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Strategic Persuasion and Public Opinion Shaping: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Donald Trump's Rhetoric on the US-Iran Conflict

Zainab Bibi

MS Scholar Dept of English Kohat University of Science and technology KUST Kohat

zainab.khan8713@gmail.com

Maleeha Hakeem khan

MS Scholar Dept of English Kohat University of Science and technology KUST Kohat

malahakeemkhan557@gmail.com

Muskan Qias

MS scholar Dept of English Kohat University of Science and technology KUST Kohat

muskanqias@gmail.com

Qaisar Hayat (Corresponding author)

Lecturer Department of English Kohat University of Science and technology KUST Kohat

qaisarhayatkhattak1@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the use of language as a powerful instrument used by U.S. President Donald Trump to influence the masses and justify the military action towards the escalating war between the U.S. and Iran in the year 2025. Based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and a rhetorical analysis, the study targets the speeches, press conferences, and social media posts delivered by Trump in late 2024, to mid-2025, and captures the discourse in the control frame of Iran as opposed, threatening and irrational, as well as the United States as moral, and defensive. The rhetoric of Trump is largely based on the appeals to emotions, ethos, pathos, and logos as well as a binary opposition (us and them), war imagery, and nationalistic calls to action that lead people to feel united and empowered. The paper identifies the linguistic tactics at play in post-defeat to justify a military escalation, such as targeted airstrikes and cyber-based operations, as well as to neutralise any opposition and identify a popular viewpoint in favour of a prolonged war. In comparison with earlier the moments of tension active rhetoric of the period of war of 2025 shows more demanding and undoubted way of rhetoric as the war is presented as unavoidable and needed. The results support the use of presidential language in the process of consent manufacturing, control of public emotion and media discourse in times of war, especially in a polarized and digital politics environment.

Keywords: Donald Trump, U.S.-Iran conflict, persuasion, rhetoric, public opinion, critical discourse analysis, presidential language

1. Introduction

The breakout of the 2025 U.S-Iran war has increased global fear of the exertion of military powers and the strategic utterance deployed by the world leaders, to justify it. Right at the center of this simmering fight is U.S. President Donald Trump, whose second-term campaign to retake the White House has not only been a repeat of his trademark rhetorical style, but has been an

intensification as well: in-your-face, visceral, and divisive. Trump needs his own standing in the street, and so he uses language as a weapon in the practice of politics as a populist in order to shape the audience and accept the authority of the state.

The rhetoric of Trump in this war is a logical development of his political ideology. It echoes that most substantial tendencies of the right-wing populist rhetoric that tends to oversimplify the problems of international relations, bringing them down to black and white frames of a good and evil. To paraphrase one of his many speeches focused on the importance of American exceptionalism, to post on Twitter steeped in nationalist pride, and finally to engage in press conferences that demonized Iran as an existential threat, Trump now repeats endlessly the worldview that legitimizes a military intervention not just as a matter of policy, but one that must go forward because it is the moral thing to do.

The communicative approach adopted by Trump has been especially successful in upbuilding of cohesiveness through the designation of a common enemy, the reference to times of American military power and the demonization of internal criticism under the label of disloyalty. He does not just use his rhetorical techniques in a haphazard manner and he conscientiously makes his phrases appeal to his political base and the general audience which has also been conditioned by years of contradictory media coverage and polarizing discourse. This enforces the already held notions, makes little room to allow wide discussion, and allows a political climate that favors military push.

Moreover, the situation in which Trump will take up the office again after another scandalous presidential election in 2024 brings another political depth to his words about war. His rhetoric does not only attempt to justify foreign politics but it is also a policy of domination. Presenting as a strong figure of power against the weak or betrayers of homeland and a liberal portrait of Iran as the biggest foreign threat, Trump makes his supporting population work below the idea of national safety and leaves the critics to curb the nationwide interest.

The rhetoric devices that Trump involves also reflect the historical trends in other wartime presidencies. Ever since Franklin D. Roosevelt urged Americans to stand in solidarity to fight in World War II, presidential rhetoric has been instrumental in framing the national perception and approval of a military intervention. However, Trump discourse is quite different as it tempted to make a direct impact on the social discourse through the usage of social media, skipping over the filters of the diplomatic process and journalistic control.

