



Original article

Ideology and Neutrality in News Reporting: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Fox News Reports on the US-Israel-Iran War

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses a CDA approach to investigate how Fox News reporters report on the war between US-Israel and Iran that started on February 28, 2026. It aims to examine the ideological implications conveyed by Fox News reporters when reporting the news. The study hypothesizes that Fox News reporters are not neutral but display a bigoted and biased ideology towards the conflicting parties. This study uses Van Dijk's (1998) model of 'ideological square,' and the analysis is limited to investigating selected discourse features that are of importance in the data under study. Finally, the study concludes with some findings that support the hypothesis.

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Keywords: Media, CDA, US-Israel-Iran War, Ideology, Fox News

الأيديولوجيا والحياد في التغطية الإخبارية: تحليل نقدي للخطاب لتقارير
مختارة من قناة فوكس نيوز حول الحرب الأمريكية الإسرائيلية الإيرانية
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المُستخلص

تستخدم هذه الورقة البحثية منهجية تحليل الخطاب النقدي لدراسة كيفية تناول مراسلي قناة فوكس نيوز للحرب الدائرة بين الولايات المتحدة وإسرائيل وإيران، والتي بدأت في 28 فبراير 2026. وتهدف كذلك الى فحص الدلالات الأيديولوجية التي ينقلها مراسلو فوكس نيوز عند تغطيتهم للأخبار. تقترض الدراسة أن مراسلي فوكس نيوز ليسوا محايدين، بل يُظهرون تعصبًا وتحيزًا أيديولوجيًا تجاه الأطراف المتنازعة. تستخدم هذه الدراسة نموذج "المربع الأيديولوجي" لفان دايك (1998)، ويقتصر التحليل على دراسة سمات خطابية مختارة ذات أهمية في البيانات قيد الدراسة. وفي الختام، تُخلص الدراسة إلى بعض النتائج التي تُؤكد صحة الفرضيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاعلام، التحليل الخطابى النقدي، الايدلوجية، الحرب الامريكية الاسرائيلية الايرانية

1. Introduction:

News discourse is often presented as factual, balanced, and objective. Yet critical discourse studies have repeatedly shown that news language is rarely neutral, especially in times of war and political conflict. Through patterns of lexical choice, emphasis, omission, quotation, and evaluation, news reports may reproduce particular ideological positions while appearing merely to describe events. For this reason, the language of war reporting deserves close critical attention, since it can shape how audiences understand victims, aggressors, legitimacy, and responsibility.

Within this context, ideology plays a central role in the production and interpretation of media discourse. Ideology is not simply a set of personal opinions; rather, it reflects socially shared beliefs, values, and group interests that organize how members of a group perceive themselves and others. In media representation, such ideological structures often emerge through polarization, whereby one side is represented positively and the opposing side negatively. van Dijk's notion of the ideological square (1998) is especially useful here because it explains how discourse tends to emphasize the good qualities and actions of "us" while highlighting the bad qualities and actions of "them," and at the same time downplaying the opposite.

War reporting provides a particularly fertile ground for this kind of ideological construction. In such contexts, journalists and media institutions may frame one party as civilized, rational, defensive, or legitimate, while depicting the other as dangerous, irrational, deceptive, or aggressive. Even when reports claim neutrality, ideological positioning can still be embedded in the selection of topics, the level of description, the use of examples, and the deployment of modality. This makes media discourse not only a channel of information but also a site where political meanings are produced and circulated.

This paper investigates how ideology operates in selected Fox News reports on the US–Israel–Iran war that began on February 28, 2026. More specifically, it examines the extent to which Fox News reporters maintain neutrality or instead reproduce a polarized representation of the conflict. The study adopts van Dijk's model of the ideological square (1998) and focuses on five discursive features:

topics, level of description, contrast, examples and illustrations, and modality. Through a qualitative analysis of selected reports published on the Fox News website, the paper aims to reveal how linguistic choices contribute to positive self-representation of the US–Israel side and negative other-representation of Iran.

The study hypothesizes that Fox News reporting in the selected texts is not neutral, but ideologically loaded in ways that favor the US–Israel side while presenting Iran as the threatening and illegitimate other. By identifying the discursive strategies used in these reports, this paper seeks to contribute to critical media studies and to deepen our understanding of how ideology is embedded in contemporary war reporting.

