



Discourse analysis from an international relations perspective: the case study of Tucker Carlson's televised interview with Vladimir Putin

El análisis del discurso desde la perspectiva de las relaciones internacionales. Estudio del caso de la entrevista televisada a Vladimir Putin por Tucker Carlson

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Vladimir Putin; international relations; Tucker Carlson; discourse analysis

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Objective: This research examines Putin's discourse in the Tucker Carlson interview of 6 February 2024 through the lens of international relations theories. The objective is to identify the main topics, themes and arguments put forward by the Russian president in a political discourse within the context of a war.

Methodology: This study outlines the main premises, postulates, and theoretical contributions of prominent American international relations authors, with an emphasis on realism and liberal movements. Exploratory, descriptive and qualitative research methods were employed, based on content and thematic analysis, as part of the discourse analysis. The main themes, statements and keywords of the narrative are identified and systematically compared with the explanations and interpretations of the Ukraine war according to leading theorists.

Results: The findings corroborate prior research that indicates a realist ideological substrate in Putin's discourse. Nevertheless, arguments and premises based on neoliberal theory are also found, as well as the undeniable protagonism of historical and cultural factors in his arguments, suggesting the relevance of history with a nationalist perspective in his narrative.

Limitations: Further research may elucidate the significance of nationalism and historical arguments in Putin's discourse, as well as the notion of the Russian world. In this regard, analysing his discourse according to Russian theorists may offer new insights.

Contribution: This research contributes to establishing a methodological framework for the study of political discourse in the context of a war conflict. Furthermore, this research facilitates a more comprehensive analysis of Putin's discourses in other contexts, as well as a comparison of his narrative with other key messages of Russian propaganda.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave: Vladimir Putin; relaciones internacionales; Tucker Carlson; análisis del discurso

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Objetivo: Esta investigación examina el discurso de Putin en la entrevista a Tucker Carlson del 6 de febrero de 2024 desde el punto de vista de las teorías de las relaciones internacionales. El objetivo es identificar los principales tópicos, temas y argumentos esgrimidos por el presidente ruso en un discurso político durante un contexto bélico.

Metodología: En este estudio se exponen las principales premisas, postulados y aportaciones teóricas de autores norteamericanos de relaciones internacionales, con énfasis en el realismo y los movimientos liberales. Se emplearon métodos de investigación cualitativos, exploratorios y descriptivos, basados en el análisis de contenido y temático, como parte del análisis del discurso. Se identifican los principales temas, enunciados y palabras clave de la narración y se comparan sistemáticamente con las explicaciones e interpretaciones de la guerra de Ucrania según los principales teóricos.

Resultados: Los resultados corroboran investigaciones previas que indican un sustrato ideológico realista en el discurso de Putin. No obstante, también se encuentran argumentos y premisas basados en la teoría neoliberal, así como el innegable protagonismo de factores históricos y culturales en sus argumentos, lo que sugiere la relevancia de la historia con una perspectiva nacionalista en su narrativa.

Limitaciones: Nuevas investigaciones podrían aclarar la importancia del nacionalismo y de los argumentos históricos en el discurso de Putin. En este sentido, el análisis de su discurso según los teóricos rusos puede ofrecer nuevas perspectivas.

Contribución: Esta investigación contribuye al establecimiento de un marco metodológico para el estudio del discurso político en el contexto de un conflicto bélico. Además, esta investigación facilita un análisis más exhaustivo de los discursos de Putin en otros contextos, así como una comparación de su narrativa con otros mensajes clave de la propaganda rusa.

1. Introduction

On the 24th of February 2022, Vladimir Putin announced a 'special military operation' in a televised broadcast, which signified the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Two years later, on the 6th of February 2024, the president appeared on the global scene again, this time in an interview conducted by American journalist Tucker Carlson. The conflict in Ukraine has been described as 'the most massive land military invasion since the Cold War's end on European soil' (Gasparini, 2023). It has resulted in significant humanitarian, economic, military and geopolitical consequences (Feás & Steinberg, 2022) and tensions have escalated in the first months of 2024, with some European countries considering sending troops to Ukraine while Russia has threatened nuclear conflict (Cuesta, 2024).

