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Doublespeak in Western Political Discourse in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf

ABSTRACT. *The article aims to explore the meaning and uses of the term "doublethink" and sort out the main aspects of this concept. As a result, the research is targeted at identifying the pragmatic tasks of applying the appropriate method of discourse construction using the example of the coverage of the historical events taking place in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf in Western political discourse. The term "doublethink", created by the British writer George Orwell for his novel "1984", finds application in the modern works in political science and political linguistics. According to Orwell, doublethink is a situation when a person believes in two contradictory statements and is unable to critically evaluate arguments. Linguists who study techniques for manipulating the consciousness of the audience concretize doublethink by means of the following techniques: euphemisms, jargon, bureaucracy terminology, and meaninglessness. The tactics of spreading doublethink in the media consist in using misleading language to distract public attention from controversial political methods (for example, the expression "improved interrogation methods" is used instead of the noun "torture", and military interventions are justified through such noble goals as "spreading democracy" and "liberating the oppressed"). A special role is played by synonymous substitutions for direct nominations that carry implicit cultural connotations for the audience. The techniques for immersing the audience in a state of doublethink are considered using the example of the reflection in media reports and statements by diplomatic agencies of the armed confrontation in Syria since 2011, the civil war in Lebanon that lasts for 15 years, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the policies of Iran and the United Arab Emirates.*

KEYWORDS: *doublespeak, euphemism, political discourse, political linguistics, political language, Eastern Mediterranean, Persian Gulf.*

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Двоемыслие в западном политическом дискурсе о Восточном Средиземноморье и Персидском заливе

АННОТАЦИЯ. *Целью данной статьи является изучение значения и способов использования термина «двоемыслие», а также наиболее заметных аспектов данного понятия. В итоге исследование направлено на выявление прагматических задач применения соответствующего приема выстраивания дискурса на примере освещения исторических событий, происходящих в Восточном Средиземноморье и Персидском заливе, в западном политическом дискурсе. Термин «двоемыслие», созданный британским писателем Джорджем Оруэллом для романа «1984», находит применение в современных работах по политологии и политической лингвистике. По Оруэллу, двоемыслие — ситуация, когда человек верит в два противоречащих друг другу утверждения и не способен критически оценивать аргументы. Лингвисты, изучающие приемы манипуляции сознанием аудитории, конкретизируют двоемыслие в виде следующих приемов: эвфемизмы, жаргон, бюрократизмы, бессодержательность. Тактики распространения двоемыслия в СМИ состоят в использовании вводящего в заблуждение языка для отвлечения внимания публики от спорных методов политики (например, выражение «улучшенные методы допроса» употребляется вместо существительного «пытки», а военные интервенции оправдываются такими благородными целями, как «распространение демократии» и «освобождение угнетенных»). Особую роль играют синонимические замены прямых номинаций, несущие считываемые аудиторией культурные коннотации. Приемы погружения аудитории в состояние двоемыслия рассматриваются на примере отражения в сообщениях СМИ и заявлениях дипломатических ведомств вооруженного противоборства в Сирии начиная с 2011 года, продолжающейся 15 лет гражданской войны в Ливане, палестино-израильского конфликта, политики Ирана и Объединенных Арабских Эмиратов.*

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: *двоемыслие, эвфемизм, политический дискурс, политическая лингвистика, политический язык, Восточное Средиземноморье, Персидский залив.*

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INTRODUCTION

Doublethink is a term coined by the famous British author George Orwell in his book *1984* [Orwell 2021]. Primarily, it holds the meaning of an idea and its opposite at the same time. Secondly, it is related to cognitive dissonance, in which contradictory beliefs cause conflict in one's own mind. Also, it refers to the use of deliberately ambiguous language for the sake of deception or manipulation.

For Orwell, *doublethink* is a situation where a person believes in two contradictory points about one thing and becomes incapable of figuring out the arguments and choosing the most suitable, most relevant or reliable.

Consequently, according to him, *doublethink* [Mike 1984] robs a person of the ability to think and makes them lose the ability to distinguish between right and wrong and turns the receivers into a submissive being without a clear identity or belonging to a specific intellectual system. Recipients, then, may become amenable to any formulated argument, no matter how contradictory it is to reality or the truth.

