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A Critical Discourse Study of the Discursive-Legitimation of Geopolitical War in Munich Security Conference

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Abstract: In de-escalation discourse about war, representation has developed into a potential tool for legitimizing or contesting war. However, little is known about the representation of war in security meetings made by Western. To fill this gap, this study comparatively investigates the representation of war in the context of Munich Security Conference. Specifically, it seeks to explore how war are justified, negotiated, how support is mobilized and how different geopolitical war actors are represented. This study employs a qualitative method. It applies an eclectic model comprising Reisigl and Wodak's (2001-2009) Discourse-Historical Approach and van Dijk's (2024) Mobilization, and Chilton's (2004) functions of war discourse to reveal the representation of war in different geopolitical settings. The speech of the U.S. Kamala Harris (US representative) delivered at the 2024 version of Munich Security Conference was analysed. It is found that that there is a constituent pattern of binary representation of social actors; the United States with its allies are discursively positioned as having authority to achieve stability across the globe while the Russia-particularly Putin, Iran, Hamas, China and their allies are represented as aggressive and destabilizing. Besides, the study reveals that Harris' speech functions as a discursive legitimation of the in-group war and the legitimation of U.S. global leadership in the time of conflicts. It is concluded that American longstanding role in global leadership is moralized and war is not an aggressive choice, but it is normalized as defensive necessity.

Keywords: War discourse, Critical discourse analysis, representation, Gaza and Ukraine.

INTRODUCTION

Complex global issues such as war have long been more than a matter of armed confrontation; in international settings such as Munich Security Conference (henceforth, MSC), wars are also negotiated, legitimized and disputed through language. Political speakers make use of such international arena to produce and reproduce ideologies of peace, war, threats, and shared defense. Al-Shboul (2023) states that language is used to show "how discourse develops around social problems and

reflects the struggle". Chilton (2004) argues that the way war discourse is represented in global arena significantly influences decision-making and public perception. In accordance with this context, critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA) has emerged as a productive analytical tool to denaturalize language in order to explore how events and persons are represented for particular ends. It also reveals the kinds of power interests buried in texts which appear normal or neutral for the surface, but which may, in fact, be ideological (Mayr & Machin, 2023, p., 326).

Although extensive scholarly attentions have been given to war discourse (cf. Mahfoud & Khaldou, 2023; Abdelhameed & Gabeen, 2025; Alexandrovna & Andreevna, 2025), there remains a relative gap in the studies which systematically discover international contexts such as MSC. Most studies have prioritized political speeches produced in domestic times (e.g., Hodges, 2011), and few studies have significantly concentrated on the role of the mediators in conflicts who are not directly engaged in wars. Addressing this gap in the research could yield distinctively how war discourses are framed across different geopolitical boundaries.

The current study employs Discourse-Historical Approach (henceforth, DHA) to analyse the U.S. Vice President selected international political speech delivered at MSC concerning armed conflict in Gaza and Ukraine. By applying an eclectic model compromising Reisigl and Wodak's (2001-2009), Van Dijk (2024) and Chilton' (2004) functions of war discourse, this study examines the four level discursive strategies that underpin the war discourse constructions in international settings. By qualitative analysis of linguistic strategies, the current study aims at uncovering how war discourse constructs 'self' and 'other' to legitimize or delegitimize military interventions.

This study is significant for its coverage of a broader lens of international discourses rather than the limited national ones. It is also methodologically rigorous in its eclectic model which helps discover the resources and reflection of power and ideology in wartime. Consequently, the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How war actors are discursively constructed, are they emphasized, downgraded, or left implicit?
- 2) What argumentation strategies are used to legitimize or delegitimize war in international meetings?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Critical Discourse Analysis Pinpointed

CDA is the field which is concerned with analyzing texts (spoken or written) to uncover the ways dominance, bias, power and inequality are reproduced and maintained discursively in accordance with the political, historical or social context (van Dijk, 1988). It moves beyond textual structure to uncover the interaction between discourse, ideology, institutions and representations (Fairclough, 1995; Flowerdew and Richardson, 2019). Representation and discourse, in communication, are shaped by power and ideology (Fairclough, 1989; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

The key characteristics which define CDA is its criticality; CDA is deliberately critical since its

motivation is to recognize the inter-connections underlying language and society. Wodak and Chilton (2005, p. xii) argue that it became critical to cope with the "turbulent environment that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union" with its new "social and political problems" as those social and political problems were discursively reflected. Mayr & Machin (2023, p., 326) add that criticality in CDA means exploring language to reveal kinds of ideas in texts which appear neutral for the surface, but may seek to shape the representation of events".