In addition, the language that Trump uses appeals to the profound narratives in the American political tradition that revolve around the issues of manifest destiny, moral exceptionalism, and civilization versus barbarism. These histories have been repackaged into the current version that justifies war like policy among nations and prevents critical discussion. The fact that these themes are being repeated again and again in the rally cannot help but rally support, but also to make emotions of the citizens turn into a less sensitive, harder thought.

Here, such an imperativeness of the analysis of the rhetorical strategy of Trump gets even more accentuated. The possible implications of uncontrolled presidential rhetoric during warfare, including the further polarization of society or the long-term transformations in the foreign policy beliefs, require a much more thorough analysis of the role of language in the formation of the mental horizon and the ideology of the nation.

The present study addresses the rhetoric and discursive means through which Trump may convince the internal audiences of the U.S. in the event of the U.S.-Iran war in 2025. Based on

the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the traditional rhetorical theory, and framing theory, the research will examine the diversity of primary documents including televised addresses, campaign rallies, and posts in social media between the periods of December 2024 to June 2025. Its thematics and semantics are analyzed through the use of appealing appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) by Trump, his metaphors of war, nationalist terms and expressions and binary oppositions (us vs. them) to justify the war not only as ethically sound but as a necessary act on a strategic level.

This paper, by exploring the effectiveness of Trump in speaking when he is in the middle of conflict, tries to bring out the political purpose of presidential language when the country is at war. It suggests that the discourse of Trump postulates a major convenience in legitimizing violence, denouncing opposition, and the reduced history of either good or evil. In this manner, the research adds to larger discourses on propaganda in politics, media role, and construction of warfare through rhetorical means in modern international politics.

2. Literature Review

In the past twenty years, the political rhetoric, presidential discourse, and war-time communication became an expanding field in the literature, and the distinctive style of Donald Trump arouses the significant interest of researchers. His approach to populist lexis, emotional and dramatic stories, and polarizing speech is one of the most significant changes in the dynamics of political persuasion in contemporary democracies.

The initial point is the contribution of George Lakoff (2016) to the primordial understanding of the Trump cognitive framing methods based on emotional appeal through metaphor and narrative. Lakoff also claims that Trump utilizes what he describes as the strict father model, a perception of the world in which hierarchy, strength and authority are appreciated, thus making aggressive foreign policies legitimate, which is an appealing philosophy to the conservative mindset. This model of the U.S.-Iran conflict as defined by Trump as an issue of order versus chaos also puts America in the position of the moral leader.

This makes Mercieca, (2020) take a deeper look into the rhetorical strategies used by Trump and find his use of repetition, hyperbolism and personal attack as the most noticeable elements of political talk. The example covered in her work describes the way Trump creates enemies (both domestic and foreign), by using dehumanizing and delegitimizing language. The tactic becomes essential in the time of conflict when it is possible to justify military intervention rhetorically and muzzle criticism.

Discourse theorists, like Norman Fairclough (2003, or Teun van Dijk (1998) stress the importance of language to exercise power relation. The model of Critical Discourse Analysis presented by Fairclough is relevant to the discourse of Trump, which aids in the ideological dominance that naturalizes the discourse of militarity and marginalizes any other options that rely on peace. The ideological square coined by Van Dijk pertains to the objective of power since the ideology of Trump strengthens the polarized perception of the world, where the positive aspects of the in-group (the U.S.) and negative features of out-group (Iran) are accentuated by the rhetoric of power.

Geopolitical reality constructed through language In international relations, language is consciously used to create a geopolitical reality (Chilton 2004); the creation of an geopolitical reality is suggested by Jackson (2005): language is a conscious and active participant in the creation of an geopolitical reality. The contribution of Chilton to the discourse of security explains

the role of metaphor and modality in evoking the feeling of urgency and threat. Such terminologies as Trump used, such as maximum pressure, locked and loaded, defending freedom, fit in this picture of the U.S as a reactive and not aggressive force.