Similarly, William Lutz, who is a specialized American linguist in the use of language and the avoidance of doublespeak, states that there are four different types of doublespeak: euphemism, jargon, gobbledygook, and inflated language [Lutz 1989], which, authorities use as linguistic tricks to manipulate public perception and avoid accountability. For example, the use of the term "collateral damage" [Griffiths 2015] was meant to describe the civilian casualties resulting from military operations. Resorting to such euphemism, media outlets seek to minimize the human cost of war and justify the military actions to their readers and viewers.

Another common tactic is the use of ambiguous and misleading language to distract people from controversial policies. For instance, when political leaders refer to "enhanced interrogation techniques" [McGreal 2012] instead of torture, they are in fact involved in using doublespeak to sanitize the truth of brutal methods.

In the sphere of Western political discourse in the Eastern Mediterranean (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine) doublespeak has become more than a common tool used to cover truths, manipulate the narratives, to justify military interventions and regime change wars.

By way of illustration, terms such as "spreading democracy" and "liberating the oppressed" [Vidich 1995] are often used to justify military interventions that serve strategic interests rather than announced humanitarian intentions. By using such language, policymakers create a facade of moral righteousness while pursuing their geopolitical goals.

In the next part, the author explores the prevalence of doublespeak in Western political discourse in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf and examines specific case studies and their implications.

THE CASE OF SYRIA

Syria has been a focal point of political discourse since 2011 due to the regime change war [Kelley 2013] and the involvement of several international / regional actors and non-state actors in the conflict.

A prime example of the manipulative linguistic discourse regarding Syria is how different states have justified their military intervention in the Syrian Republic.

For example, the United States has often described its military actions in Syria as aimed at combating "terrorism" [Operation Inherent Resolve] and protecting innocent civilians [US: Civilian Protection… 2014]. However, these interventions have also been motivated by strategic interests and geopolitical motives, such as weakening the Syrian government or countering the influence of other regional powers such as Iran [Taylor 2016].

Similarly, Russia has framed its military role in Syria as a response to an official request for assistance from the Syrian president to combat terrorism [Walker 2015]. However, what Russia might have gained as well from going to Syria is enhancing its influence and presence overseas i.e. the Mediterranean [Tohme 2020], and to get access to one of Syria's rich natural resources — the phosphate [Al-Allaf 2021].

Moreover, the Syrian government had used doublespeak in portraying the conflict, often downplaying its role in civilian casualties while simultaneously portraying the armed opposition militias as terrorists [Assad tells Annan… 2012], foreign agents, proxies and mercenaries to the western and regional powers who have been arming, training, and funding them steadily [Øystein, Selvik 2024].

Overall, the use of doublespeak in Western political discourse regarding Syria had made it difficult for the public to discern the real motifs behind different countries in the very state. On the one hand, the Syrian state [Assad tells An-

nan… 2012] and Russia portrayed the armed opposition groups as terrorists [Assad ally Russia… 2024]. On the other hand, some EU states like Germany deal with internationally recognized terrorists as legitimate representatives of power [Europe Supports Rule… 2025].

Another instance of doublespeak can be observed in the designation of the most stringent sanctions program against Syria, the "*Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act"* [Caesar Syria Civilian Protection] (commonly referred to as the *Caesar Act*), that legislatively mandates secondary sanctions. Despite its stated objective of protecting the civilians, this Act has, in practice, exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the country, leading to the severest socioeconomic repercussions in the history of Syria and Syrian people [Филаретова, Атие 2024].

THE CASE OF LEBANON

Lebanon, a neighboring state to Syria, has been a focal point of Western political discourse for decades, holding a history of 15 years civil war with all its sociopolitical ramifications and consequences.

Western political actors have often engaged in doublespeak about Lebanon concerning the used discourse to describe the state's political system. In other words, The West often describes Lebanon as a "beacon of democracy in the heart of the Middle East", "modal of democracy and pluralism", "the Switzerland and Paris of Middle East" [Noack 2024; Esber 2023]. However, this is a bit of a complex reality.

The country's sectarian system — Taif Agreement [Bennett 2013: 7—10], which allocates political power based on religious and ethnoreligious affiliation (sects), has been criticized for perpetuating sectarianism and exacerbating political gridlock [Collard 2019].

Moreover, United States, as an example, engages actively in doublespeak when discussing Lebanon's political alliances. On the one hand, US policymakers publicly support Lebanon's sovereignty and independence [The regional and international… 2025]. Nevertheless, the same policymakers hold antagonistic relation with one of the legitimate Lebanese political parties, which is presented legally and legitimately in the government and parliament — Hezbollah[1], which the Americans designates it as "terrorist" [Foreign Terrorist Organizations].

