Crisis, Coercion and Conflict as the New Peace: A Critical Analysis of Western War Justifying Discourse[*]

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George Orwell wrote and warned about the role of deceptive and misleading language in politics, a form of double speak to influence and persuade unwary audiences. War is an activity that requires the accumulation of political capital and legitimacy. By invoking a crisis situation, the political environment implies an extra-ordinary moment where standard laws and rules no longer apply. This is better done not by framing or narrating the 'desired' coming armed conflict in terms of unemotional national interests or the logical use of "just war", but through the emotional use of selective values and norms and through vague concepts like 'humanitarian war'. The Orwellian language of Western politicians and other actors promoting war in the name of peace during the era of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and the Arab Spring from the year 2001 shall be subject to critical analysis, which reveals that the use of emotions and deceptive language are key components to the war justifying discourse. This literature review reveals that a rather systematic, symbolic and ritualistic use of war justifying discourse is the mechanism through which actors' attempt to engineer public perception and consent to an act that in all probability undermines the interests and security of that same public. This article looks at these aspects and factors as a sum of the individual parts, rather than identifying and analysing those individual pieces as the influence of the war justifying discourse comes from the totality through the cumulative effect of the interactions.

Keywords: Just war, George Orwell, discourse, GWOT, crisis (communication), West (Global North)

Introduction

Throughout the ages in organised human society, war has been construed to be politics by a coercive means, intended to compel an opponent to do some action that they would not ordinarily do of their own free will (Clausewitz, 1982; Griffith, 1971). Machiavelli (2001) proposed the same line of thinking, but went even further as he believed the political elite faced no obstacles in deceiving foe or friend alike when it comes to pursuing the political aims of war, where all other considerations are subordinated to war's pursuit. It has been noted that the success of wars is being increasingly measured in political and not military terms, where there is a strong dependence on engineering domestic and international public opinion (Payne, 2005), where politics and mass media have formed a symbiotic relationship that witnesses mass media acting as an instrument of war as policy (DiMaggio, 2009). A series of dualistic, binary opposing projected discursive 'realities' are communicated to an audience to engineer their perception and consent by cognitively shifting them from a critical individual to an emotional herd in the politicised context of a 'crisis' to better ensure compliance with the war policy intent and also to overlook the otherwise obvious dilemmas and contradictions in the logic of the call to war.

Value-based approaches of modern Western society argue that organised warfare is inherently barbaric and should be left in the past. However, war also reflects the predominant political and cultural trends in the society from where it originates (Greene, 2007, p. xvii). There are paradoxes inherent in the political functioning of contemporary international relations, where seemingly evident self-contradictory propositions exist, where this paradoxical logic is best exemplified in the entire realm of armed conflict (Luttwak, 2001). These paradoxes are even hinted at in popular literature, such as the newspeak slogans of George Orwell's 1984. It has been argued that propaganda is much more than merely misleading rhetoric that has been communicated, rather it is an elaborate process that involves recontextualisation in order to ensure its effectiveness and success (Oddo, 2018).

There is a basic value dilemma that faces Western policymakers and mass media. On the one hand, wars are rightly condemned as being barbaric and they should be used only as a last resort requiring a high burden of proof. On the other hand, 'humanitarian wars' have been launched as a convenient short-term policy to bring about foreign policy 'successes' in selected countries. Therefore, warfare needs to be sold to the public, where public support before or during a military operation is of paramount importance (Western, 2005). There is also the need to not treat every war as being ethically and morally equal, but to divide between *good wars* (us) and *bad wars* (them) (Zollmann, 2017). The research question that is posed in this paper is the following: in Western warfare justifying discourse, what are the primary communicated values and outcomes and how are these motivated?

This paper begins with a literature review of academic literature on the topic of politics and the use and role of deception in language communicated to larger publics via mass communication. In the next section, the foundations for the 'moral' and 'ethical' reasoning of warfare is briefly described and explained. The following section will provide an overview of

the academic method selected and used in this paper. The fourth section consists of the main analysis of this paper and engages in a critical overview of the academic literature on how politicians and journalists construct and publicly communicate discourse on Western-led humanitarian warfare and regime change operations. Ultimately, the paper seeks to demonstrate that by taking a broader overview of the literature on the topic, the patterns reveal that through the cumulative effects of a range of varied discursive communication strategies an audience can have their consent engineered, rather than looking at more narrowly focused topics in text. The topic is not only of importance and relevance as audiences are being increasingly manipulated in what has been branded as the New Cold War, this study also intends to serve as a modest tool for helping to be able to decode and unmask those manipulations.

Politics and Deception in Language

An observation from 2010 noted a rather peculiar paradox in terms of the growing gap between Western rhetoric and the Western practice of warfare:

> What perhaps remains a greater paradox is the divergence in the West between rhetoric and practice in attitudes to and the conduct of war, where one might have expected a rejection of certain forms of violence as modern states and societies have matured, we have in reality seen little change in the degree of conflict, even if its nature has modified (Kassimeras & Buckley, 2010, p. 2).