Much can be learned by looking at the past exposures that Trump had to Iran including the 2018 withdrawal of the U.S. to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or the 2020 killing of the Iranian General Qasem Soleimani. Kellner (2021) examines the role of communication of Trump and his foreign policy in these events where the rhetorical approach is a transformation to coercive power. Nonetheless, this research goes beyond that since it sets out to examine a full-blown wartime scenario, which creates a dramatic contribution to literature.

Scholars of media studies such as Entman (2004)) and Herman and Chomsky (1988) use their resources to guide the way Trump rhetoric is escalated and mediated. The theory of framing developed by Entman is based on the idea that the selective accentuation of parts of situation (e.g. Iranian aggression) can help to give an idea to the audience as to how to interpret it. The propaganda model as developed by the two scholars, Herman and Chomsky aids in the comprehension of how media institutions maintain the endorsed narratives, especially in the course of war at which time, their coverage normally compliments the rhetoric which is advanced by the state together with the suppression of the outlooks that differ with it.

The theory of populist communication is applicable too. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) mention the populist style that opposes decent people and corrupt elites. Trump uses this form to discredit not only Iranian leaders but also his own political opponents when it comes to his foreign policy, thus interpreting them as traitors or even apologists of terrorism. This kind of discursive strategy helps consolidate his followers by muzzling them.

Digital rhetoric thinkers (Ott, 2017; Papacharissi, 2015) explain why Trump using the platform such as Twitter and Truth Social alters the conventions of presidential speech. These platforms make immediacy, virality, and personalization possible and Trump uses them to avoid the traditional media and communicate to the masses directly. When referring to Iran on his posts, he tends to make use of large fonts, exclamatory gags, and emotionally cathartic language in order to elicit response and mould the discourse.

Even rhetorical thinkers like Aristotle are consulted in going through how the speeches used ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and even logos (logic) by Trump. Trump often builds mission by displaying his own sense of strong leader; he appeals to pathos in order to both inspire fear and anger; and he resorts to logos in order to provide easy to swallow simplified explanations of very hard geopolitical moves. Even his phrases such as the ones that say Iran lied or America never backs down are not mere statements but rather rhetorically crafted statements in order to win the argument.

Other comparative studies treat the meeting point of authoritarian populism and the discourse of war. Other authors such as Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2019) relate the rhetoric of Trump to another global trend of authoritarian populism, which uses the language of nationalism to legitimize such practices as military interventions that are considered to be illiberal. The Iran conflict as framed by Trump is common among other countries that had strongman leaders and this has been the case with Russia, Turkey, and Brazil that were successful in using foreign enemies to gain power domestically.

According to political psychologists (Haidt, 2012), moral foundations are instrumental in the way individuals receive political message in a given public. Donald Trump appeals to loyalty and

power as well as the sanctity of democracy, which triggers the conservative principles of morals and makes his appeal to a war more convincing to some members of the population. This has some bearing on the production and maintenance of public support of military action.

Also, the manifestation of militarism in American political tradition (e.g., about a loss of militarism in the American political culture, Lutz, 2002; recruiting a militaristic hero to the American stripe, Bacevich, 2005) can suggest the context in which the rhetoric of Trump appears meaningful. A prolonged tradition of glorifying military force, a strong sense of fear against international enemies, makes a perfect foundation of aggressive rhetoric. These cultural tropes are borrowed by Trump who continues to stress on the fact that strength constitutes patriotism. Overall, the current research body gives a complex picture of the rhetorical approach to Trump. Less is said about his wartime rhetoric, however, after re-election beyond 2024, especially within the context of a brewing and protracted conflict such as the U.S.-Iran war in 2025. The present study is part of this new field of study and is a discourse analysis but has the contents of a comprehensive approach with overall reference to how this rhetorical theory / approach is involved in political communication and international relations. Placing Trump into the context of more general theoretical thinking and historical trends, this publication demonstrates ideological and practical influence of the presidential language in establishing various discourses of conflicts, national moods, and geopolitical movements.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is a blend of 3 major theoretical approaches; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the traditional rhetorical theory, and the framing theory.