Within the realm of the current study, CDA is more applicable to analyze war discourse and political speeches to examine critically the extent to which the political speeches shapes and influence public opinions to legitimize military actions and justify aggressions in conflicted areas such as Palestine and Ukraine.

B. Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach in CDA

The discourse historical approach (henceforth DHA) is established by the Austrian linguist Wodak and her colleagues. This approach is a prominent approach within CDA. From its name, it incorporates linguistic analysis with historical context so as to understand the way discourses are either shape or shaped by social practice. Like all other CDA approaches, this approach attempts to analyze the "structural relationships of power, dominance, control and discrimination" by providing tools to identify and describe the fundamental mechanisms which play a significant role to those social disorders (Wodak, 2001, p. 2). This approach involves four levels namely topic establishment, discursive construction, perspectivization, mitigation and intensification level. The following selected levels will guide the subsequent analysis.

1. Topic Establishment Level

In this stage, topic of the discourse is either observed or inferred. In this regard, van Dike (2001) asserts that topic identification "provides a first, overall, idea of what a discourse or corpus of texts is all about, and controls many other aspects of discourse and its analysis" (p., 102). In the data of the current study, the controlling topic is War discourse with its sub-types which are rooted in and Chilton (2004) strategic ideological functions. They involve the following sub-topics:

- i. **Justificatory (of War) Discourse:** war may be represented as inevitable and necessary to legitimize violence of the military forces.
- ii. **Demonizing (of the Other) Discourse:** war discourse may demonize the enemy and portray them as a threat, evil, danger to justify violence.
- iii. **Mobilizing (of the Public) Discourse:** war discourses may involve attempts to find support of the nation to motivate 'Our' nation to agree by

voting to participate in war and fund the costs of war. For instance, “The enemy is at the border”.

- iv. **Victimizing (of Us) Discourse:** the self may be represented as a victim of injustice or aggression. This is done to make the world to empathize with “Us” which is informed by Chilton’s (2004) function of misrepresentation of reality(see also Wodak & Reisigl, 2001).

2. The Nomination or Referential Strategies

Nomination involves categorizing persons or groups linguistically “by naming them derogatory, debasingly or vituperatively” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p.45-47). A lot of categories of nomination are based on van Leeuwen’ (1993 and 1996) social actor representation which involve constructing or hiding social actors, inclusion, exclusion, backgrounding and collectivization. However, some additional strategies are adapted from van Leeuwen’s (2008). The rationale for adapting this updated source is that it contains more categories of constructing which is closely related to conflict-related discourses.

3. Predication Strategy

Reisigl and Wodak (2001) add that as soon as social actors are identified, they are furnished with predictions. These predictions could be recognized as “stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits in the linguistic form of explicit or implicit predicate”. The ideology behind these predication strategies lies in its labeling of social actors appreciatively or deprecatorily, negatively or positively. For instance, “*Foreigners are dirty*”, and “*Jews are social parasite*” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p. 55-56).

4. Argumentation Strategy

Reisigl and Wodak (2001) argue that these negative or positive predictions could be justified through the use of topoi of argumentation (p.,45). These topoi involve giving explicit or implicit reasoning in war narratives for the sake of persuasiveness. Van Dijk (2000) states that such topoi are “ready-mades in argumentation’. Thus, war discourse is expected to be replete with such topoi.

- i. **Topos of Burdening:** this topos implies that *if any entity (individuals, groups, institutions or courtiers) is burdened by particular actions or problems, it should be acted against them to reduce those burdens* (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).
- ii. **Topos of Authority:** this topos implies that “*X has the right to do something, or X has to be done because A has the authority in deciding that*” (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, p. 79).
- iii. **Topos of Humanitarianism:** this topos implies that whenever/wherever there are political decisions (e.g. to engage in war) do not obey human rights conventions, the politicians should not perform it(Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).
- iv. **Topos of Threat or Danger:** this topos is based on the following formula “*if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them, and this argument scheme can lead to a victim-victimizer reversal*”(Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 77). Those topoi are summarized in table (1) after Reisigl & Wodak (2001,pp 77-80):
- v. **Topos of Responsibility**
This topos can be formalized in the following conditional:
“if actors have responsibility, then these actors must act”
This topos contributes to the normalization of the intervention and the silencing of the alternative voices. In DHA, responsibility is rarely neutral, it is associated with history derived from “lessons of history” and inter-textually reinforced by referring to past wars or horrific events such as “Dec,11” event in America. Reisigl and Wodak (2009) emphasize that analysing responsibility topos helps to reveal who is allowed to act.
- vi. **Topos of History:** This topos involves temporal comparisons. It implies that certain actions should or should not be done because they had already certain consequences(Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p., 80).
- vii. **Topos of Finance:** this topos implies that “*if a specific situation or action costs too much money or causes a loss of revenue, one should perform actions that diminish the costs or help to avoid the loss*”(Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p.,78).