In describing the political climate of the 1920s, Walter Lippmann named indifference as the greatest challenge to 'democratic' politics and suggested means of countering it: "To conquer it men generally turn to their ancient comforter, self-deception: they complain about the stolid, inert masses and the apathy of the people" (Lippmann, 2005, 11). Lippmann's ideas have been subsequently expanded upon and developed by other researchers. According to Edelman (2001, pp. 3-4): "Virtually all political groups and individuals benefit at times from misleading and inaccurate assumptions and accordingly have an incentive to create and disseminate such beliefs. […] A very high proportion of the beliefs that guide political conduct and political rhetoric accordingly are myths." Furthermore, with reference to social change language, Edelman (2001, p. 78) argues that "it helps determine beliefs about the past and present and what specific changes will mean for various groups in the future, and it shapes beliefs about which interest groups and public officials should be regarded as allies and which as threats or enemies." Language in its written and oral forms is present in the information realm in terms of its interpretations and representations of the physical realm in order to gain influence in the cognitive realm of audiences.

The above ideas seem rather diverse and scattered on the surface, but their intellectual logic and psychological effect are interconnected. Although the physical act of warfare is often associated and conceived within the theoretical framework of realism, the art of politics mixed with the art of language is needed to construct the idea of its supposed

necessity. This construction takes place in the information realm through the representation and interpretation to ignite and engineer emotions and ideas in the cognitive realm. The strong emotions of fear (of some risk) and/or altruism (to do something good) are effective primers and mobilisers for engineering consent by shaping audience opinion and perception of the elements of the physical realm. Rhetoric is key in manufacturing the feeling of comfort and/or self-deception among the audiences, which is necessary owing to the paradox and discrepancy between the intention of the political word and the outcome of the military action. Once the consent or lack of resistance to war as a policy is secured, the aftermath and outcome is of lesser importance as this is less commonly covered in 'good' Western wars as opposed to 'bad' enemy state wars (Simons, 2016; Zollmann, 2017).

In Orwell's dystopian novel 1984, language is used to keep the masses ignorant of their psychological manipulation and compliant with the wishes of the political system, where the public is unable to detect the contradictions present in society. This was combined with the use of catchphrases and slogans creating information and cognitive dominance (Hossain, 2017; Abdu & Khafaga, 2019, pp. 423-424). It is noted that linguistically speaking, strategies and tactics are used to persuade and manipulate the public in 1984:

> [...] mind control is linguistically evidenced through a number of strategies, such as simplification, euphemism and morphologicalisation. All of which depend totally on the ideological use of lexis. These strategies have linguistically been manifested in different tactics, including slogans and caption (simplification); naming and/or renaming things and mollification (euphemism); and derivation, inflection, coinage, compounding and reduction (morphologicalisation) (Abdu & Khafaga, 2019, p. 428)-

The above quote alludes to the use of language as a means to prevent cognitive clarity of the politicised human realm in depiction and description. Orwell hated jargon and valued the clarity of simplicity, where his criticism gave rise to the entry of such concepts as 'big brother,' 'newspeak' and 'doublethink' (Slater, 1975, p. 460). Orwell pointed to the dualistic situation where language can either enrich or corrupt the intellectual thought process and the resulting cognitive evaluations. Johnson (2021, pp. 35-36) notes that language in 1984 is key to understanding that the freedom of thought, speech and action are a potential 'threat' to a political system, especially one where language is a mechanism of the construction of 'reality' and not simply its description.

Various tactics and mechanisms for manipulative political speech have been noted, especially with the use of projected or asserted values that reveal "metaphor, assertion-based patterns and thesis-antithesis in the service of axiological proximisation" (Sowinska, 2013, p. 792). For example, the rhetorical uses of values in the discourse of US President George W. Bush's presidential administration were "in fact re-definitions of particular axiological and value laden concepts, are an important tool in presidents' hands to establish who is 'us' and who is 'them', [and can be used to] garner support for particular policy proposals and legitimise political actions" (Sowinska, 2013, p. 806). Dunmire (2005, p. 481) notes, "an important ideological component of political discourse derives from its representation of the future and the rhetorical functions those representations serve in

implicating more immediate and discursive actions." This is particularly valid in the nominalisation of threat functions as a means to construct a possible bleak future that requires drastic policy action, where the operationalised use of fear engineers public consent. Trotter (2015) observed that an audience develops a passively reactive and uncritically thinking herd mentality stance that subconsciously is guided by the communicator's suggestion when emotionally primed and mobilised by fear.

The above cognitive conditions can be engineered and manipulated through the invocation of the concept of 'crisis' and its subsequent communication. By declaring a 'crisis', an extraordinary situation is implied and as such the laws and rules that govern political management can be justified as being insufficient to tackle the problem at hand. As its is extraordinary and this is the logic to attempt to legitimise risky and grey zone legal acts of aggression against another state or non-state actor in the dubious name of humanity and values as "freedom" and "democracy" (Chifu & Simons, 2023, pp. 219-245). The definition of a crisis is given as the simultaneous presence of three different environmental factors: 1) a threat to values (life, property, ideology, identity … etc.), 2) presence of uncertainty (not known what shall happen and when), and 3) the issue of time constraint (problematic situation needs urgent resolution) (Boin et al., 2005, pp. 2-4). The perception of a crisis, regardless of whether an actual crisis exists, can simultaneously increase the operational choices of those seeking to create the context for war and decrease the defender's operational choices in an environment rich with informational and cognitive deception and manipulation using language to define the situation and what is to be done politically.