CDA (especially when pursuant to the three-dimensional model of Norman Fairclough) stresses the aspect of relations between language, power, and ideology. It enables us to analyze the manner in which discourse is used in the social practices such as legitimizing the use of military force.

The traditional theory of rhetoric, especially, appeals by Aristotle, ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and logos (logic) are helpful in understanding how Trump influences his persuasive appeals, keeping the values and feelings of his audience in mind.

Framing theory, in particular, Entman (1993) helps to analyze why Trump transforms complex matters of geopolitics into easier-to-swallow stories, with a tendency to frame the aspects of the perceived reality and give it more significance. These frames tend to influence the decision making and formulation of opinion by the masses.

4. Methodology

A qualitative textual analysis was conducted on a curated dataset comprising:

Trump's tweets and Truth Social posts from December 2024 to June 2025

Public speeches and press conferences related to Iran

Campaign rally transcripts and televised addresses

The data was coded for:

Persuasive appeals (ethos, pathos, logos)

Metaphors and militarized language

Pronoun usage ("we," "they")

Representations of the self and the enemy

Crisis and war framing

Delegitimization of dissent

Appeals to American exceptionalism

This methodological approach allows for a nuanced understanding of both the micro-level linguistic choices and the macro-level ideological implications.

5.1 Us vs. Them Framing

The utterances of Donald Trump throughout the U.S.-Iran war of 2025 always depend on the two opposite sides to draw a moral line down the middle between the United States and Iran. Time after time, Trump is positioning the U.S. as an orderly place that is characterized by peace and moral uprightness whereas he is painting Iran as a chaotic, evil and innately violent place. As an example, speaking in March 2025, Trump said: We are not scared. Not only is this statement used to strengthen the validity of U.S. military actions in the region, but this statement, in a sense, can be used to frame Iran as a constant antagonist in a Manichaeic epic.

The collective pronouns like we and they that are used by the rhetoric strengthen this duality. This is a quote by Trump who said, we are a peace loving nation. They are warmongers that despise liberty," the in group/out group construct favored in populist war rhetoric is underlined. This framing performs two roles, one is to rally the in-group behind a common identity and moral purpose, and the other is the dehumanization or delegitimization of the out-group.

Another effect of the binary logic is that it simplifies complicated geopolitics. Trump has called Iran a regimen of terror, cult of death in rally talks and denounced the Iranian leaders as Nazis of modern times. Such excessive use of language leads to moral panic leaving no room to diplomacy or interpretation of such. The theory of Van Dijk (1998) about the ideological square, i.e., association of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation is evidently at play here.

The rhetorical escalation of Trump in 2025 is no exception in the sense that it demonstrates nothing less than a shift since his previous presidency. Although his statements concerning Iran were inflammatory in 2020, in most cases, they were discussed as retaliatory. Conversely, the rhetoric of 2025 is prospective; it is training the audience to sustain their relationship, and it implies that the existence of Iran as a geopolitical actor is the threat of a constant nature. The outcome is the commodification of war and the loss of the common discourse in the arena of public deliberations.

5.2 Ethos by Appeal to Patriotism and Strength

During the fight, Trump has positioned himself as a strong chief. This rhetoric appeal helps to justify his credibility as the Commander-in-Chief and as a symbolic protector to the people of America. During a March 2025 televised talk, he said: "we are the most powerful military in the world". Iran ought to reconsider." It is an appeal to national strength that calms the audience and scares the opponent at the same time.

Trump is a constant reference to the American historical leaders, Ronald Reagan as a reference point: Ex: compared himself several times to Reagan when standing up against tyranny, Reagan did it; we will stand up against evil. This is historical invocation that amounts to an ethos borrowing, whereby Trump is equating what he is currently doing to moments of communal moral clarity that are not open to debate.

He makes use of military personnel in speeches, which also helps to improve his ethos. The placing himself next to honored generals or mentioning the courage of dead troops lets Trump champion the narrative of moral superiority. His argument on American exceptionalism further

boosts his ethos appeal: no nation in history has contributed more towards the defence of freedom like the United States of America.