Table 1. Topoi of Argument Adapted from Reisigl & Wodak (2001)

No	Topoi of Argument	Example	Ideological Function
1.	Topos of Burdening	“we were forced to react”	stifying violence as reactions to their actions
2.	Topos of Authority	esident Trump said “military invention is the only solution”	Legitimizing War as it initiated by Authority (individual or institution)
3.	opos of Humanitarianism	“We are saving Lives”	Framing Military Actions as humanitarian duty
4.	Topos of Threat/ Danger	“they are terrorists”	ming the antagonist as evil and dangers
5.	Topos of Responsibility	eaders have responsibility to stop aggressors”	Legitimizing political actions and supporting hegemonic leadership
6.	os of History	y are Nazis”	ming the self as victims

Reisigl (2017,p.52) summarizes the questions used to approach those five strategies and the purpose behind implementing them which are summarized in Table 2. :

Table (2) Questions and Purpose of DHA Four Discursive Strategies

No.	Questions of Discursive Features	Discursive Strategies	Purpose of Discursive Strategies
a)	How are persons, events and processes referred to linguistically?	Nomination/ Referential	Discursive construction of social actors, events and processes.
b)	What qualities are attributed to social actors?	Predication	Negative or positive discursive characterization of social actors and events.
c)	What argumentative topoi are employed in the discourse?	Argumentation	Persuading or justifying the addresses of specific claims.
d)	Are the respective utterances intensified or mitigated?	Intensification/ Mitigation	Modifying the force of utterances regarding their epistemic & deontic status

C. CDA and Political Representation

The notion of representation constitutes a fundamental concept within CDA. Fairclough (2003, p.124) mentions that “representation is always interwoven with power, as discourse not only describes the world but also serves to legitimize, challenge or transform social relations”. In CDA, representations are understood as shaped and mediated constructions rather than neutral images of reality (Mayr & Machin, 2023). Thus, they are selective practice. Representations are ideology-sensitive influenced by social contexts, power relations and ideological beliefs (van Dijk, 1998; 1998; Fairclough, 2015), which realized by linguistic choices which in turn shape how groups or individuals are represented.

In this regard, van Dijk (2008) states that leading groups strategically use language to sustain power by directing how individuals, groups, and events are represented. As for portraying war events, this may be represented as “necessary intervention”, “self-defense” or “defense of freedom” rather than an “aggression”. This representation of war depends chiefly on political speakers’ ideological perspectives. Accordingly, the way events (e.g., war) are framed impact public opinions and reactions to justify or condemn events like war. Baker et al., (2008) argues that lexical choices carry ideological implications for example, speakers have a choice between “illegal aliens” versus “asylum seekers” in describing immigrants. Fairclough (2015) mentions that speakers also have a choice in the syntactic level in using passive or active constructions. For example, “ten civilians were killed” versus “the military kicked ten civilians”. Lakoff (2004) depicts that metaphor used in representing events influence people perceptions for example portraying war as “a game” implying “winning hearts” versus “disease” implying spreading disease” which in turn frame war as a normal consequence or a problem.

Representation is decisive. It “is one of the obvious functions of discourse...since through language we present view of reality” (Chilton,2004,p.46;Boyd & Llamas, 2012, p.318). For example, the way George W. Bush in 2003 frames war in the Middle East as “War on Terror” which is a battle between “good and evil”. This binary description influence public perception to justify military actions.

D. Ideology and War Discourse

War discourse is a strategic communicative practice through which political actors construct, justify, contest or legitimize military actions. Central to this type of discourse is ideology; Ideology refers to the socially shared frameworks of meanings through which speakers or writers represent events and actions in the world around them (van Dijk, 1998). Besides, ideologies are “representations of who we are... what our relationships are with other groups, in particular our enemies or opponents, that is, those who oppose what we stand for, threaten our interests and prevent us from equal access to social resources and human rights” (van Dijk, 1998 p.312).

CDA aims at uncovering how language contributes to sustain unequal power relations (van Dijk, 2006). Among the various forms of ideology is the ideology of war, which often seeks to naturalize power misuse and legitimize control over other people or other territories by strategically misrepresenting the “Others” through processes of negative other representation (Wodak, 2015).

