

Analysis of charles krauthammer's opinion piece: asyndetons, allusions, telegraph...

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Analysis on Krauthammer Opinion Piece

Hindsight – as more time passes, emotions calm and the analysis of an event becomes more objective. Charles Krauthammer, a syndicated columnist for over 400 newspapers and a Pulitzer Prize winner wrote an article in 2011 loosely analyzing the last decade since the attack on the Twin Towers.

Krauthammer's premise is to invalidate "the new conventional wisdom" that the United States' military response to the attacks was an overreaction. To support his premise, Krauthammer uses asyndetons, telegraphic sentences and loaded words, but his primary tools of persuasion are rhetorical questions and historical allusions.

The piece is directed to the general American public and the people who believe in the "new conventional wisdom". Krauthammer begins the piece by defining "The new conventional wisdom on 9/11". He immediately establishes an emotional connection by engaging the audience in the first word of the definition by using the pronoun we, "We have created a decade of fear"(704). Krauthammer's use of 'we' infers he is a peer to his audience, hence, reinforcing his credibility and emotional connection to the readers. The definition continues with the asyndeton, "We overreacted to 9/11 – al-Qaeda turned out to be a paper tiger; there never was a second attack – thereby bankrupting the country, destroying our morale and sending us into national decline" (704).

Krauthammer uses an asyndeton three times in the piece for the same reasons, it creates an impactful sense of urgency and draws focus. In this

first asyndeton Krauthammer expresses the point of view of the opposing party. This highlights the topic he is trying to debunk. The sense of urgency makes the reader more conscious of the contents of the line. The second asyndeton, found in the second paragraph, creates an image of the fall of Osama bin Laden. The asyndeton brings emphasis to this line because it is read faster, since there are no conjunctions. This aids in the imagery of bin Laden's fall from power, not just as an average fall, but a dramatic fast fall. The third asyndeton bluntly emphasizes Krauthammer's view, " It kept us safe – the warrantless wiretaps, the Patriot Act, extraordinary rendition, preventive detention and yes, Guantanamo"(705). His concrete view on the US military response is highlighted in the first portion before the hyphen. The hyphen creates depth and concentration for his view. In turn, to support his credibility, Krauthammer acknowledges the opposing side's point that there were error and loss because of the military response. Although, directly after the acknowledgement he inserts a historical allusion and rhetorical question to bring the focus back to his point of view.

Contradictory to Krauthammer creating a sense of humility using ' we', the overall tone of the piece is condescension. The tone of condescension arises from Krauthammer's extensive use of rhetorical questions and historical allusions. The first question can be found in the second paragraph as Krauthammer writes, " The secretary of defense says that al-Qaeda is on the verge of strategic defeat. True. But why? Al-Qaeda did not spontaneously combust"(704). The answer to his question sets the tone of condescension because it is stating the obvious. The second rhetorical question, " What

turned the strong horse into the weak horse?" incites a stronger tone of condescension as he answers it beginning with the word precisely. The word is commonly used in a condescending tone when spoken, as if the audience had no knowledge of the topic. Krauthammer continues in the next paragraph by using logic and continuing with the use of the pronoun ' we' in an attempt to keep connected with the reader. He states that at the beginning of the Afghan campaign it was supported, but now has been denigrated to a war that bankrupted the US. Then he inserts, " We think of Pakistan as the terrorist sanctuary. We fail to see that Afghanistan is our sanctuary, the base from which we have freedom of action to strike Jihad Central in Pakistan and the border regions"(705). Here Krauthammer tries to maintain is persona as part of the people. He uses the loaded word, freedom, because it incites emotions from Americans. It helps to swing the reader to Krauthammer's view. He continues with the use of we in the next paragraph, but in reference to Iraq. Although in this reference, he also entwines a historical allusion of World War II. This historical allusion aids to have the reader create a positive link between the Afghan and Iraq wars to World War II, a war that America was proud to win. It is also Krauthammer using logic. He compares the recent situation to a situation successful situation in past. Reason dictates that if it is similar to a successful situation in the past, it has a high chance of being successful now.

Krauthammer continues in the seventh paragraph with a combination of rhetorical questions and historical allusions. After he acknowledges the point of the opposing side, he remarks, " Or the Pacific campaign of World War II,

with its myriad miscalculations, its often questionable island-hopping, that cost infinitely more American lives?" (705). Here he uses logic to say that there may have been errors and losses – the point of the opposing side – but in World War II there were also errors and losses and the US emerged just fine.

In the following paragraph, Krauthammer comes to his main point to debunk the "new conventional wisdom", that in the last 10 years there has been no second attack. As Krauthammer states, "That testifies to the other great achievement of the decade: the defensive anti-terror apparatus hastily constructed from scratch after 9/11" (705). The loaded word, testify, connotes truth. Like freedom, this is another American value held close by citizens. The lack of the attack testifies that the US response was not an overreaction. This is Krauthammer using logic and emotion to persuade the reader to his point of view.

Towards the end of the piece, Krauthammer begins to state economic facts. Though his use of 'we' helped improve his credibility, his lack of citations of the facts creates difficulties in trusting the figures and his entire piece. On the contrary, the use of these figures such as, "[Eisenhower] defense spending was 11 percent of GDP and 60 percent of the federal budget. Today, defense spending is 5 percent of the GDP" (705), is Krauthammer using logic to tell the reader that the money used in Afghan and Iraq war is nothing compared to the Eisenhower administration and the US was fine. He continues with a condescending tone as he says that the US approaching bankruptcy, "has as much to do with the war on terror as do

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sunspots”(706). This is Krauthammer inferring that there is no basis for the “ new conventional wisdom” since there is no correlation between US bankruptcy and the war on terror.

Krauthammer comes to a close with a final historical allusions and a telegraphic sentence, “ 9/11 was our Pearl Harbor”(706). Here Krauthammer tries to emotionally persuade the reader for the last time through American patriotism. He continues with is final attempt at using logic to sway the reader “ the enemy had no home address. No Tokyo. Which is why today’s war could not be wrapped up in a mere four years”(706). With his use of rhetorical questions and historical allusions he logically makes a strong case against the “ new conventional wisdom on 9/11”(704). Krauthammer’s use of asyndetons, telegraphic sentences, the use of ‘ we’ and loaded words successfully created an emotional link with the American general public despite the overall condescending tone. The combination of his use of logic and emotion is perfectly blended to persuade the reader that the “ new conventional wisdom” is nonsense.