The quality of deceptive and manipulative political language, using rhetoric, metaphors, simplifications, slogans, catch phrases, euphemisms and morphologicalisation are key to the (un)successful ability to persuade and influence an audience of the façade of an ethical and justifiable proposal for war. However, the proposal for war is anything but ethical and justifiable under ordinary situations, the pertinent point is for the audience under manipulation to believe that it is a 'good' and 'necessary' war. In the next section, the idea and practice of the process of moral reasoning for warfare shall be discussed, a key element in the step of the legitimization of warfare.

Moral Reasoning of Warfare

Coker (2004, pp. 19-20) noted that there are Western styles of warfare where, "Europeans are intent on normatising war; the Americans in instrumentalising it. […] For in instrumentalising it more than ever the US seems to be intent on transforming not only its character but its nature." There are different logical bases in use, which are rhetorically operationalised to attempt to justify and/or legitimize the resorting to the use of different forms of warfare as a foreign policy option (Walker, 2019). Two such paths are to base argumentations on legal/national interests or moral/ethical considerations. How these are applied is changing as the nature of warfare and the actors evolve and transform. Rochester

(2016) argues that there are an increasing number of emerging political and legal dilemmas as a result of changing warfare realities that are a consequence of the new realities of 21st century international relations and geopolitics. He observes that warfare is becoming increasingly messy in terms of the actors involved and their warfare practice.

Inherent dilemmas and contradictions can be detected in the war justifying political discourse of Western political leaders, especially within the frame of notions of security and insecurity within the context of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) or the so called Arab Spring. For example, the projected greatest threat to modern civilisation has been identified as the global jihad and the threat of Islamic terrorism. Yet, the United States and its allies supporting and encouraging proxy warfare and the use of state sponsored terrorism proving to be a significant threat to civilian populations (especially in the Middle East North Africa region) and undermining human security abroad as well as domestically (Hashmi, 2014). For example, the US supported Islamist groups in Afghanistan (including Osama bin Laden) to destabilise the Soviet-backed Afghan government and Soviet forces there, Islamist and terrorist proxy forces have also been supported in Libya and Syria by the US and its allies against the Gaddafi and Assad governments. Something not hidden by mainstream media, even if not 'advertised', but rather 'justified' as necessary in the name of Western values ('freedom', 'democracy' and so forth). Scahill (2013) notes the destructive and disruptive effects of the US covert militarised foreign policy operations that have resulted in perpetual war.

Walzer (2006) points out that the argument that links the practice of warfare with the evaluation of justice is in every sense a political and moral imperative. There are contradictory politicised conversations that condemn and seek to ban "unjust wars" and to promote and legitimise "just wars". The notion of "just war" or jihad among the Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) involves competing and conflicting images of the gods with their demands for allegiance, victory and faithfulness in conflict and wars (Hoffmann, 2006). Legitimacy for engaging in a "just war" or jihad is found not only in the resonance of the message, but also the credibility of the messenger. The principles of "just war" and jihad form the basis of a moral judgement of the actions of the named enemy and to suggest a policy remedy in the name of the common good (Temes, 2003; Fisher & Wicker, 2010). This boils down to creating a sense of moral righteousness in politically legitimising the path to war, however, the execution of the physical dimensions of warfare are also subjected to moral evaluation and weighing and can be found wanting.

Although the nature of just wars is based on the premise of moral judgement, the process makes use of reasoned logic of the pros and cons of going to war (or not) based on the weighing of concrete national interests. Traditionally speaking, these interests have tended to be dominated by military-political considerations that led to intervention or non-intervention, which has gradually been broadened over time and circumstances in international relations (Forbes & Hoffman, 1993). A more emotionally based logic, which exhibits moral and ethical judgement as a basis for informing military intervention in international relations is the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon argued that there was a need for countries to engage in regional and

global collaboration in order to prevent mass atrocity crimes, which was argued as a right to military intervention as a means to protect those civilians at risk. R2P was championed as a new norm in international relations and was adopted at the UN World Summit in 2005 (Kassim, 2014, pp. 8-13). However, the concept is somewhat vague and vulnerable to abuse, which some claimed was the case in R2P military intervention in Libya and why it was not able to be invoked in Syria as a consequence (Thakur, 2013; Brockmeier, Stuenkel & Tourinho, 2016). The basic questions surrounding R2P remained unanswered and could be subjected to selective interpretation and application for geopolitical expediency. Responsibility to protect whom, from what, and by which means?

Method

This paper involves a study of academic literature that interprets Western war justifying discourse, the highly politicised physical act of going to war requires the facades of justification and political legitimacy to enact. Even though not all academic literature is in complete agreement on the Western war justifying discourse, they do reveal some important conceptual and practical aspects on how those narratives are conceived and implemented by policymakers and practitioners. A discourse study is a valuable means of identifying the various patterns and trends present in each scenario or situation. This is an examination of how people use language to create meaning, influence others, and shape social realities. Narratives and discourse interact to make sense of political and social identities. "In short, identities are storied as we and what happens in the world is not simply discovered but made meaningful via the narrative form" (Forchtner, 2021, p. 305). McKenna noted that there is "the need for a strong social theory given the materialist and context-bound nature of discourse in daily activity. From this basis, the paper then characterizes the "new times" in which contemporary discourse occurs, and briefly surveys those issues typically analysed, namely political economy, race and gender, and critical literacy" (McKenna, 2004, p. 9). Of particular interest and relevance are the following contextual factors: informational power, cognitive influence, and political speech as key elements of Western war justifying discourse.