Those representations are manifested in language which reflects the fact that the association between language and ideologies are closely seen; as Verschueren (2011) argues that the relationship between language and ideology is not direct; it is realized through choices that a language user uses (Jiang and Cui, 2014). It is this selectivity in the

discourse which critical discourse analysts try to uncover in the discourse particularly the typical “discrimination, biases and representation”, then showing their role in power and social struggle (Xin, 2016, p. 22; van Dijk, 2000; Yang, 2023). Consequently, Ideological representations are main focus of CDA where critical discourse analysts analyze how different hidden ideologies are created, spread and strengthened through discourse. Those hidden Ideologies require analyst to deliberately decode them depending on effective choices of lexical items, syntactic construction, modality and transitivity. Understanding how ideologies are constructed in discourse helps to see how community perceptions of certain social issues (e.g., race issues, immigration, war and peace, etc.) are represented in the media and politics which in turn have an impact on policy-making and general social cohesion(van Dijk , 2020).

E. Gaza and Ukraine Wars in the Munich Security Conference

Munich Security conference is held every year in Munich, Germany to discuss most heated issues such as wars. It is the world's largest gathering of its kind (Franke, 2024). The 60th version of this conference held in 2024 focused mainly on the wars in Gaza and Ukraine. The ongoing struggle in Gaza between Israel reached its most escalation when Hamas attacked Israel on Oct.7, 2023. The Israel response leads to extraordinary destruction, hostages and loss of civilian lives(<https://securityconference.org/en/msc-2024/>). The conflict in Gaza attracts many international discourses which mirrors polarized positions of global representatives; in Western discourses, Israel is usually framed as doing “self-defense” whereas Hamas is normally represented as “terrorists”. On the contrary, In Arab and Middle-East discourses, the conflict is framed as occupation and Hamas is portrayed as resistance to that occupation (www.dailyparliamenttimes.com). The war of Russia against Ukraine is not seen as a regional struggle, but a threat to the existential of Europe as a whole. It reached its high escalation in 2022 when Russian decided to invade Ukraine. What bothers Russia is Ukraine ongoing attempt to become a member of the NATO. Russia sees this attempt as a threat to its sovereignty(Cahyono et. al. 2022, p. 10).

The discourses about these wars attracted many CDA researchers; Philo and Berry (2004) mention that when the conflict is reported in international arena, both sides of the conflict do their best to stress the validity of their own story in terms of the language they use for the descriptions of what is happening and “who is to blame” (p., 256).

Consequently, it becomes the arena of discursive battlefield where the language of war is crafted to influence international agenda. When applying CDA to MSC speeches, it will help to show how various powers structures of politicians influence different conflicts on a global scale.

I. METHODOLOGY

A. Model of the Analysis

In order to systematically analyze the discourse of war in international arena critically, an eclectic model was used in this study. The basic model is DHA after Reisigl and Wodak's (2001 & 2009) four interconnected level with further enhancement from Van Leeuwen's (2008) social Actor Representation model. The four levels follow a logical flow from topic identification, discursive strategies of nomination, predication and argumentation strategies.

The rationale for using Reisigl &Wodak (2001-2009) framework of DHA is that it is “the most linguistically oriented of the CDA scholars”(Wodak & Mayer, 2016, p.21). It also offers a macro-contextual orientation which is vital in “interpreting the linguistic data within their sociopolitical context”. This can only be reached using DHA since it integrates knowledge from other field of study (e.g., history) which, in turn, offers deep interpretation to “understand why specific discriminatory discursive practices are performed ... in pursuit of specific political or social aims”(Wodak & Mayer, 2016, p.268).

Besides, the motivation behind integrating categories from other approaches within the four –level main model of this study is due to the complexity of international political conflict-related discourse as well as the following motivations; Van Leeuwen's (2008) model of social actor is best suits the second category of Reisigl & Wodak (2001) namely ‘Nomination discursive strategy’, particular with Van Leeuwen's new categories of ‘Appraisalment’ and ‘Functionalisation’ which aid in reveal biased representation.

B. Data Collection and Rationale

The current study implements a qualitative method; a method which Khanday & Khanam (2019) reveal its advantage as yielding “maximal information about the problem under consideration” by deeply analysing the data(p., 374). The use of such method could also afford various benefits concerning the scope of concepts and the scopes of explanations of the research problem which in turn lead to have the strengths of qualitative methods (Tzagkarakis & Kirtas, 2022; Maxwell, 2023).

The data of this study was selected based on the criteria of purposive sampling and the following criteria (direct relevance to war discourses, speaker's authority, geopolitical significance, and public accessibility). Consequently,

the U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris’ political speeches delivered at MSC in its summit in the year of 2024 were selected. Harris speech is taken from Frank’s(2024) book namely ‘Collection of Munich Speeches’.

MSC is chosen since it invites representatives from all over the world even the conflicted actors to discuss urgent matter with direct relations to the globe stabilization.

The conference of 2024 is chosen since it has themes of the war in Ukraine and the war in Gaza as the main dish to be discussed which in turn have direct link to the concept of the current study (i.e., discourse of war). This speech belongs geopolitically to the Global West (Harris speech). This speech belongs to a powerful country which in turn would influence the way war is condemned, legitimized, and represented in different geopolitical places of the globe.