2. Ideology

Ideology, as van Dijk (2018, p.17) states, is considered to be the mental representation or the schema of a particular social group. It represents the morals, beliefs, identity, objectives and norms of the group and governs their relationships with other social groups (van Dijk, 1998, p. 69). Ideologies and discourse play an important role in the formation of intellectual perceptions (Khudair,2026, p.1248). They can be grouped into categories like racist/anti-racist, religious/irreligious, pacifist/militarist, feminist/sexist, etc. These categories exemplify the concept of polarization and distinguishing between in-group, which is typically positive, and out-group, which is typically negative, illustrating the concept of ‘the good us’ and ‘the bad them’ (van Dijk, 2017, p.17).

Ideologies can be judgmental or evaluative in deciding what is acceptable and not acceptable for the social group and what is right and wrong for them, thus becoming the provider of the guidelines for the social perception and interaction. (van Dijk, 1995, p. 248).

Since ideologies represent the morals and identity of the social group, they can also provide a positive self-image for it, that is, it emphasizes the good in-group and the bad out-group. This study examines how Fox News reports judges and evaluates the conflicting groups in terms of ideology and which group, US-Israel or Iran, is seen as an ally that can be included in ‘the good us’ and which can be excluded to ‘the bad them.’

2.1. Ideology and Neutrality in News Reporting

Ideology and neutrality play an important role in the media. Media institutions around the world claim that they convey nothing but the truth, and their news reports are always transparent, objective, and not biased. However, these claims should always be questioned. According to Jäger (2001, p.50), **no discourse is free from ideology. It is, in fact, shaped by ideology just like ideology is shaped by discourse. Discourse, especially in times of war, has hidden ideologies that are all about expressing how good, innocent, strong, civilized, and victorious the in-group is and how bad, evil, weak, barbaric and defeated the out-group is. Taking this idea into consideration, the claims of neutrality and objectivity should always be questioned and doubted.**

2.2. Ideological Square

The notion of ‘ideological square’ is coined by van Dijk (1998, p.267) in which he introduced the descriptions of both the good in-group and the bad out-group. Van Dijk further explains that this binary opposition, in-group and out-group, is illustrated by the use of linguistic dimensions and

lexical choice of the discourse (van Dijk, 1998, p. 33). Thus, ideologies consist of the representation of SELF and OTHERS or US and THEM, which fuels polarization and the concept of the positive self-representation and the negative other-representation (Ibid.). According to Van Dijk (2000), there are four principles for analyzing ideology that are:

1. Emphasize/state what is positive/good about US.
2. Emphasize/state what is negative/bad about THEM.
3. De-emphasize/deny what is negative/bad about US.
4. De-emphasize/deny what is positive/good about THEM.

These four principles can be applied to all levels of discourse structural analysis. In this paper, Van Dijk's ideological square is used in the analysis of Fox News Reports due to its significant ideological analysis categories that are useful to the concept of US vs. Them.

3. Model of Analysis

Adopting van Dijk's (1995, 1998) model of dominance and power. Certain discursive features are selected among others to serve as the model of analysis for this study in association with the 'ideological square'. These features are: *Topics, Level of Description, Contrast, Examples and Illustrations, and Modality*

3.1. Topics

Topics are considered to be of importance due to their significance in controlling the interpretation, reflecting the ideology, and showing power and bias (van Dijk, 1998, p. 44). Topics or 'themes' are important because they show what the text is mainly about and what ideas are emphasized. They reflect the meaning and the formulation of the whole discourse or part of it.

Adhering to Van Dijk's 'ideological square', topics are used by speakers to highlight their goodness and others' badness, and de-emphasize their badness and others' goodness through topicalization and de-topicalization.

3.2. Levels of Description

Level of description is a discursive feature that is about how meaning, ideology, and power are constructed by language users. The level of description can be either global (macro-level) or specific (micro-level). Global (Macro-level) description focuses on the overall meaning of the discourse, capturing what the discourse is mainly about (van Dijk, 1980, p. 10), while specific (micro-level) description focuses on the lexical choices, syntax, and presuppositions that are about our good things and others' bad things (van Dijk, 1998, p.45).

