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Undemocratic and Liable

Noel Kildiszew

Written for COM 301: Rhetoric and Social Influence (Prof. Justin Kirk)

The tragedy of World War II left the world in rubble. In 1945, a continent once controlled by fascist and communist dictators found itself in the process of rehabilitation not only of cities but also of government systems. With Hitler and Mussolini literally out of the equation, the world could seemingly recover peacefully. However, seventy-four years later in 2019, similar problems are beginning to rise out of the ashes of WWII. Under the presidency of Donald Trump, the United States government is beginning to align itself with fascist ideology. Traditionally, fascism creates social and government systems that support a centralized government, national and racial purity, and militarism. In her article "Will We Stop Trump Before It's Too Late?" former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright explores the danger of this new trend, pointing to the ways in which President Trump's undemocratic decision-making in the Oval Office perpetuates this ideology. U.S. citizens on either side of the political spectrum should pay attention to Albright's argument while testing for manipulative rhetoric. A resurrection of this political ideology could have negative implications both at home and abroad. Thus, by examining the impact of certain presidential actions, the following rhetorical analysis allows for an apolitical look into Albright's claims, evidence, and reasoning.

Albright forms her argument on one central claim. She asserts that Donald Trump encourages the spread of fascism, "...the possibility

that fascism will be accorded a fresh chance to strut around the world stage is enhanced by the volatile presidency of Donald Trump." This major claim is supported throughout the article with several sub-claims. First, Albright expands on how leaders throughout the world are contributing to this new wave of fascism, "The raw anger that feeds fascism is evident across the Atlantic..." Next, she claims that America's leadership is particularly necessary to stunt the spread of this ideology, "If freedom is to prevail over the many challenges to it, American leadership is urgently required." She concludes with claiming that a *great* nation such as America does not "merit that label by aligning itself with dictators and autocrats, ignoring human rights, declaring open season on the environment, and disdaining the use of diplomacy at a time when virtually every serious problem requires international cooperation..." Overall, Albright challenges the current administration, providing her interpretations and alluding to her predictions of Trump's presidential engagements both foreign and domestic.

Throughout this rhetoric, Albright uses strong evidence and reasoning which strengthen her central argument. To demonstrate the potential resurrection of fascism, she first presents examples of oppressive power across the globe, "The danger of despotism is on display...Putin has just been re-elected to a new six-year term...In China, Xi Jinping has persuaded a docile National People's Congress to lift the constitutional limit

on his tenure in power.” Putin’s reelection sparked conversation globally. According to interviews with Russian constituents, Cable News Network (CNN) reporter Angela Dewan found that many citizens chose to abstain from voting because they neither wanted to support Putin’s ever tightening grip on Russia nor vote for an inexperienced third-party candidate (2018). Further east in China, Xi has ensured his presidency for life, enforcing a consolidation of power. *Time*’s Charlie Campbell writes “China’s burgeoning influence, augmented by Washington’s retreat into nativist language, further normalizes autocratic political systems that have been on the rise since the 2008 financial crisis” (2018). Campbell suggests that autocratic political systems are trending and becoming seemingly acceptable at the fault of both Xi and Trump. According to the 2019 U.S. News & World Report, the U.S., Russia, and China are ranked as the world’s top three most powerful countries. Albright’s evidence and reasoning highlights the influence these countries have on the world’s stage.

Historically, these abuses of power abroad would oblige the U.S. to intervene in some way, spreading the ideology of a healthy democracy. As Albright states, “If freedom is to prevail over the many challenges to it, American leadership is urgently required. This was among the indelible lessons of the 20th century.” However, the media suggests Trump has instead built comradeships with these leaders. In Asia for example, Trump made a visit to Beijing to meet with Xi towards the end of 2017. Nick Frisch of *The New Yorker* expands on this visit and explains how popular Trump was among the Chinese public. He states, “[Trump’s] brash artifice, transactional worldview, and blood-and-soil nativism are all

familiar archetypes in China... Trump’s election neatly fit the Chinese-propaganda narrative that American democracy, while it may have had its moment, is a fluke, and will ultimately end in corruption and dysfunction” (2017). Unlike past U.S. presidential visits, Trump’s did not come with a plea to the Chinese government for moral and democratic change. Rather, Trump fit nicely into their autocratic ideology. Albright reasons that “instead of standing up for the values of a free society, Mr. Trump, with his oft-vented scorn for democracy’s building blocks, has strengthened the hands of dictators.”