Such contradiction in rhetoric serves to perpetuate mistrust and undermine the promotion of stability and security, as the use of doublespeak in Western political discourse concerning issues in the Eastern Mediterranean

has had far-reaching consequences of comprehension, trust, and communication. Through the manipulation of language and rhetoric, political actors have been able to obscure true intentions, divert attention, and perpetuate misinformation.

THE CASE OF PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

In the case of Israel, which borders both Lebanon and Syria, doublespeak, as well as euphemism, are often used to obscure the realities shaping the Israeli policies and actions.

For example, the construction of the illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories [Israeli settlements…] is often referred to as "housing projects" [Staff, Magid 2024], "units" [Approval of 5,255 Units… 2024] or "neighborhood expansion" [Settlement Expansion… 2025], downplaying the violation of international law and the displacement of Palestinian families.

Similarly, the IDF [The Israel Defense Forces] use of excessive force against Palestinian civilians is often claimed to be a "self-defense" or "counterterrorism" [IDF launches counterterrorism… 2025], obscuring the disproportionate impact on Palestinian lives and the erosion of human rights.

In this case, doublespeak is used here as an evident to picturize Israel as a victim of aggression rather than a victimizer, which is De facto nuclear state [Israel] with a history of militarized occupation [Occupied Palestinian Territory… 2025] and human rights violations [UN rights office… 2025].

In such political discourse, doublespeak perpetuates a biased narrative that favors the state of Israel and dehumanizes the counterpart, Palestine. Through distorting language, doublespeak reinforces stereotypes, legitimizes oppression, and obstructs reconciliation and peace.

For instance, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist militant group is often described as a "despicable terrorist group" [The despicable terrorist… 2023], which often viewed through as extreme and violent.

This narrative has been perpetuated by many Western governments, particularly the United States [Foreign Terrorist Organizations], UK [UK and US target… 2023], Australia [Hamas] etc. which have designated Hamas as a terrorist organization.

However, this characterization of Hamas as a terrorist group ignores the complexities of the organization and the broader political specificities since for example the Amnesty International [Amnesty International… 2023], UN officials [Top UN Aid… 2024], and international coun-

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[1] Hezbollah, a Lebanese paramilitary political party, which was founded in the 1980s as a resistance and liberation movement against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon.

tries such as Russia, Norway, China, and Brazil do not recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization, but as a Palestinian national movement that represents a significant component and integral part of the Palestinian population.

Therefore, such dualities of terrorist/non-terrorist often fail to highlight the roots of the problem, hence creates a lack of progress in peace processes and negotiations, and thus Western governments risk simplifying the complexities of the Israeli Palestinian conflict and sidelining potential avenues for diplomatic channels, which ultimately turn a blind eye on the broader political and social roles of the two sides of the conflict.

In other words, to gain a better understanding of the situation in the Palestine in specific and the Eastern Mediterranean in general, it is essential to move beyond the simplistic characterizations of the nature of issues and start to identify the complexities of the political dynamics at play via recognizing the multifaceted truths and trajectories.

THE CASE OF IRAN

Iran, one the major key players in the Middle East, has been at the center of Western political discourse since the 1980s, as many media services have adopted the use of double language to shape the public opinion and justify policy decisions regarding the newly born Islamic Republic of Iran.

The ultimate example regarding Iran is the use of terms such as "rogue nation" [At U.N., Trump… 2017] or "axis of evil" [Heradstveit, Bonham 2007] to describe the country as a threat to global peace and security, according to the FBI [The Iran Threat].

In addition, Western governments often use double language when discussing Iran's nuclear program [Wintour 2025]. While Iran insists that its nuclear activities are for peaceful purposes, Western countries often describe these efforts as a proliferation threat [United Nations nuclear… 2024], thus justifying economic sanctions and, in some cases, military action [Cohen, Herb, Marquardt 2025].

According to Larry Beinhart's "Four Myths Government and Media Use to Scare Us About Dictators" [Beinhart 2007], We have a basic mythology; appeasement of dictators leads to war. The historical basis for this narrative is the "appeasement" of dictators. It encouraged them to believe the democracies are weak and would not oppose them. That led to attempting more conquests and engulfed us all in World War.