3.3. Contrast

Contrast is a discursive strategy used to shed light on the differences between two or more social groups that have divergent goals, typically the differences between 'us' and 'them', which is achieved by polarization (van Dijk, 1995, p.45). The differences between 'the good us' and 'the bad them' can be emphasized by employing contrast, for example, 'we always abide by the law, but they always break it', which serves as a perfect example of polarization that shows 'the good us' and 'the bad them'.

Since this paper adopts Van Dijk's 'ideological square', contrast is used by speakers to highlight the hidden ideologies through the use of polarized terms, and the good in-group, the bad out-group differences.

3.4. Examples and Illustrations

Examples and illustrations are considered to be one of the discursive features that can highlight ideological implications. They are presented as stories to add extra plausible evidence and extra credibility of the good deeds of in-group and the bad deeds of out-group (van Dijk, 1998, p.49). So that the hearer or reader may feel that the stories are neutral, objective, and truthful.

3.5. Modality

Finally, modality is regarded as the structures that evaluate the state of affairs. According to Fasold and Connor-Linton (2006, p.153) Modalities “refer to aspects of meaning which cause sentences to be about the non-factual, that is, about the alternative possibilities for how things could be.” It shows the speakers’ unique way of conceptualizing ideologies and worldviews. According to Halliday (1994, p.362), modality is the representation of the speaker’s point of view that judges what is right or wrong about the discourse. Fowler (1991, p. 76) states that “language does not allow us to say something without conveying an attitude to that something.” In other words, speakers who claim that their discourse is totally objective, neutral, and ideology-free are basically expressing their point of view, their ‘angle of vision’ that determines the ‘feel’ and ‘color’ of their discourse (Simpson, 1993, p. 5).

In Van Dijk’s framework, modality indicates how language users express certainty/uncertainty, possibility/necessity, obligation/permission, and attitudes and judgments in discourse.

Model of Analysis (CDA Framework)

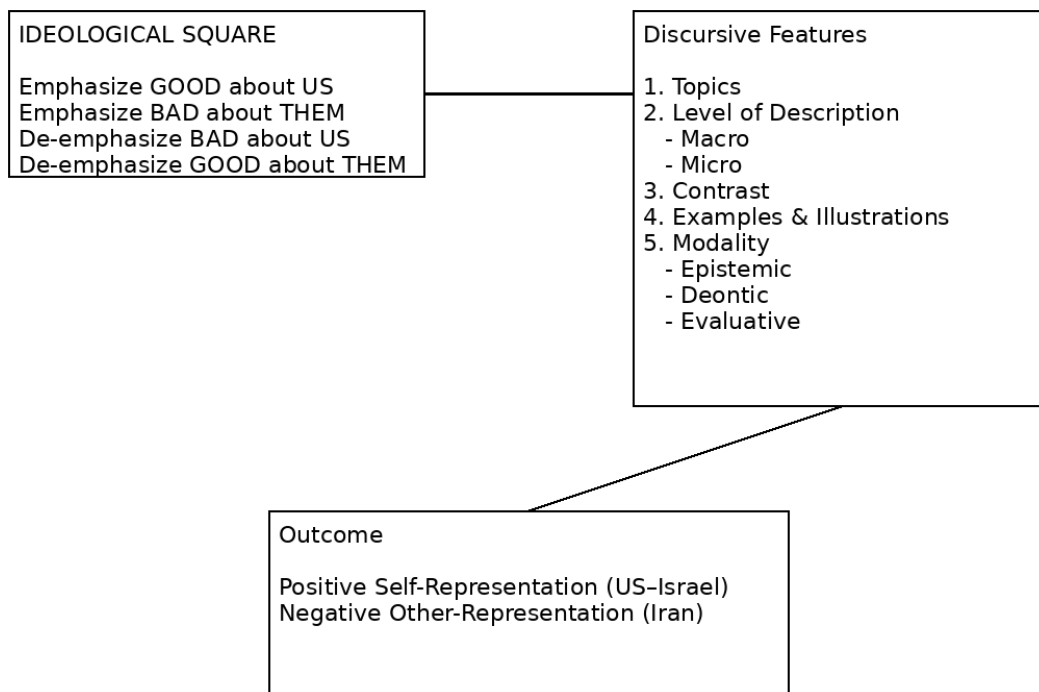


Figure (1): Model of Analyzing Discourse Features in Fox News Reports.

