

The decision to go to war is a choice to take human life. The choice is complicated and too often manipulated. Resonating in recent history are the false allegations that gave reason for the United States to invade Vietnam and Iraq (Johnson, 1964; Bush, 2003). In both cases, the current President of the United States addressed their country and presented accusations that a line had been crossed. For both conflicts, history has shown these allegations were not accurate (Shane, 2005; Norton-Taylor, 2013). Public opinion was manipulated and lives were lost.

Discussed in this essay is a rhetorical analysis of a speech given by United States President Barack Hussein Obama. One year prior, Mr. Obama drew a metaphorical red line in response to the escalation of Syria's civil war. (Thomas, 2012). Since that statement, deadly chemical weapons have been used and Mr. Obama is now prepared to commence military strikes against Syria. The determination to use military force and the reasoning behind it makes this analysis significant and necessary. To analyze Mr. Obama's determination, this essay will investigate why he chose to use a rhetorical platform he historically was critical of. The points made in his speech are eerily reminiscent to those made by his predecessor to invade Iraq. Mr. Obama's strong opposition to the Iraq war framed his candidacy for president (Zeleny, 2007). At that time, he opposed reasoning that the proliferation and use of weapons of mass destruction posed any threat to the United States; or a necessity for military force (Obama, 2002). For these reasons, Mr. Obama claimed the Iraq invasion was a war that should have never been authorized (Zeleny, 2007).

It was the decision of Mr. Bush to invade Iraqi. He convinced the public that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, had used them and was going to use them again (Bush, 2003). Prior to the invasion, Senator Obama stated he was against, “war based not on reason... but on politics” (Obama,

2002). He concluded that the Iraqi President posed no imminent threat to the United States and that the international community could contain him (Obama, 2002). In some regards Mr. Obama is now in a similar situation as Mr. Bush. Both men wanted to bomb another country and both need public support. It is Mr. Obama's previous anti-war stance that make his current motivation suspect. To these ends this essay can state it's proposition; Mr. Obama is using the veneer of chemical weapons to gain public support through their visceral response to humanity.

On September 10, 2013 Mr. Obama's televised speech was primarily intended to sway support from citizens and congressional leaders of the United States. He began with a brief summary of events in Syria. The selection of detail for his summary outlines the magnitude to which he perceives these events as critical. In this way he creates a setting for his narrative and attempts to build validity to warrant further action.

Constructing the body of his speech, Mr. Obama presents evidence and reasoning for his perspective. The first appearance of which is found in his setting. Here, Mr. Obama uses the events of WWI and WWII to reference the awful nature of chemical weapons. The result of these wars brought about international laws restricting their use. Building a premise to warrant force, Mr. Obama explains the actions taken by the Syrian government have violated these laws. To enforce these laws, Mr. Obama reasons the United States should deploy military strikes against the Syrian government. Concentrating on the importance of military action, Mr. Obama repeatedly solicits the notion that this response is in the interest of national security. He then summarizes his speech with another reference to twentieth century nostalgia, by quoting a 1935 speech given by President Roosevelt.

The methods presented in this essay are used in a two pronged approach. With the purpose of securing the article, this approach allows for a careful analysis of both hyperbole and rhetoric. The term hyperbole is used in this essay to discover the rhetors use of exaggeration with the intent to sway opinion (Stoner, Perkins 2005). The term rhetoric is used to identify messages that are intended to influence the rhetors audience (Stoner, 2005).

The first of these methods is a classic neo-Aristotelian criticism. The function of this method allows proper identification of ethos, logos and pathos. These terms are used to describe ethics, logic and emotion (Stoner, 2005). The relevance of these devices are important to identify because of their influence on the audience. They provide the rhetor the opportunity to influence the audiences beliefs, attitudes, and most importantly actions (Stoner, 2005). The analysis of this artifact identifies these devices in Mr. Obama's speech as public appeals to humanity.

The second prong used in this essay is a narrative criticism. The function of this method is to analyze the rhetors account of events for rationality and fidelity (Stoner, 2005). In this artifact, Mr. Obama's invention of logical appeals is done through his narrative. The narrative is the way he, summarizes events, interprets facts and quotes others. Analyzing narrative rational allows this essay to dissect the logical consistency of the narrative (Stoner, 2005). Like wise, the narrative fidelity allows analysis into the logic of the rhetors reasoning (Stoner, 2005). It is in these ways the integrity of the narrative can be examined for hyperbole.

The rhetorical use of WWI and WWII are not new for Mr. Obama. To display a time when military force is necessary, he turns to these examples. As a senator, he referenced this time as a cause when war is justified (Obama, 2002). The purpose of this historical reference is to transfer noble properties to his narrative. This is a classic appeal to ethos, pathos and logos. It is through the shared lens of history that these events are viewed as a dichotomy between good and evil. Conjuring this inference in his audience, Mr. Obama is able to transfers preconceived feelings to his narrative. In this way the narrative invokes a shared impression of values. To consider the importance of values, is to understand that they are deeply connected to an individuals system of beliefs. In these ways, the neo-Aristotelian method shows the rhetors attempt to appeal to the audience through ethics, emotion and logic.