In his campaign, Trump’s stance on immigration veered farther to the Right than most Republicans running in the race. Now under Trump’s presidency, there has been a growing target on the issue of immigration. In the *New York Times*, Clyde Haberman explains that Trump has turned anti-foreigner, seen in both his lukewarm efforts to help the refugee crisis and his passionate pursuit of a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico. In conclusion, Haberman suggests that this stems from xenophobia, a fear fueling Trump’s “America First” policies. Albright’s central argument is supported by her reasoning of Trump’s relationship with immigrants, “He libels immigrants and the countries from which they come. His words are so often at odds with the truth that they can appear ignorant, yet they are in fact calculated to exacerbate religious, social and racial divisions.” Albright’s reasoning concludes that Trump is seeking to divide the people of our nation, pushing out those who are politically, racially, or even religiously different. These xenophobic actions display America as a nation who supports oppressive ideology to our enemies and allies abroad. Albright reasons that “Mr. Trump

appears to like bullies, and they are delighted to have him represent the American brand.”

In 2018, president Trump named John Bolton as the new United States National Security Adviser (NSA). As a result, Albright questioned the quality of Trump’s future security decisions: “The recent purge of his national security team raises new questions about the quality of advice he will receive. John Bolton starts work in the White House on Monday.” According to CNN’s David Rothkopf, Bolton “is known as an architect of the Iraq War, an enemy of multilateralism and foe of the United Nations...He is also a harsh critic of the Iran nuclear deal and of North Korea, and is seen as someone who might promote conflict in both cases” (2018). Siding with Albright’s concern, Rothkopf explores the major apprehensions and potential consequences surrounding Bolton’s new position as NSA. His ideology discourages international alliances and has proven to be unpredictable in nature. Given his reputation, using Bolton as an example strengthens Albright’s argument because it forces the audience to question the leadership of Trump regarding international affairs.

Albright’s strongest conclusion in her article paints Trump as an undemocratic leader. She explains, “At one time or another, Mr. Trump has attacked the judiciary, ridiculed the media, defended torture, condones police brutality, urged supporters to rough up hecklers and—jokingly or not—equated mere policy disagreements with treason.” In these examples, Trump is shown to lack moral leadership and encourage conflict among fellow Americans. Regarding Trump’s critique of the media, Richard Cohen with the *Washington Post* presents how Trump refers to any news source with an adverse opinion to the Trump

Administration as “fake news.” The freedom of the press established in the First Amendment protects democracy and liberty. Without it, the presidency seemingly loses one of its checks and balances. Who will keep them accountable? According to Cohen, Trump wants a “servile press, one that offers praise, withholds criticism and refrains from reporting awkward truths” (2018). Ultimately, undemocratic actions provide the catalyst to a fascist revival.

Albright’s rhetoric makes lofty claims, calling the audience to action. Thus, it is necessary for a critic to test her article for manipulation. First, a critic should consider if the rhetoric intentionally silences other groups or people. Albright’s article does not violate this standard. Rather, she states, “... we should each do our part to energize the democratic process by registering new voters, listening respectfully to those with whom we disagree, knocking on doors for favored candidates, and ignoring the cynical counsel...” Second, a critic should test if the rhetoric attempts to overwhelm the audience’s reason. Rather than build up the audience to a powerful emotional response, she presents solid evidence to support her claims. For example, she states, “His policy toward North Korea changes by the day and might quickly return to saber-rattling should Pyongyang prove stubborn before or during talks.” Lastly, a critic should check if the rhetoric targets groups or individual people, not their ideas or actions. Although she addresses Trump often, she never attacks his character. Critiquing his actions and ideology, she states, “Instead of engaging in creative diplomacy, he has insulted United States neighbors and allies, walked away from key international agreements, mocked multilateral organizations and stripped the State

Department of its resources and role.” Overall, Albright meets the standard for ethical rhetoric.

Contemporary politics have caused historical turbulence in the United States. Though the WWII era has concluded, remnants of fascist ideology that propelled the war continue to guide political leaders today. Given the current state of U.S. foreign relation and domestic policy issues, Albright’s arguments are crucial to consider. As an informed citizen, constituents from either political party should consider Albright’s argument earnestly as this issue is impartial to entire political spectrum. Guided by

the actions of an American political leader, the threat of a fascist renaissance impacts individuals on a global scale due to U.S. influence abroad. Albright allows her audience to question for themselves whether Trump is acting undemocratically or not. Provided with the necessary evidence to consider, readers are urged to create a dialogue around this issue, stopping its polarizing influences. Though her major claim seems unimaginable, the evidence is factual and her reasoning is consistent. Ultimately, her rhetoric is effective and does not attempt to deceive or manipulate the audience.

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