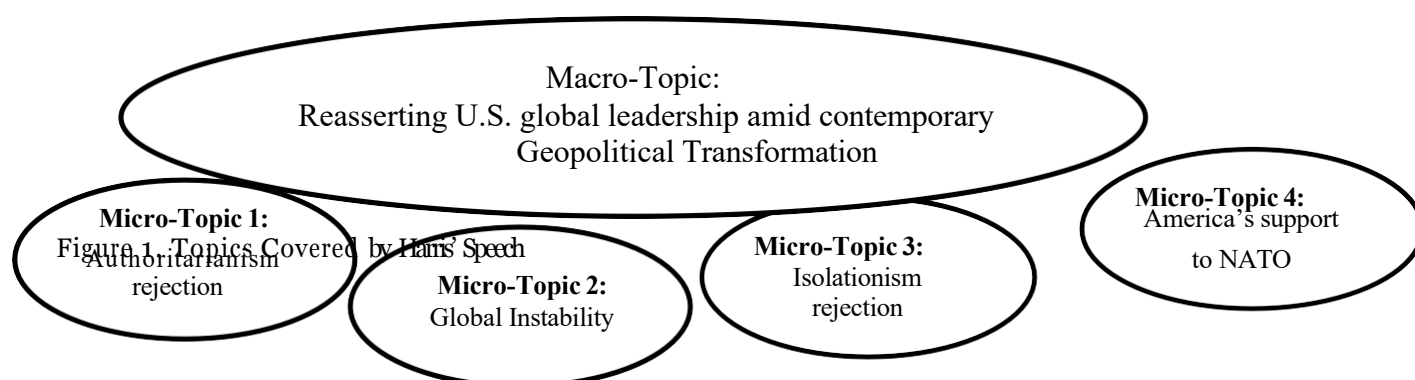
II. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In DHA, it is important to understand the moment in history in which the speech was delivered, the problem the speech respond to, and all other factors that makes the speech meaningful. Thus, this analysis starts with the historical and sociopolitical background then proceeds with the other selected stages of DHA.

Historical and sociopolitical context- Kamala Harris delivered this speech in the 2024 version of MSC amidst interconnected geopolitical tensions in Ukraine and Gaza. The war in Ukraine reshaped the NATO priorities and the European security policy. The event of the death of political prisoner named Alexia Navalny in the Russian prisons influenced Harris speech and the agenda of MSC where it turned the tone of MSC from strategic to human-right oriented. This event is mentioned in the opening paragraph of Harris speech. There was also anxiety in Europe about U.S. commitment to continue supporting NATO since 2024 was an election year in US so many European were worried about whether America will isolate itself from the NATO or not. Therefore, Harris speech met this worries by reassuring message that the U.S. remains committed the collective defense by NATO. Finally, this speech came amidst international instability and crisis in Gaza, tensions with China and disruptions in global supply chains, and the American internal division Congress political polarization regarding Ukraine war funding.

i. Topic establishment

Defining the topic or the sub-topics of the speech dives the analysis clarity in showing how the ideological influence of each political war speech is achieved. Harris’ speech is centered on the macro-topic of the America’s global leaderships in time of conflicts. Such topic is developed and supported by a sequence of interrelated micro-topics which visualized in Figure 1.



Harris’ speech is directed to legitimize the continued leadership of the U.S. administration. Such leadership is depicted as imperative and strategic in response to global instability in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. The Micro-topics contribute to the argumentative coherence of the speech. In Chilton’s terminology, this speech function as demonizing discourse; Harris demonizes both internal calls to isolate America external struggles, and external worries of Europe about America’s support to NATO. The speech also functions to victimize the Ukraine by rejecting authoritarianism of Russia.

ii. Discursive Construction of Social Actors

The speech of Harris at MSC encompasses a multilayered network of social actors. This stage of analysis involves exploring nomination (how social actors are referred to) and predication (how social actors are described using various adjectives), and argumentation as observable linguistic practices. These discursive strategies are ideologically vital for legitimizing USA foreign policy regarding geopolitical global conflicts.

The actor analysis of this speech reveals a different nomination and predication strategies which align with the in-group social actors involving the United States, Biden-Harris administration, Ukraine, Ukrainians, Arab leaders as shown in Table 3. It also involves the out-group social actors encompassing Russia, Putin, Hamas,

domestic opposing parties in the U.S., and Iran and its proxies as shown in Table 4. These are the main social actors which are built both explicitly and implicitly throughout the whole speech by reference and predication.