Pointing to international laws that regulate the use of chemical weapons is a rhetorical flaw in Mr. Obama's speech. Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed this point in a New York Times

editorial. Here, Mr. Putin explained that it is the roll of the United Nations Security Council to enforce international law, not that of the United States (Putin, 2013). The connection between this violation and the obligation the United States holds to enforce international laws is never made. The lack of this connection weakens the narratives rationality. To this point, the logical sequence between cause and effect is not clearly made. The fact that poison gas was used in another country does not create the authority for the United States to drop bombs. It is in these ways the narrative rationality exposes hyperbole in the artifact. For Mr. Obama, the connection is made by overinflating the importance of the United States and the urgency of the situation.

The proliferation of chemical weapons and their threat to the United States is important to this artifact. It is within this hasty generalization and slippery slope fallacy that Mr. Obama's narrative fidelity fails. He assumes that the failure to use military strikes will inevitably result in further distribution of said weapons. Mr. Obama presents no evidence that the Syrian President was responsible for these actions or has a desire to use these weapons in the future. To make these claims with out evidence builds fear and concern in his audience. It is for this reason the device is used. By making the event scary, Mr. Obama encourages support and makes his reason for action more urgent. In these ways this analysis discovers further persuasion using ethos and pathos. It is the lack of logical connections and evidence that exposes failed narrative fidelity.

Mr. Obama concludes his speech with a Franklin Roosevelt quote. This is taken from a 1935 speech given in San Diego, California. The application of these words to support his reasoning are taken absolutely out of context. The speech given by President Roosevelt was meant to address his response to the Great Depression and “despite what happens in continents overseas... the Fathers of our Country prayed that it might remain unentangled and free.” (Roosevelt, 1935) Kept in context, this speech gives reason to why President Roosevelt waited so long to enter WWII. What it does not do, is lend itself to the advocacy of unilateral military strikes founded on accusations. At this point, the narrative is no longer creditable. The rhetorical skew on facts, conditions and history exists in the

narrative for the sole purpose of hyperbole and persuasion. The ends of which is a clear justification for action.

Mr. Obama's use of these appeals are not unfamiliar. President Bush had similar justification for his unilateral decision to commence military strikes in Iraq (Bush, 2003). Prior to this invasion, Mr. Obama objected to Mr. Bush's rationale to invade without international support. He protested that there was “no imminent and direct threat to the United States” or allies. He further concluded that Mr. Bush was motivated not by principle but by politics (Obama, 2002). At that time, with this point, Mr. Obama contradicts his future actions as president. The implications of this previous anti-war position shows a shift in his paradigm. Recognizing this suggest alternative motivation other than the the ones stated in his speech. This observation shines a light onto the use of rhetoric and hyperbole. They create a humanitarian obligation to do the right thing. What they do not do is clarify why this event, at this particular time is more important than any other in the world.

It is the contention of this essay that the humanitarian appeal to stimulate public support for military force is nothing more than a manipulative strategy to further other objectives. Obscured from public view is any discussion of Mr. Obama's motivation in what has been termed, “the long war”(Pernin, Nichiporuk, Stahl, Beck & Randaelli-Sanchez, 2008). One objective of the long war, stated in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, was to “shape the choices of [foreign] countries at strategic crossroads”(Pernin et al., 2008). To this effect, the arraignment of interests that do not benefit the United States global primacy could very well be a strategic crossroad. One arraignment worth noting is Syria's pipeline deal with Iran (Iran signs \$10 billion gas deal with Syria, 2011). The impact of which has broad geopolitical implications for Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United States. To these points, it is imperative to slightly crack open the closed political aperture and allow a little light to expose the probability of political objectives.

The methods of analysis used in this essay have secured a slippery rhetorical artifact. Purposefully deployed, devices found in this speech were revealed to expose their intended design to

influence public beliefs, attitudes and action. If humanity is understood as a benevolent nature, then it is easily understood why figures of authority use this approach to gain public support. A simple example can be found in the difference between euthanasia and murder. One is an act of compassion and the other an act of passion.. To which, the use of chemical weapons, the urgency to use military force and the threat to the United States are little more than a veneer to the real issues. The use of these devices are no more than an appeal to the public's visceral response to humanity. Mr. Obama's use of this rhetorical platform is understandable when understood that killing for the righteous cause of humanity is more palatable than the bitter necessity of geopolitical strategy.

It was the people of the United States who had the authority to establish and enact the Constitution of the United States of America. This created an obligation for its citizens to monitor and hold accountable elected officials. It is this mandate that requires constituents to pay close attention to the actions and decisions of elected officials. Therefore, it is the conduct of public servants that require the scrutiny of private citizens. To this purpose this essay has assisted that role for society.

To the effect rhetoric has on the unaware, criticism necessary. As opinion leaders, rhetorical critics have a moral obligation in a democracy. "No nation state is likely to match America in the four key dimensions of power; military, economic, technological and cultural" (Brzezinski, 2004). This puts the United States in the unique position of being the first global hegemonic power with a democratically elected government (Bender, 2003). To this unique position, an informed constituency is required to critically analyze the actions and decisions made by elected leaders. Conversely, intellectual laziness becomes a breeding ground for manipulation. It is in this way the criticism found in this essay becomes relevant to society at rhetorical critics. Without which elected officials abuse their power, war is waged and life is lost.