4. DATA DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Data Collection

The data selected for this paper represent the top articles that are posted on Fox News 'official website (www.foxnews.com). Four articles are selected purposively from different periods of time, starting from February 28, 2026, to March 26, 2026. This study is a qualitative one. Some examples are selected among others due to the huge amount of data, which may be misleading in statistical analysis. Thus, it is better to emphasize qualitative research on randomly selected articles.

4.2. Method of Analysis

The selected data will be analyzed using the adopted model, which incorporates Van Dijk's 'ideological square.' The analysis investigates the five discursive features: topics, levels of description (Macro-Level Analysis and Micro-Level Analysis), contrast, examples and illustrations, and modality.

4.3. Data Analysis

4.3.1. Topics

Analysis of Topicalization: Topicalization is a crucial ideological discursive feature in Fox News report on the US-Israel-Iran War. Topics are represented by the three main 'headlines.' According to the model adopted in this study, the three headlines are perceived as ideological structures that imply the ideology of 'the good us' and 'the bad them.' The first two headlines imply the good actions of the US-Israel, the third implies the bad actions of Iran, and the fourth headline is mixed, showing both 'the good US-Israel' and 'the bad Iran.' This is shown in detail in the table below.

	Topicalization	Good/Bad actions of US-Israel/Iran
R1	"Historic US-Israel strikes on Iran are underway as Tehran faces regime survival test."	Good actions of US-Israel.
R2	"Trump says US 'obliterated' military targets in strike on key Iranian oil hub. 'Powerful bombing raids.'"	Good actions of US-Israel
R3	"Iran's hidden mountain nuclear site raises urgent threat, must be 'neutralized': reports."	Bad actions of Iran.
R4	"Trump proven right on Iran's long-range missile capability as regime targets US-UK base, experts say."	Good actions of US-Israel/ bad action of Iran,

Table (1) Ideological Indications in Fox News Reports

4.3.1.1. Analysis:

In *R1*, the reporter expresses through the headline how the US-Israel actions are justified, and important, rather than morally questionable, describing them with the word 'historic.' On the other hand, he refers to Iran by the word 'regime' rather than 'government' to imply it as an authoritarian, non-democratic, non-civilized regime that has severe existential problems.

In *R2*, the reporter indicates US strength, precision, and military might and effectiveness by the phrase 'obliterated military targets.' The headline acts as a show of US power and strength, especially with

the phrase ‘powerful bombing raids.’

In *R3*, the choice of words like ‘hidden’, ‘urgent’, ‘threat’, and ‘neutralized’ displays the image of Iran as secretive and dangerous, which poses a threat not only to the region but to the whole world. Finally, in *R4*, the headline starts with the phrase ‘Trump proven right’, which shows a positive self-representation, while the choice of ‘regime’ and ‘targets US-UK base’ shows a negative other representation.

4.3.2. Level of Description

Overall Analysis of Level of Description: This discursive feature is highly utilized in Fox News reports on the US-Israel-Iran war. Global and specific are used to express what is positive about US-Israel group and what is negative about Iran group. On the other hand, no information, either global or specific is used to express what is negative about US-Israel group and what is positive about Iran group. The following table shows the level of description found in the selected reports.

	Text	Type	Good/bad actions of US-Israel/Iran
R1	(1) Prime Minister Netanyahu said that “in the coming days we will be required to show resilience.”	Direct Quotation	Good action of US-Israel.
	(2) Israeli officials said the goal of the campaign was to “thoroughly degrade the Iranian regime’s capabilities and remove existential threats to the State of Israel.”	Reported Speech and Direct Quotation	Good action of US-Israel.
	(3) President Donald Trump condemned Tehran’s role in regional instability, saying, "From Lebanon to Yemen and Syria to Iraq. The regime has armed, trained, and funded terrorist militias that have soaked the earth with blood and guts.”	Reported Speech and Direct Quotation	Bad actions of Iran.
	(4) “He added, "Iran is the world's number-one state sponsor of terror... It has always been the policy of the United States, in particular my administration, that this terrorist regime can never have a nuclear weapon. I'll say it again. They can never have a nuclear weapon.”	Reported Speech and Direct Quotations	Bad actions of Iran.
	(5) “The military cited renewed Iranian efforts to advance ballistic missile production and conceal	Reported Speech	Bad actions of Iran.