Table 3. The Representation of the In-groups in Harris' Speech

Social actor	Nomination	Predication
-United States -Biden-Harris Administration	-the United States -America (metonymy) -President Biden and I (institution roles) -our administration	-strong, powerful, prosperous. -Defender of democracy - rational, globally engaged -Builder of alliance
Ukraine Ukrainians	-the people of Ukraine (Collectivization) -President Zelenskyy (individualization) -a free and democratic people	-Brave and skillful -victims of aggression -Kyiv stands free and strong
NATO European Allies	-NATO (institutional actor) -our allies and partners -Europe (collectivization) -50-nation coalition	-strong, Unified, more effective. -standing for freedom and democracy -Making historic commitments.
Arab Leaders	-Arab leaders (regional collectivization)	-important partners for diplomacy

i. Nomination strategies of social actors

As for Nomination strategies of social actors, Table 3. reveal that Harris consistently employs collectivization to construct the in-group social actors which comprise the United States and its allies. They are realized through first-person plural pronouns 'we', 'our', national identifiers 'America', the United States, and alliance-based references 'our partners'. This nomination patterns position the in-groups as a unified collective social actors.

On the contrary, as shown in Table 4., some of the out-groups are excluded such as America' domestic oppositions. This is realized in "*there are some in the United who disagree*" (Harris, 2024). This social actor is left implicit. Such concealment has the ideological function of criticizing the opponent without direct confrontation. It also involves concealing Iran's friend such as Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, by referring to them using vague reference such as "we work to counter aggression from Iran and its *proxies*, prevent regional escalation" (Harris, 2024). Other out-group social actors are referred to explicitly; this involves America's foreign opponent such as 'Russia', 'China' and 'Iran' which are referred to using the strategy of Nationalization. 'Putin' is another actor which is referred to using the strategy of Individualization and Hamas is referred to using the strategy of Functionalization by highlighting their role as committing a "terrorist attack" (Harris, 2024). The same is applied to Putin when his role of "an aggressor" (Harris, 2024) or "an imperialist authoritarian"(Harris, 2024) is highlighted as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The Representation of the Out-groups in Harris' Speech

Social actor	Nomination	Predication
-Russia - Putin	-Russia: (collectivization) -Putin (individualization) -An imperialist authoritarian -an aggressor (categorization)	-Responsibility for Navalny's death -Brutality -Aggression, recklessness - failure, high casualties
Hamas	-Hamas -a terrorist organization	- slaughter, torture, rape, -triggering the conflict, -threat to civilians
-Iran and its proxies	Iran and its Proxies (Genericization)	-counter aggression -risk of regional escalation
-American domestic opposition	-some in the United states (indefinite reference) -they (distancing pronoun)	-[their] worldview is dangerous and short-sighted. -would weaken America and global stability.

reveal that there are certain attributes, characteristics and qualities assigned differently to the in-group and out-group social actors in Harris speech as follows: The in-group social actors are predicted positively through attributes of leadership, powerfulness,

DISCUSSION

Predication Strategies of Social Actor

As for predication strategies, Table 3. And Table 4.

responsibility, strength and braveness, defender of democracy rationale, victims and important partners of democracy. This is identified in examples such as "how America responds will affect the American people, the people of Europe, and people around the world" (Harris, 2024). Besides, positive attributes was condensed in describing Ukraine such as "the bravery of the people of Ukraine, along with the leadership of President Zelenskyy and the 50-nation coalition the United States has led, has allowed Ukraine to achieve what so many thought was impossible. Today, Kyiv stands free and strong" (Harris, 2024). Such positive predication represents the in-group as powerful and dependable.

The out-group social actors are predicted negatively through threat-oriented attributes. For example, Russia is associated with aggression and murder, as in "Russia is responsible [for Navalny's death]", "We have also imposed economic costs on Russia for its aggression", "If we fail to impose severe consequences on Russia, other authoritarians across the globe would be emboldened" (Harris, 2024). Hamas is associated with terrorism as in "Hamas committed a terrorist act [of its attack on Israel on October, the seventh]" (Harris, 2024), and Iran is associated with geopolitical instability as in "we also work to counter aggression from Iran and its proxies" (Harris, 2024).

The Argumentation strategies (Topoi)

As for the Argumentation strategies (Topoi), they are used to justify the predications assigned to the social actors. There are recurring topoi in Harris speech as follows:

Topos of Burdening

This topos implies that if any entity is burdened by particular actions or problems, it should be acted against them to reduce those burdens (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). Here, Harris repeatedly represent the actions of the NATO led by the United States as a reaction to the burdening caused by other aggressors to achieve stability across the globe. Thus, America repeatedly represented as the safeguard of global security and the bearers of alliance coordination and military costs. This is shown in examples such as "America's role of global leadership is to direct the benefit of the American people", and "the emphasis of U.S. led coalition to sustain support for Ukraine" (Harris, 2024).