To capture the above-mentioned variables of interest for this paper, a literature review was conducted. Literature reviews can offer a broader and more comprehensive overview of the topic and subject matter at hand to provide clarity of the subject matter problems (Pati & Lorusso, 2018; Conz & Magnani, 2020). There are several different types of literature review – systematic, semi-systematic and integrative (Snyder, 2019, pp. 334-336). The integrative (critical) literature review has been selected for this paper. Its aim is to "assess, critique, and synthesize the literature on a research topic in a way that enables new theoretical frameworks and perspectives to emerge" (Snyder, 2019, p. 335). A literature review should be dialogic in nature and not simply a repetition of other peoples' writings and thoughts. Therefore, the literature selected needs to be relevant to the research task at hand where research is framed in the context of earlier works (Silverman, 2020, pp. 50-51). The sample of academic literature was collected through a digital search on Google Scholar

using the search terms "war justifying discourse", which generated 17,400 results. This sample was further refined through a manual examination of the texts in the first 15 pages (10 results per page) of results to evaluate the texts relevance to the research question posed. A sample of some 60 academic texts were chosen on the above-mentioned qualitative criteria concerning their pertinence to analysing and explaining Western war justifying discourse from the year 2001.

Justifying Wars: Constructing and Representing 'Good' Wars

Information and communication are essential elements in Western politics and prosecution of warfare. Roberts (2017, p. 21) notes the West's model for warfare consists of "deliberately designed information-centric forces, and information dependent people, believing that information itself is the key to victory." Information is important on the battlefield, but it is also central to the politics of war and how warfare is communicated to public audiences. On the politicised issue of 'national security', it is noted that the emotive environment is easily subjected to manipulation by different stakeholders. Edelman (2011, p. 7) suggests, "because such anxieties are easily aroused and because they can be easily directed against any domestic or foreign group that is labelled a threat, worries about national security are constantly evoked." The key outcome is that the threat is taken as a plausible argument or believed falsehoods by the audience rather than objective and factual evidence. Because then the suggested policy 'remedy' can be implemented with the façade of legitimacy. This is observable in the communication of politics on warfare. It should also be noted that discourse and narratives intended to justify and legitimise conflict involvement, evolve over time and circumstances, they are not static.

> Rather than treating legitimacy as something decided only at the start of a war, the model views it as a shifting process shaped by events on the ground, political rhetoric, and public reaction. The wartime justification trajectory outlines four phases—initial justification, conflict dynamics, social reactions, and post-conflict evaluations—that evolve as conflicts progress (Alexandrescu, 2025, p. 1).

There is a continual process of negotiation and renegotiation, contestation and alignment, which demands new justifications for the façade of political legitimacy. Western (2005) notes the need to lobby and persuade different stakeholders (executive and legislative branches of government, mass media, expert community, domestic and international publics and so forth) to win hearts and minds to accept and support warfare as 'necessary' foreign policy. Not all wars are equal though. Mass media play a crucial role in preparing the cognitive realm of audiences in the build-up towards a military intervention. Politicians and mainstream media evoke the mantra of 'humanitarian intervention' and 'R2P' in their storyline when named enemy states (of the Western-centric order) are asserted to have committed human rights violations whereas the Western military interventions are asserted

to be means of preventing human rights violations (Zollmann, 2017). This is clearly seen in the communication of political leaders' speeches.

> […] particular constructions of freedom contributed to the overall representation of the invasion of Iraq and the Global War On Terrorism as an atemporal struggle between good and evil forces, and also enabled the Bush administration to broaden the axiological spectrum to seek allies in 'freedom's cause' and thereby solicit legitimisation for US military involvement and democracy promotion in the Middle East on a global scale (Sowinska, 2013, p. 806).

The executive branches of Western governments have an established rhetorical approach in their war justifying discourse to public audiences in the post-Cold War world of 'wars of choice'. News media and journalists tend to cover the official war justifying discourse in an uncritical manner to mass audiences, where the press is assessed as having failed in its duty to hold power to account (Thussu & Freedman, 2003; Bennett, Lawrence & Livingston, 2007). A number of discourse strategies intended to legitimize (to make acceptable as the 'right' thing to do) militarized foreign policy have been noted: 1) creating and using emotions (fear in particular), 2) use of a hypothetical future, 3) use of rationality, 4) voices of expertise, and 5) projecting altruism (Reyes, 2011, p. 781). These discursive strategies are consciously and deliberately embedded into   political speech, which is in turn relayed by news media to mass audiences as an instrument of war through the engineering of public consent by obtaining their approval and support.

Loseke (2009, p. 517) notes that "rhetoric might achieve effectiveness to the extent that it deploys only the most widely held and deeply embraced symbolic codes and their accompanying emotion codes, avoids codes whose meanings and evaluations are widely contested, and is one-dimensional, binary, and dramatic, and therefore discourages disagreements." Emotions are a powerful and effective tool of cognitive manipulation of audiences. According to Reyes (2011, p. 785): "The appeal to emotions allows social actors to skew the opinion of their interlocutors or audience regarding a specific matter." Therefore, emotions can be skewed in the audience towards accepting and responding to a negative representation of a 'them' or a positive representation of an 'us' to prime and mobilise audiences against one actor and against another. There are different types of emotions that can be exploited from the negative spectrum of fear or hatred or revenge to the positive spectrum of patriotism or pride. Fear is used in the information realm to affect and shape the cognitive realm of audiences to engineer and manufacture their consent to a suggested course of action. The 11 September 2001 terror attacks on the US mainland are an iconic moment in the collective memory of the US, where powerful emotions such as fear, anger and desire for revenge were instrumentalised to rally public support and legitimacy for what became known as the GWOT (Reyes, 2011). Fear of further attacks and an unseen enemy, anger at the human losses and attack on US soil, and the desire to engage in revenge to overcome the fear and anger were utilised in war justifying discourses. As Dunmire (2005, 507) argues: "Bush's vision offers us an Orwellian future in which the specific embodiment

of the threat may change, but the threat is always there, occasionally diminished but never fully defeated."

