reframes his actions by explaining the context of his actions in order to change the mind of his audience. MacArthur and his audience were both painfully aware of his recent dismissal from commander of U.S. forces in Korea. “I address you with neither rancor nor bitterness in the fading twilight of life, with but one purpose in mind: to serve my country” (MacArthur). By using this appeal of character, MacArthur is able to establish his dismissal as the past and emphasize his address as something of service to his country. He does this because he wants to build a line of trust with his audience so he can convince them to change policies of warfare.

MacArthur defends his actions against China by illustrating how the fall of one location could quickly undo all the war effort in Asia. His argument is especially effective if you consider the theory of loss aversion, which states that people strongly prefer avoiding losses than acquiring gains. He uses this

strategy in order to convince his audience that he is more knowledgeable than they are and that the army should have power to make their own decisions while in combat zones.

Before one may objectively assess the situation now existing there, [one] must comprehend something of Asia's past and the revolutionary changes which have marked her course up to the present . . . the peoples of Asia . . . now see the dawn of new opportunity, a heretofore unfelt dignity, and the self-respect of political freedom. Mustering half of the earth's population, and 60 percent of its natural resources these peoples are rapidly consolidating a new force, both moral and material, with which to raise the living standard and erect adaptations of the design of modern progress to their own distinct cultural environments. (MacArthur)

By using phrases like “one must understand” and “one must comprehend” MacArthur re-affirms his authority as a person with more knowledge than his audience. He uses this same instructional language much later in his address when he speaks of the Chinese militarization. “To understand the changes which now appear upon the Chinese mainland, one must understand the changes in Chinese character and culture over the past 50 years” (MacArthur). By using this subtly, he is able to establish the army as more knowledgeable than a distant congress who exist disconnected from the battleground.

Even though MacArthur uses these rhetorical strategies well so far within his address, he knows that he will need more in order to establish that his opinions are well-informed and not unusual. “I have been severely criticized in lay circles, principally abroad, despite my understanding that from a military standpoint the above views have been fully shared in the past by practically every military leader concerned with the Korean campaign, including our own Joint Chiefs of Staff” (MacArthur). He says this in such a way that he has built his own enemy. This is a widely used marketing technique because people get more interested in conflict and competition and people will defend an underdog.

In addition to his rhetorical appeals of character, MacArthur often uses emotional appeals in his 1951 address. In the beginning of his address, he pleads for his audience to listen, "I trust . . . that you will do me the justice of receiving that which I have to say as solely expressing the considered viewpoint of a fellow American" (MacArthur). This is no different from the emotional appeals of Mark Antony's funeral oration for Caesar: "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears".

MacArthur uses several emotional words like justice, invincible, strong, attrition, revolting, warmonger, honor and even savage in order to support his claim that we and those we conquer gain greater protection from our victories. He states one such emotional appeal by describing an ideal situation, even an impossible situation: "Our line of defense is a natural one and can be maintained with a minimum of military effort and expense. It envisions no attack against anyone . . . but properly maintained, would be an invincible defense against aggression" (MacArthur). However, this ideal situation described by MacArthur is impossible because it is extremely unlikely to have a good defense without an offense and MacArthur himself knew this well. Yet he repeats this idea later in his address. "The Pacific was a potential area of advance for any predatory force . . . All this was changed by our Pacific victory. Our strategic frontier then shifted to embrace the entire Pacific Ocean . . . it acts as a protective shield for all of the Americas and all free lands of the Pacific Ocean area" (MacArthur). Using repetition in this context, MacArthur is able to make his emphasize his claim and make it memorable.

MacArthur then provides examples of countries which the United States fought in and how they were made better through war. By providing examples, however anecdotal, he is able to make his claim feel more legitimate. "The Japanese people, since the war, have undergone the greatest reformation recorded in modern history . . . Politically, economically, and socially Japan is now abreast of many free nations of the earth and will not again fail the universal trust" (MacArthur). By recounting multiple countries, MacArthur uses emotion rhetorical strategy by creating an emotional connection to any of his audience who fought in those areas. "Of our former ward, the Philippines, we can look forward in

confidence that the existing unrest will be corrected and a strong and healthy nation will grow in the longer aftermath of war's terrible destructiveness" (MacArthur). By bringing up past war stories, MacArthur benefits doubly because he is able to remind the audience that he has much experience serving his country in each of those areas, which only helps him build his appeal of character.

MacArthur uses repetition to reinforce his claim that we benefit from victory and victory comes from the army's freedom to rule itself. Note that he chooses the phrase "the position of the command" rather than directly naming anyone. He states this claim as indirectly as possible as to not blame his audience. (*emphasis added*)

I called for reinforcements but was informed that reinforcements were not available.

I made clear that *if not permitted* to destroy the enemy built-up bases north of the Yalu, *if not permitted* to utilize the friendly Chinese Force of some 600,000 men on Formosa, *if not permitted* to blockade the China coast to prevent the Chinese Reds from getting succor from without, and *if there were to be no hope* of major reinforcements, the position of the command from the military standpoint forbade victory . . . we could hope *at best* for only an indecisive campaign with its *terrible* and *constant* attrition upon our forces if the enemy utilized its full military potential. I have *constantly* called for the new political decisions essential to a solution. (MacArthur)

MacArthur reveals his true character here, his own emotion, and his own frustration with losing. Losing is the opposite of victory and MacArthur is torn by the thought of not ending war in clear victory.

MacArthur starts his address relying solely on his appeal of character; after he lays a foundation of authority, he uses emotional appeals to further persuade his audience. While MacArthur never states outright that he desires congress to grant total autonomy to the army, it is pretty clear when analyzing the rhetoric he used in writing his address. By using these combination of appeals, MacArthur is able to make his address more memorable and unique.

Works Cited:

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