If the other countries had stood up to them right away, the theory goes, they would have backed down. If they hadn't, they would have gone to war and nipped dictators in the bud, thereby preventing war.

Now we are floating the story that Iran is a dictatorship. If we "appease" her, it will only encourage Iran and that will engulf us in World War Three.

If we accept the myth as a gospel truth that should guide our political and military lives, and accept that description as true, it makes good sense -- it is even necessary -- to start another preventive war, to stop Iran now!

Eventually, we are creating a mirage of mythologies — about a "rouge state" which isn't one really, about "appeasement" that is completely inapplicable, about nuclear weapons that don't exist whatsoever, yet, and about a country that is "evil" -- that make it seem like we must do something.

If we've learned but one thing from wars is that after we panic ourselves with descriptions of the worst that will happen if we don't move, we had better consider the worst that will happen if we do and be ready for it, Larry Beinhart said.

THE CASE OF SAUDI ARABIA AND UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

In his book *Beyond Hypocrisy* [Herman 1999] Edward Herman explained that double-speak and doublethink in modern societies mean the ability to lie, whether knowingly or unconsciously, and to get away with it; and the flexibility to use lies and choose and shape facts selectively, ruling out those that don't fit the agenda.

This is particularly evident when discussing the case of KSA and UAE simultaneously, as both Islamic monarchies are often portrayed as allies of the West, who praise them for their efforts in "counterterrorism" [Counterterrorism] and at the same time looks away from the twin states complex realities of human rights abuses [Ten ways that Saudi Arabia…], lack of basic democracies [United Arab Emirates], political oppressions [Saudi Arabia: Unrelenting… 2020], and aggressive foreign policies [US Assistance to Saudi-Led… 2022].

One example of doublespeak in the Gulf states is the case of Saudi Arabia's involvement in Yemen, along with its ally UAE. Western leaders have repeatedly praised Saudi Arabia for its efforts to combat Iranian influence in the Red Sea through its military intervention in Yemen. However, they fail to acknowledge the devastating humanitarian crisis caused by Saudi and UAE airstrikes, which have targeted civilians and vital infrastructure, and created the inhumane famine in Yemen [Almutawakel, Alfaqih 2018].

Similarly, the UAE has been hailed as a key partner in fighting radicalism, yet its support for extreme militias in Libya [The UAE in Libya…

2020] and interference — alongside the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members — in the internal affairs of other nations, like they did in Syria [Devereux 2022], undermines stability and fuels regional wars and conflicts.

It is worth noting that engaging in double-speak, Western politicians and news agencies perpetuate a narrative that conveniently ignores the complexities and contradictions in their ties with such states — the KSA and UAE, whereas this highlights the urgent need for a further nuanced and critical analysis of foreign policies, which is imperative to challenge these distorted narratives and hold leaders accountable for their complicities in human rights abuses, regional and international instabilities.

CONCLUSION

According to Noam Chomsky, the Orwellian doublespeak is an integral part of the manipulation of the English language in American media, via a process that is named *dichotomization* [Herman, Chomsky 1988], which is a component of media propaganda involving "deeply embedded double standards in the reporting of news" [Herman, Chomsky 2002].

In the same context, Ferdinand de Saussure, claims that language is inherently structural, existing as a self-contained system that functions as a tool for human communication via a system of symbols — words and letters [Percival W. K., de Saussure F. 1977]. Saussure introduced the "syntagm" and the "paradigm" relationship in language, considering that "syntagm" is the horizontal sentence structure, whereas the "paradigm" represents the vertical relationships between words.

In other words, this is the group of linguistic possibilities and signals that replace one word in a sentence. Even when a word is replaced by a synonym that conveys a similar meaning, the replacement retains its cultural and societal connotations, adding something new to the general meaning of the sentence.

To simplify this concept, one can examine the terminology used in contemporary media, such as the use of words as "martyr-dead" "neutralized-killed", "revolutionary-resistance" rebel-terrorist" or "IDF/occupation forces".

Each one of the above-mentioned examples, even when referring to the same person or thing, offers multiple interpretations that carry distinct cultural and ideological connotations.

For William Lutz, being an effective consumer of language involves more than simply "expressing dismay at dangling modifiers, faulty subject and verb agreement, or questionable usage" [Lutz 1996].

In the end, according to Lutz, "doublespeak is a language which pretends to communicate but doesn't, language which makes the bad seem good, the negative appears positive, the unpleasant attractive, or at least tolerable" [Garner 2016].

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