Hypothetical future provides another angle for Western war justifying discourse. As noted by Reyes (2011, p. 786), "to pose a threat in the future that requires our imminent action in the present. Political actors exert their power addressing the future by employing specific linguistic choices and structures, such as conditional sentences […]." A false logic can be used to nudge audience perception and opinion on a projected threat. For instance, it may be wrongly argued that   failure to act or do something in one part of the world can have disastrous consequences in another part of the world and therefore military action is required (Chang & Mehan, 2008; Reyes, 2011, p. 794). This was used with the hypothetical arguments that Saddam Hussein was gathering weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq and had links with terrorists, which were used as a pretext of a pre-emptive strike on Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent occupation of the country. Another deceptive discourse logic used to raise anxiety among the audience was the threat of leaving the 'job' of fighting terrorism incomplete in Afghanistan, which was also subsequently followed up as an excuse for the continued occupation of the country or fighting 'terrorism' in Syria to prevent its spread elsewhere (especially that of the Islamic State). It is possible to amalgamate different discourse strategies, such as emotions with a hypothetical future. As Loseke (2009, p. 518) suggests: "[…] the promised happy ending of Bush's story, the triumph of virtue over morality, idealizes American values. Audience members outside the United States may not be amused with this story glorifying American values and anointing Americans as saviours of civilization." Therefore, the war justifying discourse is based upon constructing the premise of a 'promise' of a 'good' future, which is projected on the basis that a 'bad' future shall prevail because of the risks and threats if nothing is done. There is also the use of projecting a bad future if "something" is not done to support another side in a proxy war as the Ukraine War. There is an attempt to justify and legitimise political action by using the false logic that the war will come to 'our' borders if something is not done, and to narrate and use discourse that makes the 'good' side (Ukraine) as a mirror to Western society and the 'bad' side (Russia) a binary opposite of us (Alyaya, 2023). This is done in a similar vein to the Why We Fight series of Frank Capra, such as the Battle for Russia Part One, which attempted to mirror the Soviet society to the US after decades of demonisation (please see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6mkjqSxOIo&t=13s).

This use of binary opposing dichotomies of discourse in political speech has been observed and confirmed by other researchers. Even though Donald Trump began the delivery of lethal military aid to Ukraine, he associates the war as "Biden's war", and Biden's speeches followed various political and humanitarian imperatives that were framed in a crisis context. "The data analysis reveals that the discursive strategies used in speech are authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis" (Aluya, 2025, p. 117). The opposing logics of the discourse and narrative construction of the Ukraine War is an unbridgeable one at this stage, where one may be mistaken for thinking these sets of justifications and legitimacy were not even about the same conflict (Krickovic & Sakwa, 2022). There is a perfectly logical and operationally oriented reason for this situation, the

information flows on a crisis event as the Ukraine War are used to define reality, which in turn is used by the sides to try and restrict their opponent's operational choices while simultaneously enlarging their own operational choices. It is possible to see the shifts, backwards and forwards, on President Trump's discourse on the Ukraine War. When the war seems to be a winning proposition he supports escalating the conflict. When the war seems to be lost on the battlefield then it is "Biden's war" and he threatens to withdraw direct support in the proxy war and hand it over to the Europeans. In this way, evading being seen as being associated with losing a war (as Biden was in 2021 with Afghanistan) and to potentially make money from selling weapons to the Europeans to provide to Ukraine, minimising political risk and maximising economic opportunity. This may well explain Trump's obsession with Venezuelan regime change on the flimsy and not credible excuse of President Maduro being a drug cartel head and Venezuela a narco-state, while also acknowledging the largest oil reserves are to be found in Venezuela. A fact that has been mentioned by Trump in both of his presidencies.

Rational logic is established "when political actors present their legitimization as a process where decisions have been made after a heeded, evaluated and thoughtful procedure" (Reyes, 2011, p. 786). At times, false logics can be used, especially those that convey a sense of inevitable threat, such as the false claims by the Bush administration about Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein having weapons of mass destruction and links with terrorists (Chang & Mehan, 2008, p. 453), but they do need to be plausible and resonate with the audience. A rationally constructed discourse is articulated by the speaker and carried without further interpretation by mass media, which is used to justify a course of action that is likely to involve a certain cost or sacrifice by the audience being addressed. For example, the rational logic that "we" did not ask for a fight but have been forced by circumstances may be employed. Otherwise, any arguments used that invoke notions of 'consulting' with allies/partners or the 'international community's' opinion on a specific military issue or event imply conscious intentionality for war, rather than having an 'unwilling' government's policy hand 'forced'. In other instances, a decision is "not made lightly." Therefore, the constructed discourse is constituted on the basis of hard decisions, consultations with stakeholders, a general lack of choices available, or being 'forced' into a course of action (Chang & Mehan, 2008; Oddo, 2011, p. 388; Reyes, 2011, pp. 797-799). Another tested rational logic strategy of war justifying discourse by an actor is to divide and construct   a cognitive distance in the audience between the constructed "us" and "them" as a means of projecting moral evaluation as a source of political legitimacy for war as policy (Oddo, 2011). This was experienced in President George W. Bush's infamous binary delineation of *you are either with us or with the terrorists* (them) after the 9/11 attacks.