This topos functions to represent hegemony and dominance as responsibility and strategic necessity rather than a choice. Ideologically, this topos normalizes the global leadership of the U.S. by representing it as unavoidable.

Topos of Authority

This topos implies that "X has the right or the authority to do something" (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, p. 79). This topos relies on institutional or moral

authority to legitimize actions and claims related to wars. In Harris' speech, Such authority is constructed through representing NATO as an institution as in "[the NATO is] the greatest military alliance the world has ever known", or the authority is relied on laws such as "Article 5", historical event such as the horrific event of "9/11) or authority which is based on collective voice using the collective pronoun "we" to represent the international community in facing the aggressors of others.

This topos functions to transform and represent the unilateral decisions of the U.S. as a global collective will to achieve instability in the conflicted areas. Ideologically, opposing to the policy of the U.S. represented as a delegitimation of the international order itself.

Topos of Humanitarian

This topos implies that if people around the world are suffering, all types of interventions are morally required. In Harris's speech, Ukraine and Gaza are represented as suffering and under humanitarian crisis as follow:

The Ukrainian are represented as "free and democratic people" who have the right to defend themselves against Russia, and

The Gazans are acknowledged as being civilians who are suffering because of Hamas terrorism.

The humanitarian language is presented in Harris's speech but in a limited way particularly regarding Gaza. Ideologically, humanitarian topos has the effect of reducing the visibility of violence or unequal accountability in war.

Topos of Threat:

This topos associates the out-group actions to broader risks. This is explicitly realized through conditionals such as :

"if we went easy on Putin, let alone encouraged him"
"if we stand by while an aggressor invades its neighbors with impunity, they will keep going"

This means that aggression leads to regional and global instability.

"if we fail to impose severe consequences on Russia, other authoritarians across the globe would be emboldened".

This indicates that the failure to respond would enable further expansion of threats.

Topos of Responsibility

It is one of the means by which responsibility is assigned to individuals. In terms of the van Dike's Ideological square, the way responsibility in narrated emphasizes the in-group and the out group division. The preferred responsibility is associated with the in-group such as:

"America must stand strong for democracy"

which emphasizes that it is in America's responsibility to defend democracy and the international order to stop aggression from whoever dares to attack its

neighbors.

Similarly, the responsibility of negative or sensitive actions is assigned to the out-group in order to justify actions. It is realized in this speech through obligation-oriented language in the following examples:

“Russia must pay for the damages it has caused to Ukraine”.

In this example, the one responsible for the damage in Ukraine is Russia. It is narrated in this way to justify any reaction that would be imposed on Russia by the international law.

Topos of History

Topos of History or in van Dijk’s terminology “Historicity” is used in this speech to justify current actions by restating historical facts. Among the historical facts mentioned in this speech is past wars, fascism and tyranny, NATO response after 9/11 events. These historical facts provides reasoning for present-day policy without explicit analogy elaboration as shown in the following example

The forces of tyranny and fascism were on the march, and then America joined our allies in defense of freedom”.

In this example, the speaker justifies its joining of NATO by using historical facts of previous wars that the forces of tyranny (i.e., Russia) were on the march of occupying Ukraine and some other European territory. Without America’s joining the coalition of NATO, the aggressor would occupy their territory.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that war discourses are negotiated and legitimized. Political speakers make use of such international arena to produce and reproduce ideologies of peace, war, threats, and shared defense. Fairclough (2003) confirms that discourses containing such themes are seldom neutral, they are ideologically loaded with power relations and strategic use of language; for example, Harris’ usage of lexical items such as “sovereignty, aggressors, defenders of peace” framing their countries as defensive actors resisting aggressions(See also Chilton, 2004).

The DHA analysis of Harris speech reveals five dominant discursive patterns in talking about geopolitical wars:

War is not an aggressive choice, but it is normalized as defensive necessity, “to counter aggression from Iran and its proxies” , to counter “the conflict that Hamas triggered on October 7th” and to stop “Russia’s ongoing aggression in Ukraine” (normalization of war.

Historical memory is instrumentalized to justify military escalations and pre-empt dissent. This is manifested in expression such as “I need not remind the people of Europe of a dark history when the forces

of tyranny and fascism were on the march”.

American longstanding role in global leadership is moralized, equating U.S. power and leadership with global stability, security, peace, and unrestricted flow of commerce. Stating that “In fact, when America has isolated herself, threats have only grown”.

Authoritarianism is personalized through the social actor of Putin with his related negative predication, making complex geopolitical dynamics simple and defendable using expressions such as “Putin’s war”, “Putin’s aggression and recklessness”, and “Putin’s brutality”.