Deliberation of security and ethical authority is important during these uncertain times. The fact that Trump reigns on personal determination- that he will never allow America to be bullied, makes him a savior against lawlessness, both international and local.

5.3 Pathos Emotional Appeals

The speech of Trump is full of emotional words that make people feel angry, proud, afraid, and empathetic. Trump spoke to the nation after an attack on a U.S base in Iraq in February 2025: I want to ask them: Who do they think they are? They targeted our heroes. It involved innocent lives of the American people. We were under obligation to take action.” This creation of architecture makes geopolitical strategy an emotionally touching story of saving American lives. The use of pathos is also observed whenever Trump appeals to families and community. Such statements as effort to make the war real, examples are: Think of mothers and fathers who lie awake night after night wondering what may have happened to their sons who are wearing uniforms, are critical to policy making, as this appeals to the general human emotions. This establishes some degrees of emotional commitment to the military action that makes it harder to protest.

These emotional appeals are increased by the visual rhetoric. Trump regularly waits to be applauded when he refers to fallen soldiers in his speeches or asks the Gold Star families to rise and be counted. The moments form a performative solidarity between the leader, the nation, and the soldier sacrifice, positioning support of the war as something emotional.

Another compelling pathos argument in messages delivered by Trump is fear. The expressions of the word nuclear threat, sleeper cells, sabotage plans become massive and are especially numerous in digital media and the posts on Truth Social. This type of language riles the population, which Trump, in turn, uses to build American desire towards better expenditure on the military and further intervention.

5.4 Justification and Logos by Way of Simplification

Although the rhetoric used by Trump is quite emotional, it is simplified in logical reasoning to convince the people. Rejection of the Iran Nuclear Deal is one of the most salient logical appeals that is heard all over: The Iran Deal was a disaster. They were dishonest and corrupt. We terminated it.” Such reductionist assertions abolish complexity and asecticism.

He is also generally employed in cause-effect reasoning: We sanctioned. Their economy was destroyed. Sanctions work.” This rhetorical style is usually logical in the sense that it plays to common sense though the realities are often more complicated. Trump creates an image of a successful leader by establishing unambiguous successes of military and economic strategies made by him.

Numerical reinforcement is one other type of logos. Using such statistics, Trump typically mentions percentages to give verifiable credence to his words: We have eliminated 85 percent of their missile sites. Nevertheless, these are statistics that are hardly put into perspective or even referenced based on how they are effective instead of them being objectively accurate.

There is also the simplification of foreign policy doctrine. Trump employs the use of aphorism such as peace through strength in campaign rallies and America First means America safe. These are ideologically compact phrases, which speak directly without the need to expand any longer.

5.5 Metaphors and Military Linguistics

Such militarization of diplomacy by Trump uses bellicose figures of speech. Financial sanctions and the terms such as locked and loaded, maximum pressure, and the final battle of freedom, etc build the air of unavailability and hostility. Diplomacy turns into war by surrogate means and negotiation turns into surrender.

These metaphors are not relatively accidental, but rather they influence cognitive framing. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) say that metaphors are not decorations to language, but they affect the way individuals think about reality. By saying something like, "We are in a war of civilization and savagery, we, America, are the saviors of universal values, and that is why we can take extraordinary measures," Trump justifies unexceptionable measures.

Through this metaphoric framing, it goes to domestic politics. Trump labels Democratic critics and the constitutional opposition as the sources of accommodation or enemies supporters, and he erases the differences between internal resistance and external hostility. This helps create a siege mentalities among his fans, where any criticism is taken as treason.

Placing military imagery alongside moral absolutes, Trump transforms policy work into a crusade. Such slogans as a mission of justice and a crusade of peace make the war sacred, not allowing alternative to compromise or disobedience.

5.6 Each Other Examples of Important Speeches and Press Conferences

The rhetorical tactics employed by Trump are quite visible in some of his main speeches. As he said in the January 2025 State of the Union, the reign of terror by Iran is past. We America are great and prepared." This line is triumphalist in nature saying not only that there has been victory but also that we are ready. It further means that the agency of Iran has been nullified- a strong version of discursive dominance.