Rational logic was also used in the humanitarian discourse that accompanied some of the uprisings during the so called "Arab Spring." Malito (2019, p. 104) identified three rhetorical mechanisms used in the war against Libya: the first refers to "regime change" which "was defined as a universal interest through the Manichean representation of Gaddafi opposed by a unified Libya (universalisation)." A second point is that "contradictions in the resort to violence have been marginalised and alternatives to militarisation have been

ignored, such in the case of the African Union's roadmap (simplification)." The third point made is that "the media and scholars have perpetuated dominant narratives portraying Gaddafi as a 'mad dog' of the Middle East (reiteration)." By dominating the information realm, it is hoped to depoliticise, delegitimise and marginalise alternative arguments or proposals to ensure the cognitive realm only imagines one realistic policy path, the road to war. This was clearly visualised in the 2015 parliamentary debates in Britain on the use of military force in Syria: "Crucially, pacifism's subjugation means that political discourse, and thus political action, is critically limited. And thus, war, and the practices and institutions that support it, seem normal and inevitable" (Reeves O'Toole, 2020, p. 20). The Syrian War (as have a multitude of other wars) proved that the role and value of the "dynamics of (de)legitimisation are key in armed conflict as they are linked to actors' power and authority at local, regional and international levels. […] Political discourses can become powerful discursive tools and have real consequences on conflict dynamics. They can affect the legitimisation of violent actions and in (re)producing actors' legitimacy" (Martini, 2020, p. 737). The importance of an effective and publicly visible framing and counter-framing in shaping actors' opportunities and threats in the Syrian conflict is also highlighted by Schoon and Duxbury (2019). Although, rational and emotional logics are not strictly separated in politicised discourse on the topic of warfare, they can become entangled and mutually reinforcing in the persuasiveness of the argument. To illustrate the mixing of styles of appeal and justification, the Ukraine War provides numerous examples. Where justification and opposition to a conflict go hand in hand, the rhetorical opposition to a conflict can serve as a board to deeper engagement in the conflict further ahead in time when it is convenient. This is found when juxtaposing Russian and versus NATO discourse on the Ukraine War.

> First, both sides describe the events in a way that combines the factual and moral reading of them that favour them. Second, continuity is rhetorically established to justify the actions of both factions as rooted in their pre-conflict status rather than being seen as reacting to the war. Finally, both sides use threats and exhortations for others to act in accordance with their wishes and demands. These three strategies showcase how both sides rhetorically manage their accountability, moral rightness and, at the same time, work up the moral guilt of their opponents. Similarity between the literature on expressions and denials of prejudice are found here, in the case of discursively sanitizing military action (Demasi, 2023, p. 257).

Ethos and the role of expert voices in the field are instrumentalised to back political proposals with statements based upon their expertise. The persuasive power is derived from the potential of a credible expert to bring context and strength to the official argument to legitimize the proposed actions (Reyes, 2011, p. 786). In this category of discursive persuasion, 'experts' may consist of political leaders (political authority), military leaders (military authority), and subject knowledge experts (knowledge authority). There is an attempt to justify and legitimize the ideological positioning of warfare by the projected 'authority' of the speaker(s) to have the course of action supported or at least not resisted (Reyes, 2011, pp. 797-799). A great deal of contrived technical and political expertise was used to successfully establish the path for war in Iraq, which was based on the presumed

knowledge, expertise and public profile of key influencers for the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Chang & Mehan, 2008). The role of former General and Secretary of State Colin Powell in presenting fake WMD evidence at the United Nations, for example, where the messenger rather than the message was intended to be the more persuasive element.

Projecting altruism occurs when "public speakers, in particular, and social actors, in general, make sure their proposals do not appear driven only by personal interests. They present themselves, for example, as serving their voters, and therefore they legitimize proposals as a common good that will improve the conditions of a particular community" (Reyes, 2011, pp. 786-787). For example, altruism may be utilised by way of invoking the notion of a "just war" or R2P. Hence there is an attempt to project the act of warfare as being beneficial to other individuals or groups, especially if they are presented as being innocent and/or powerless against powerful perpetrators of 'unspeakable' violence. This category of discursive argumentation can include such 'noble' acts as bringing 'democracy' and 'freedom' to a disadvantaged group, preventing war crimes or crimes against humanity, as well as bringing peace and stability to a region or country (Reyes, 2011, pp. 801-803). In other words, some forms of tangible or intangible benefits are alleged for disadvantaged groups of a third party through the use of military force against another party (often a government or politically organised group). The war justifying discourse of the GWOT relied on the spirit of a rational logic and approach aligned with the notion of a "just war", which has differed from the Arab Spring interventions that applied an emotional logic and approach more in tune with R2P. Haqpana and Tsouroufli (2023, p. 1) observed that "international development initiatives in the Global-South are often shaped by Western and Eurocentric constructions of gender, female agency and empowerment embedded in popular narratives of universal rights and white mainstream feminist ideals." Although, such discourses and narratives appear after a target country has been regime changed, therefore demanding a justification and legitimisation for a continued occupation, such as the Afghanistan War (2001-2021). The age old "tried and true" imperial excuse of bringing 'civilisation' and 'democracy' to a country.