Alliance and coalition politics are naturalized, framing the social actor of NATO predicated as unquestionable, inventible and universally beneficial to “prevented wars, defended freedom, and maintained stability”.

Together, these five patterns construct a discourse in which a continued war support seems historically justified, ethical and unavoidable.

The nomination and predication strategies together with their justification in the topoi of argument coincide with van Dijk’s Ideological square; the in-groups are associated with positive attributes and the out-groups are associated with negative-predication. This is also ideologically represent the in-groups as powerful and seeking to “prevent wars, defend freedom, and maintain stability” while the out-group are presented as a source of threat as in “Russia’s ongoing aggression in Ukraine” or “China’s efforts to reshape the international order”.

Ideologically speaking, such nomination and predication strategies in Harris speech differentiate between different social actors; those who promote peace and instability and those who initiate wars. Such prediction has different discursive functions to: delegitimize the enemy (i.e., Russia).

legitimize U.S. global leadership.
frame Isolation as irresponsible.
mobilize empathy and support to Ukraine.
strengthen multilateralism, alliance identity and collective defense with NATO.
justifying US. foreign policy and Israel’s right to self-defense.
Build legitimacy with Arab Leaders for peace effort
This finding of linguistic elements which shape public perception copes with Charteris-Black (2004, p. 28) who integrates cognitive linguistics to “show how metaphors shape public perception of war, revealing underlying ideologies and justifications”.
From a DHA perspective, Harris’ speech characterizes how present-day Western political discourse re-contextualizes war in global security

conferences through historical and moral legitimation relying heavily on the topos of Burdening, the topos of Authority, the topos of Humanitarian, the topos of Threat, the topos of Responsibility and the topos of History . By embedding military actions within the narratives of security and democracy, Harris speech converts geopolitical conflicts into civilizational struggle to sway public opinion. This finding copes with van Dijk (2008) concentration on the way used to manipulate public perception and Chilton (2004) take the analysis further to demonstrate the way language is strategically used to justify or condemn war and conflict.

The reliance on the topos of history provides a hegemonic closure of meaning; this topos invokes fascism, World War II, and NATO's foundational myths to limit interpretive space for alternative policies such as de-escalation or diplomacy.

Moreover, the personalization of danger and threat through Putin and the specification of the Middle East conflict to Hamas align with prior CDA studies showing that the individualization of blame eases complex geopolitical conflicts and smooth public consent for prolonged war (Wodak, 2009). This copes with Chouliaraki's (2006) findings that "media representations of war sway public empathy and moral engagement by fabricating narratives that can either humanize or dehumanize those involved in conflicts" (p. 22).

Finally, although humanitarian language employed by Harris in the Israel-Hamas segment, it remains subordinated to security necessities. It shows how humanitarian discourse is integrated without challenging leading power structure.

VI. Conclusions

This study has examined Harris' 2024 MSC speech through the DHA. With the aim to reveal how social actors are referred to, how they are predicated, and how these representations are legitimized through selected argumentative topoi. The study reveals that this speech functions as a discursive legitimation of the in-group war and the legitimation of U.S. global leadership in the time of conflicts. This is achieved through moral polarization and historically-grounded argumentation. The main findings show that there is a constituent pattern of binary representation of social actors; the United States with its allies are discursively positioned as having authority to achieve stability across the globe while the Russia-particularly Putin, Iran, Hamas, China and their allies are represented as aggressive and destabilizing. These binary representations are persistent through systematic predication attributes that assign leadership to the in-groups, while attributing brutality and threat to the out-groups.

These binary representations are further legitimized through a coherent network of argumentative topoi. Those topoi of burdening, authority, humanitarian, threat, responsibility and history legitimize the global leadership of the U.S. as an unavoidable obligation to be involve in the global intervention especially of Gaza and Ukraine to alert against the ideology of isolationism and to legitimize Biden-Harris' preventive and deterrent policies. Rather than merely describing war events, these argumentative topoi function as a discursive warrant against geopolitical instability which makes in intervention of the NATO led by the U.S. as imperative and historically justified.

This research provides an empirical grounded application of DHA to contemporary geopolitical wars demonstrating the continued relevance of Reisigl and Wodak model for analysing multipolar geopolitical conflicts. Theoretically, these findings have the implication that war discourse can normalize power relations to convert geopolitical interest into moral imperatives. Practically, the findings reveal that the elite political discourse of war can shape and sway public perception regarding legitimizing or contesting war.

Even though the current study has come up with interesting contributions, the study has particular limitations in the sense that the study has focused on elite political discourse and has not consider audience perception which would further brighten way these discursive strategies are circulated. Consequently, future research could integrate multimodal CDA to analyse other media representations accompanying war discourses.

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