In a February press meeting after an airstrike with Israeli troops, Trump said: Beat the war we did not start, but we will end it, strong, with the honor, and conviction. The latter is characterized by a three-part structure that makes it easier to remember and accentuate the moral correctness of American intervention.

During one of his campaigns in March, he said to his supporters, they hate us because we are free. But we shall not be threatened. The line is a recycle of the post 9/11 rhetoric and it parallels Trump to the legacy of wartime presidents who rode the public opinion to keep political capital. These messages are also enhanced through visual and symbolic language. Trump often employs such imagery as an American flag, military jets, and veterans to emphasize the patriotism. These are factors that form part of a myth making in relation to presidential wartime leadership.

5.7 Agenda -Setting and Media Amplification

The media coverage enhances the rhetorical dominance of Trump. His speech soundbites run on networks and his Truth Social messages spread quickly on the digital media. Trump language is usually portrayed by the right-leaning media as pure truth, and challenged by the left-wing and centrist outlets- ironically, which only propagates it further.

This relationship helps in the process of setting of agendas. Media does not make up peoples minds (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), but what they think about. Trump manages to control the headlines, thus making his definition of the conflict the main story, which leaves other outlooks in the shadow.

Trump rhetorical style also gets rewarded by the social media algorithms. Emotional intensity, moral certainty and binary thinking are other aspects that can result in more reach and encourage more people to engage with posts, further increasing their exposure.

The echo chamber effect enhances the cohesiveness of your message. The most vociferous supporters of Trump use his words and repeat his newest jargons, for example, Iranian terror state or military justice, and are used in personal conversations and on social media to build a rhetoric of participation that spreads the message even further.

5.8 Dissent and Silencing

A notable characteristic of this war rhetoric of Trump is its destitution of dissent. Critics do not only prove to be wrong, they are looked upon as unpatriotic or even traitors. In one of his Truth Social posts dated April 2025, Trump stated: "Democrats that say not to act are on the same side as the enemy. They prioritized politics over national security." The framing creates this black and white morality in which protest is translatable to betrayal.

The silencing technique also discourages sophisticated argumentation and narrows down the arena of democratic discussion. Politicians who dare to criticize the war are criticized by society with a vengeance that is fuelled by a vindictive internet campaign. The rhetorical climate no longer embraces freedom of speech, especially that opposing the specific views, which are held within the Republican Party.

It even targets journalists. The critical media is often labeled by Trump as a piece of fake news or an enemy of the people and dilutes the voice of the alternative narratives. This helps to create an epistemic crisis in which truth is subjective to a particular ideology.

Trump has been effective at rousing his forces by monopolizing the discourse on patriotism and defining the alternative as subversion of the nation and limiting democratic accountability. The outcome is a political environment where war no longer fits as policy option but as a litmus test of morality.

6. Conclusion

The language that has been used by Trump in the 2025 U.S-Iran war is an effective tool of persuasion. With the help of rhetorical appeals, nationalistic presentation of the issue, sacrificing the language of metaphors to a crisis, and a binary opposition, Trump shapes the world, where the American aggression can be viewed as the defense, and Iran as a recognizable existential threat. His rhetoric reduces complicated geopolitical strains to emotionally striking and politically beneficial tale and, this way, mobilizes support, curbs opposition, and strengthens power during the period of war.

His effective use of ethos, pathos, and logos, which are boosted by the digital media platforms and reflected at partisan outlets, is the demonstration of how presidential language can be used to influence either of the two crucial aspects perception and policy with a certain war.

7. Future Research

The research will make a contribution to the knowledge of the role of the political rhetoric and its presence during war on the example of the period of the populist government and the coverage of media. Possible areas of future study include the reception of Trump messaging by the population, cross-national comparisons with the leadership rhetoric of Iran, or how digital spaces enhance and misrepresent presidential language in the case of international conflict. Also, the comparative studies with previous administrations or even global figures may be useful in

putting Trump discursive way into larger phenomena of the authoritarian populism and presence of global militarized rhetoric.

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