	elements of its nuclear program as justification for the timing of the strike.”		
R2	(6) “Moments ago... the United States Central Command executed one of the most powerful bombing raids in the history of the Middle East, and totally obliterated every MILITARY target.”	Direct Quotation	Good actions of US-Israel.
	(7) “Our Weapons are the most powerful and sophisticated that the World has ever known but, for reasons of decency, I have chosen NOT to wipe out the Oil Infrastructure...”	Direct Quotation	Good action of US-Israel.
	(8) “I will not allow a terrorist regime to hold the world hostage and attempt to stop the globe's oil supply.”	Direct Quotation	Bad actions of Iran.
	(9) “The island... is about the size of New York City’s Central Park... roughly 90% of Iran’s crude oil exports pass through it.”	Narrative	Bad actions of Iran.
R3	(10) “At the beginning of March, a vehicle was struck outside the site, presumably by Israel... evidence the U.S. and Israel are watching the mountain carefully.”	Narrative	Good actions of US-Israel
	(11) “The U.S. and Israeli forces launched Operation Epic Fury in late February and have since struck more than 7,800 targets in Iran.”	Reported Speech	Good actions of US-Israel.
	(12) “High-resolution satellite imagery... shows Iran's accelerated efforts to reinforce the site... against potential airstrikes.”	Narrative	Bad actions of Iran.
	(13) “Before the United States and Israel end major combat operations against Iran, they must complete two urgent tasks [neutralizing nuclear sites]”	Direct Quotation	Bad actions of Iran.
R4	(14) “One missile reportedly failed in flight, while a U.S. warship launched an SM-3 interceptor at the other,	Reported Speech	Good actions of US-Israel.

	officials said.”		
	(15) “The Trump administration... was therefore justified in its decision to undertake military action as Iran has consistently refused to negotiate.”	Narrative	Good actions of US-Israel.
	(16) “Today, their lies were exposed once again, when missiles were fired 4000km away from Iran. They hoped to lie their way into becoming a force that can terrorize the world.”	Direct Quotation	Bad actions of Iran.
	(17) “The Islamic Republic of Iran significantly escalated its war effort against the U.S. with its launch of two intermediate-range ballistic missiles on Friday.”	Narrative	Bad actions of Iran.

Table (2): Level of Description.

4.3.2.1. Analysis:

In *R1*, at the macro level (Global), the article presents US-Israel as protectors that face a dangerous regime that is a threat to the good in-group. At the micro level (Specific), word choice is used to intensify Iran’s negative representation and its bad actions as “the world’s number-one state sponsor of terror” while associating Israel with endurance and legitimacy.

In *R2*, at the macro level, US-Israel group is shown to be overwhelmingly strong but still controlled and ethical. At the micro level, force is being glorified by the use of destructive language and threats, but then it softens to show that the US-Israel are the protectors of international interests and trade.

In *R3*, at the macro level, the war is presented as a preventive action. At the micro level, Iran is represented as secretive and dangerous, and urgency is encouraged through nuclear and military vocabulary.

In *R4*, at the macro level, Iran is shown as a global threat to the world. At the micro level, phrases such as ‘proven right’, ‘terrorize the world’, and ‘escalated lies were exposed’ intensify the image of Iran as a threat and validate US actions.

4.3.3. Contrast

Overall Analysis of Contrast

The analysis of Fox News reports shows that several contrasts are used by Fox News reporters. These contrasts enrich the ideology of ‘the good us’ and ‘the bad them.’ It is evident that the use of words to describe each of the conflicting groups. Table 3 shows the use of contrasts attached to each group.

	US-Israel	Iran
R1	‘show resilience’, ‘heightened precautions’, and ‘remove existential threats.’	‘missile barrages’, ‘state sponsor of terror’, ‘terrorist regime’, and ‘conceal elements of its nuclear program.’
R2	‘most powerful and sophisticated’, ‘reasons of decency’, and ‘free and safe passage.’	‘interfere’, and ‘disruptions.’
R3	‘must complete two urgent tasks’, ‘recover or eliminate’, and ‘prevent’.	‘potentially most dangerous’, ‘urgent threat’, ‘must be neutralized’, and ‘terrorist proxies.’
R4	‘proven right’, ‘justified’, ‘US strategic hub’.	‘significantly escalated’, ‘lies were exposed’, ‘terrorize the world’, and ‘direct threat range.’

Table (3) Use of Contrasts.