There is clear power hierarchies and cultural connotations apparent in the war justifying discourse used in the branded conflicts of the Arab Spring, such as Libya in 2011, and the failed attempt to use it in Syria later, where the right to intervene has evolved to the responsibility to intervene. "This idea not only has heavy moral connotations but also imperial ones. It builds upon John Stuart Mill's exception to the rule of non-intervention for non-civilised states" (Xypolia, 2022, p. 17). Thus, the projected notion of an altruistic civilising mission of the West, assisting 'barbarians' (oppressed beings and worthy of assistance) that seek to progress their civilizational development, and removing 'savages' (tyrannical and illegitimate) that hold them back, is part of this discourse. Additionally, the accusation of the use of sexualised violence in war has been used to fit political agendas and to legitimise military intervention, which is sensationalised and highlighted above other brutality encountered in warfare. Three discursive legitimisation strategies leading to the acceptance of political policy in the form leading up to military action are: 1) "[C]constructing sexualised violence as a weapon of war, 2) condemning concrete architects of the

machinery (typically one of the conflicting parties), and 3) proclaiming the urgent need to protect the victims through all necessary means" (Kolmasova & Krulisova, 2019, p. 147). This provides the façade and pretence that any military action for geopolitical gains is obscured through the discourse of altruism by the pursuit of 'humanitarian' objectives based upon cultural and value-laden reasoning and appeals.

Discourse and narrative-based justification and legitimacy appeals can and do evolve with circumstances and events in the operational and political environments. For example, the 20 year long conflict in Afghanistan. The strategic narrative began as a defensive imperative and necessity born from the insecurity emanating from the 9/11 attacks. "For nearly two decades, U.S. foreign policy was locked in the iron cage of a robust liberal narrative, centred around anti-terrorism." This evolved in to "From 2018 to 2021, the severity/frequency of terrorist attacks declined significantly, the anti-terrorism narrative weakened, audience costs of inaction declined, and costs of action rose" (Walldorf, Jr, 2022, p. 136). This came at a convenient geopolitical moment when geopolitical crises in Europe and the Indo-Pacific were emerging that required additional military resources. A shifting of military assets to meet what were considered more serious and pressing security challenges.

Analysis and Discussion

Politicised symbolic language is used to engineer and construct deceptive language, which tends to make use of a number of the discursive strategies identified by Reyes (2011): emotions, hypothetical future, project altruism, 'expert' testimony, and logic (including false logic). In this respect, those creating and communicating the war justifying discourse seek to engineer a sense of deceived fear or comfort, a means of priming and mobilising apathetic audiences in democracies. Both Lippmann (2005) and Edelman (2001) note the cognitive challenge in overcoming that apathy. Even though warfare is barbaric, it is also being normalised, which potentially makes it more socially and politically acceptable to Western audiences. The moral reasoning seeks to create a perception of urgent threat to a "foreign people" that can ultimately influence "home audiences" to accept a firm and urgent response such as the use of military force. This is intended to create a sense of comfort in audiences, by helping a 'like-minded' foreign people and averting the sense of fear through removing a hypothetical future threat. Hence, morality and ethics are artificially introduced into an activity that lacks ethical or moral pursuits.

The hypothetical future discursive strategy is noted by Roberts (2017), where the belief in information itself is key to victory. There is a great deal of agreement among authors (such as Western, 2005; Thussu & Freedman, 2003; Bennett, Lawrence & Livingstone, 2007) who suggest that in Western war justifying discourse, the role of the information war is to support and enable the physical (kinetic) war through engineering consent through projecting the sense of moral and political legitimacy for war. Those wars tend to be communicated, not as wars of choice, but as a 'moral' duty forced upon them (altruism) to protect human life

and values. This is representative of Orwell's newspeak as an instrumental aspect in the efforts to prime and mobilise audiences to emotionally accept engaging in a course of risky policy action (warfare). Though the risky action is communicated as being necessary ethically and for the sake of human security (including at 'home').

There is an observable evolution in war justifying discourse and narratives underway, which is in turn a reflection on the evolving political, economic, social and military circumstances of the West. The days of asymmetric warfare, where a far superior Western military goes to war against a far weaker military opponent from the days of the Global War On Terrorism and the Endless Wars are declining. The West is in relative decline, increasing political and economic pressure on the prioritisation of resources and where public sentiment is hardening against more war. The final part of the evolution puzzle is relating to the military opponents, who are better equipped militarily and politically motivated, such as Russia (2022), Iran (2025) and China. This makes war a much riskier and harder to justify proposition. Hence the decline of humanitarian wars and the rise of geopolitical wars of interests and resources, rather than values and human rights. Even if the familiar priming mechanism of the us versus them has a familiar ring.

Conclusion

The research question posed in the opening of this paper asks, what are the primary communicated values and outcomes in Western warfare justifying discourse, and how are these discourses motivated? The five discursive strategies identified by Reyes (2011, p. 781) are absolutely relevant and connected to the Western approach to employing war justifying discourse. This has formed the basis for informing the final section of this paper in delineating the discursive strategies in different Western-led wars of the 21st century. These did not prove to be neatly delineated and operating as separate or individual discursive strategies but can be observed as operating in a complementary manner to each other to boost the persuasive capability and capacity of mainstream mass media outlets.