The contrasts shown above are built lexically, that is, positive expressions such as ‘resilience’, ‘decency’, and ‘proven right’ are attached to US-Israel, while negative expressions such as ‘state sponsor of terror’, ‘urgent threats’, ‘lies were exposed’, and ‘terrorize the world’ are attached to Iran. This realization of van Dijk’s ‘ideological square’ in showing positive self-representation of US-Israel and negative other representation of Iran.

4.3.4. Examples and Illustrations:

Overall Analysis of Examples and Illustrations: In the analysis of the data, examples and illustrations are found in Fox News reports. The use of these discursive features is found in the forms of quotations, stories, and reported speech. In all Fox News reports, these discursive features are utilized to express what is positive about US-Israel and what is negative about Iran. Table 4 below shows the use of examples and illustrations in the selected data.

	Text	Type	Good/bad actions of US-Israel/Iran
R1	(1) Prime Minister Netanyahu said that “in the coming days we will be required to show resilience.”	Direct Quotation	Good action of US-Israel.
	(2) Israeli officials said the goal of the campaign was to “thoroughly degrade the Iranian regime’s capabilities and remove existential threats to the State of Israel.”	Reported Speech and Direct Quotation	Good action of US-Israel.
	(3) President Donald Trump condemned Tehran’s role in regional instability, saying, "From Lebanon to Yemen and Syria to Iraq. The regime has armed, trained, and funded terrorist militias that have soaked the earth with blood and guts.”	Reported Speech and Direct Quotation	Bad actions of Iran.
	(4) “He added, "Iran is the world's number-one state sponsor of terror... It has always been the policy of the United	Reported Speech and Direct Quotations	Bad actions of Iran.

	States, in particular my administration, that this terrorist regime can never have a nuclear weapon. I'll say it again. They can never have a nuclear weapon.”		
	(5) “The military cited renewed Iranian efforts to advance ballistic missile production and conceal elements of its nuclear program as justification for the timing of the strike.”	Reported Speech	Bad actions of Iran.
R2	(6) “Moments ago... the United States Central Command executed one of the most powerful bombing raids in the history of the Middle East, and totally obliterated every MILITARY target.”	Direct Quotation	Good actions of US-Israel.
	(7) “Our Weapons are the most powerful and sophisticated that the World has ever known but, for reasons of decency, I have chosen NOT to wipe out the Oil Infrastructure...”	Direct Quotation	Good action of US-Israel.
	(8) “I will not allow a terrorist regime to hold the world hostage and attempt to stop the globe's oil supply.”	Direct Quotation	Bad actions of Iran.
	(9) “The island... is about the size of New York City’s Central Park... roughly 90% of Iran’s crude oil exports pass through it.”	Narrative	Bad actions of Iran.
R3	(10) “At the beginning of March, a vehicle was struck outside the site, presumably by Israel... evidence the U.S. and Israel are watching the mountain carefully.”	Narrative	Good actions of US-Israel
	(11) “The U.S. and Israeli forces launched Operation Epic Fury in late February and have since struck more than 7,800 targets in Iran.”	Reported Speech	Good actions of US-Israel.
	(12) “High-resolution satellite imagery... shows Iran's accelerated efforts to reinforce the site... against potential airstrikes.”	Narrative	Bad actions of Iran.
	(13) “Before the United States and Israel end major combat operations against Iran, they must complete two urgent tasks [neutralizing nuclear sites]”	Direct Quotation	Bad actions of Iran.
R4	(14) “One missile reportedly failed in flight, while a U.S. warship launched an SM-3 interceptor at the other, officials said.”	Reported Speech	Good actions of US-Israel.

(15) “The Trump administration... was therefore justified in its decision to undertake military action as Iran has consistently refused to negotiate.”	Narrative	Good actions of US-Israel.
(16) “Today, their lies were exposed once again, when missiles were fired 4000km away from Iran. They hoped to lie their way into becoming a force that can terrorize the world.”	Direct Quotation	Bad actions of Iran.
(17) “The Islamic Republic of Iran significantly escalated its war effort against the U.S. with its launch of two intermediate-range ballistic missiles on Friday.”	Narrative	Bad actions of Iran.

Table (4) Examples and Illustrations

4.3.4.1. Analysis:

The texts excerpted from the selected data show a significant number of Examples and illustrations that imply the notion of polarization and ‘the good us’/ ‘the bad them’ ideology.