Edelman noted (2001, p. 10) "the willingness of the general public to vest power in a small group of people by accepting their right to rule and by obeying their laws and orders, even when these are contrary to the interests of the great majority." This is particularly evident in the Western world's war justifying discourse, especially in the sphere of 'humanitarian' wars or regime change.   Here, Reyes's (2011) discursive strategies meet with Orwell's warnings on the use of deceptive language, such as double speak or newspeak. There is also an attempt to cognitively project the sense of being forced into wars and 'making mistakes', when the wars being justified by discourse are intentional and deliberate. Therefore, Western war justifying discourse is rooted in the universalisation, simplification and reiteration of interests, culture, emotions, morality and information space dominance.

Contemporary mass mediated political persuasion is made problematic and difficult for the communicator, which is due in no small part to national and international audiences

being heterogeneous in the understanding and interpretation (hence conclusions and reactions) to the emotional and symbolic codes used in the discourse. Therefore, the influence and effects of cultural production on emotional meaning is a variable that needs to be taken into account and understood when an actor uses war justifying discourse. Cultural codes are a communicational mechanism that are used to guide and prime particular ways of thinking, and emotional codes are used as a means of generating particular ways of feeling among audiences.

From the literature review it can be deduced that information operations and influence activity is intended to play a supporting role to enacting selective military operations by powerful brokers rather than the intended façade of an honest broker. Interestingly, the current Western war justifying discourse concerning the Russian Ukrainian War has evolved away from the familiar patterns and templates described above. Even before the war began the emphasis was on protecting Ukraine's national sovereignty and right to choose its own path, which fits with the strategies of hypothetical future, rationality, expert voices and altruism. However, as the war has progressed, there have been an increasing number of public statements from high-ranking Western officials that rely on emotions, hypothetical future (negative) and introducing self-interest. For example, referring to the conflict as a proxy war against Russia and using the war to weaken and degrade Russia's power and influence (Simons, 2022). The justification for this course of indirect military conflict is the necessity to contain Russia. Although, having stated this point, it should and must be noted that this is a very tentative observation as the Ukraine conflict is still ongoing and transforming.

There are limitations to this paper that need to be made transparent and acknowledged. First and foremost, the sample is relatively small owing to the manual nature of the process, which has implications and namely that the result is indicative in nature. Secondly, where the sample was drawn from has unseen constraints and especially the effects of algorithms on generating the sample and available works, including the ranking of the total sample. If another means and source was used for collecting the sample, a different result could be delivered. A third point that needs to be mentioned is that the sample are largely drawn from Western-based or oriented academic journals, which adds another potential bias, ideological and/or perceptional.

The power of discourse has become an important aspect of security analysis (Balzacq, 2005), and foreign policy is often legitimated through the mobilization of rhetoric (Goddard & Krebs, 2015). Rhetorical contestation shapes the boundaries of acceptable policy and the very possibilities of state action (Krebs & Jackson, 2007). U.S. foreign policy toward China is no exception. Recent research indicates that U.S. national discourse has increasingly constructed China as a potential enemy Other (Ooi & D'Arcangelis, 2017), and the mobilization of rhetorical resources from adjacent policy debates has become key to U.S. elites' representation of China as an ideological threat (Winkler & Jerdén, 2023). Since Donald Trump became U.S. president in 2018, the U.S.-China relationship has entered a steady downward spiral marked by trade disputes, technological rivalry, geopolitical maneuvering, and human rights concerns. Bilateral relations between the two major powers

have deteriorated to such an extent that both sides have begun discussing how to avoid an armed conflict (CSIS, 2024). In terms of rhetoric, Trump employed pure advocacy, exemplified by his call to "decouple" from China (Reuters, 2020). However, the subsequent Biden administration has adopted a different policy approach, and accordingly, the U.S. government's rhetoric on China has shifted as well, moving from pure advocacy to a more nuanced and mixed representation that emphasizes both competition and cooperation (The Economist, 2020).

In this research, using rhetorical criticism and approaching the topic from the perspective of strategic communication, I examine the Biden administration's rhetoric on its China policy. Specifically, I explore how the administration has rhetorically shifted from Trump's approach of pure advocacy to redefine U.S.-China relations as a balance of competition and cooperation. I also analyze how the administration addresses the inherent tension within a policy mix that includes cooperation, contest, competition, confrontation, and the avoidance of conflict. This analysis aims to uncover the underlying motives behind the Biden administration's China policy rhetoric: Is it merely a façade for a policy of pure advocacy, or does it reflect a genuine shift in U.S. strategic intent? The theoretical framework guiding this research is the Mixed-Motive Model of public relations, and the rhetorical criticism method employed is Burke's (1969) cluster analysis. This study contributes to the strategic communication literature by testing one of its most influential theoretical models, the Excellence Theory's Mixed-Motive Model, through rhetorical criticism.

Biographical note

Professor Greg Simons has a PhD from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand and has an Associate Professor title awarded in Political Science from Uppsala University in Sweden. He is a Professor at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication at Daffodil International University in Dhaka, Bangladesh. His research interests include the changing political dynamics and relationships, mass media, public diplomacy, political marketing, crisis management communications, media and armed conflict, and the Russian Orthodox Church. He also researches the relationships and connections between information, politics and armed conflict more broadly, such as the GWOT and Arab Spring.

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