In R1, Text (1), the text shows positive self-representation that it illustrates US-Israel group as having the virtue of ‘resilience.’ It implicitly displays US-Israel as the victims of the aggression caused by Iran. In (2), the text also shows a positive self-representation of US-Israel. It illustrates that the military actions are not an act of war but rather a technical and defensive necessity. The phrase “existential threat” serves here as proof that any action taken by US-Israel is considered a good and necessary survival act. In (3) the text shows a negative other-representation. The countries mentioned, “Lebanon to Yemen,” help illustrate the ‘geographical reach’ of the threat. While the phrase “soaked the earth with blood and guts” creates a visual illustration of Iranian bad, brutal actions. In (4) the text shows a negative other-representation of Iran and a positive representation of US-Israel combined.

The use of “number-one” illustrates Iran as the out-group antagonist, on the other hand, the repetition of never illustrates the firm and moral boundary of the US-Israel group that implies the positive self-representation, the good us vs. the bad them. In (5) the text shows a position self-representation of US-Israel and a negative other-representation of Iran. It depicts Iran as being deceptive by the use of the word ‘conceal’. It also shows that the threat is real and immediate by using phrases like “ballistic missile production.”

In R2, text (6) shows emphasis on power and precision. It capitalizes the word ‘military’, which displays US-Israel as an ethical, targeted actor. In (7), the text attaches the word ‘decency’ to the military decisions, which shows moral restraint as well as immense power. In (8), the text shows a negative other-representation of Iran by using the word ‘hostage’ to depict Iran as an irrational, globally disruptive actor. In (9), the text provides a geographical and economic narrative to show how disruptive Iran is and to show also that the strikes against Iran are ethical and justified.

In R3, Text (10) uses a tactical event as an example of the in-group’s constant vigilance and active defense strategy, drawing a positive self-representation of US-Israel. In (11), specific names and numbers are used in the text such as “operation Epic Fury” and “7.800 targets” to show US-Israel’s

strength and military efficiency and dominance. In (12), phrases like “satellite imagery” are used to represent concrete and objective evidence of the out-group’s secretive and deceptive behavior. In (13), the text depicts the Iranian nuclear program as ‘urgent’ danger that demands immediate intervention.

In R4, in text (14), contrast is used to show the difference between the out-group’s technical failure and the in-group’s technological superiority and defensive success. In (15), the text provides justifications for the military strikes by using phrases like “the refusal to negotiate,” which illustrates the in-group’s justified strikes. In (16), specific numbers are used (4000 km) to show and prove the out-group’s inherent lies and deceptiveness. Finally, in (17), the text illustrates Iran as the aggressor by detailing unprovoked actions against US-Israel sites.

4.3.5. Modality.

Overall Analysis of Modality: in the analysis of the selected data, two kinds of modality are found: Epistemic Modality, which focuses on the truth, deduction, and belief, and Deontic Modality, which focuses on rules, duty, permission and morality (Fairclough, 2003, p.167), in addition to other types such as assertive and evaluative sentences. Table 5 shows the use of modality in texts excerpted from the selected data.

	Texts	Types of Modality
R1	(1) “Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the nation, warning that 'in the coming days we will be required to show resilience.”	Deontic (Obligation/Necessity)
	(2) “leaders signal that the campaign will continue 'as long as necessary .”	Epistemic and Deontic (Certainty and Necessity)
	(3) “It has always been the policy of the United States... that this terrorist regime can never have a nuclear weapon. I'll say it again. They can never have a nuclear weapon.”	Epistemic (Absolute Impossibility)
R2	(4) “I will immediately reconsider this decision, Trump added.”	Epistemic (Future Certainty)
	(5) “I will not allow a terrorist regime to hold the world hostage... And if Iran does anything to do that, they'll get hit at a much, much harder level.”	Deontic and Epistemic (Prohibition and Certainty)
	(6) “Any military action there could have consequences well beyond Iran.”	Epistemic (Possibility)
R3	(7) “One nonproliferation expert warned it must be 'neutralized' before the U.S. war with Iran ends.”	Deontic (Obligation)
	(8) “First, they must neutralize Pickaxe Mountain. Second, they must recover or eliminate highly enriched uranium.”	Deontic (Obligation)
	(9) “Preventing Iran from having a nuclear weapon is one of President Donald Trump's stated war aims.”	Assertion (Fact/Truth)
R4	(10) “The Trump administration... was therefore justified in its decision to undertake military action.”	Evaluative (Moral Certainty)

	(11) “Europe is absolutely at risk as the recent launch makes clear.”	Epistemic (Certainty)
	(12) “If left intact, Iran's ballistic missiles would attain intercontinental range soon.”	Epistemic (Probability)

Table (5) Use of Modality

4.3.5.1. Analysis:

In R1, text (1), uses the phrase “will be required to” to frame the in-group as not an eager participant in the war, but forced by necessity. The phrase shifts the responsibility of the conflict away from US-Israel, displaying their actions as defensive. In text (2), the use of “will” for certainty, combined with the word “necessary,” justifies the military action and frames the in-group violence as a rational and measured response. In text (3), the repetition of “can never” displays an absolute moral boundary. It defines the out-group as extremely dangerous and never to be trusted, reinforcing their bad image.

In R2, text (4) expresses absolute volition and authority. The use of this kind of modality positions the US president as the ultimate and decisive moral authority, capable of enacting ‘justice’, thereby emphasizing in-group strength. In text (5), the use of the phrase ‘will not allow’ shows in-group authority policing the out-group. The use of ‘They’ll get hit’ conveys certainty and portrays the out-group as someone who only understands absolute force and severe punishment. In text (6), ‘Could’ is used to amplify the global threat of the out-group’s geographical location, and emphasizes the dangerous nature of Iran’s position.

In R3, text (7), the use of “must be” is a directive that frames proactive military destruction as an urgent, inescapable moral duty for the in-group. In text (8), the repetition of ‘must’ structures in-group aggression as a mandatory checklist for global safety; they ‘have to’ do this because the out-group leaves them with no other choice. In text (9), the assertion used here serves as a high certainty model. It states the out-group’s pursuit of a weapon as an undisputed fact, which aligns with the in-group’s righteous war aims.

In R4, in text (10), the definitive use of ‘justified’ implies a kind of unquestionable truth. It closes the door on the debate about the ethics of the in-group’s military strikes. In text (11), the use of the adverb ‘absolutely’ pushes the threat level to the maximum and eliminates any doubts about the out-group’s danger, which shows Iran as an imminent threat to the entire Western World. In text (12), the use of ‘would attain’ implies an inevitable, dangerous progression if the in-group does not intervene, which legitimizes the good actions of the in-group bombing the out-group now.

Conclusion:

This study has examined selected Fox News reports on the US–Israel–Iran war through the lens of van Dijk’s (1998) ideological square. The analysis of topics, level of description, contrast, examples and illustrations, and modality demonstrates that the reports are not ideologically neutral. Rather, they consistently construct a polarized representation of the conflict in which the US–Israel side is associated with legitimacy, strength, restraint, and moral justification, whereas Iran is represented as dangerous, deceptive, aggressive, and globally threatening.

The findings show that this ideological positioning is achieved through a range of discursive strategies. At the level of topics, headlines foreground the military actions of the US and Israel as decisive, justified, or historically significant, while highlighting Iran as a source of threat and instability. At the level of description, both macro- and micro-level meanings contribute to a broader frame in which military action appears defensive and necessary. Similarly, contrastive expressions, examples, and

illustrations repeatedly reinforce positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Modality also plays an important role by presenting military action as necessary, justified, and morally certain, while construing Iran as an urgent danger that must be confronted.

Taken together, these patterns strongly support the study's hypothesis that the selected Fox News reports reflect ideological bias rather than neutrality. The discourse of the reports aligns closely with the logic of van Dijk's ideological square: emphasize the good things about "us," emphasize the bad things about "them," and minimize any reverse representation. In this way, Fox News reporting does not simply inform its audience about the conflict, but actively participates in shaping a particular understanding of it.

The study confirms the usefulness of Critical Discourse Analysis in uncovering the ideological dimensions of media language, particularly in wartime reporting where claims of objectivity often conceal deeper structures of power and alignment. It also suggests that media consumers should approach news discourse critically, paying attention not only to what is reported, but also to how it is reported. Future studies may expand the data set, compare Fox News with other media outlets, or examine audience reception in order to provide a broader account of ideology in contemporary conflict reporting.

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