The interview occurs at a critical juncture, considering the Ukrainian counteroffensive's failure and the Russian army's advances (Barnes et al., 2023), the \$60 billion blockade by the US Congress (Yabutaleb et al., 2023) and the upcoming US elections, which could result in a change in foreign policy if Donald Trump wins (Wolf, 2023). During the interview conducted by Tucker Carlson, Putin presented his narrative on the war in Ukraine to a global audience for over two hours. This research seeks to identify the main argumentative points and themes of his narrative during the interview. The aim is to analyse them from the perspective of international relations, particularly realist theory, as the Russian leader has been linked to this approach (Gasparini, 2023; Kagan, 2023; Rösch, 2022).

The research, therefore, exposes the main theses of schools of thought such as classical realism, neorealism or neoliberalism. The interview was subjected to inductive analysis to identify keywords with high symbolic content, main themes and

categories highlighted by Putin. These were then compared with the premises of the main theories and the latest analyses on the war in Ukraine by international relations theorists such as John J. Mearsheimer, Gilford John Ikenberry or Stephen Walt.

The textual corpus is a political speech delivered by the highest leader of one of the sides during wartime, so the propagandistic nature of the content is taken for granted. In this sense, it is not analysed in terms of truthfulness or falsehood, but as a discourse or narrative that is supported by both specific milestones and theoretical premises of schools of thought of international relations. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the discursive strategies employed by the Russian leader.

2. Objectives

The main objective (MO) of the research is to identify aspects of Russian President Vladimir Putin's narrative that are based on the basic postulates of international relations theories. This objective is specified in three specific objectives (SO). The first specific objective (SO1) consists of summarising Putin's main milestones, arguments and narratives, as well as recent contributions to international relations regarding the war in Ukraine. The second specific objective (SO2) is to identify narrative elements rooted in the postulates of realism and neorealism. The third objective (SO3) is to address any possible inconsistencies with this theory, as well as those aspects highlighted by Putin that fall within the logic of other international relations theories, such as neoliberalism.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. International relations theories

Since the 1960s, liberalism and realism have been the two main schools of thought (Powel, 1994). Realist thinkers go back to Thucydides

in ancient Greece (Blinder, 2021), with Machiavelli being one of the most renowned exponents in history (Berebon, 2023). Thomas Hobbes, 17th-century Enlightenment thinkers, E. H. Carr, Hannah Arendt, Hans Kelsen, Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer are prominent authors in the field of international relations (Berebon, 2023; Kagan, 2023; Rösch, 2022).

One of the key assumptions of classical realist theory is the self-interested and power-seeking nature of human beings (Baylis et al., 2019; Raj & Singh, 2023). According to Morgenthau's view, marked by social Darwinism, individuals are driven by a desire to live, procreate and dominate, and so are states (Blinder, 2021). Another fundamental assumption is the anarchic nature of the international system, with no authority above states. Therefore, states, through their rulers, are the primary – if not the only – actors in international relations, as they design foreign policies and have the capacity to act and reshape their environment (Blinder, 2021).

The neorealist movement does not agree with classical realism's view of human nature as the best explanation for the functioning of the international order, rejecting the famous analogy between natural organisms and human groups. Following Kenneth Waltz's key contributions in the *Theory of International Politics* (1979), this movement is commonly referred to as structural realism (Frigg & Votsis, 2011).

Neorealist theory asserts that domestic politics, the type of regime or the ideology of rulers are irrelevant, as the theory focuses solely on material causes (Alim, 2019). According to Waltz, only major players can make a significant impact: 'in international politics, as in any self-help system, the units of greatest capability set the scene of action for others as well as for themselves' (Waltz, 1979, p. 72).

Waltz underlines the importance of the balance of power and the security dilemmas as central to understanding the international order. He is labelled a defensive realist, in contrast with Mearsheimer. Mearsheimer, who is inspired by the works of Waltz, considers that great powers behave offensively to maximise power and hegemony, rather than merely to ensure their security (Mearsheimer, 2006, p. 111). Mearsheimer's ideas are crucial to both neorealism and offensive realism. Offensive realism is a theory grounded in five key assumptions. First, it assumes that the international system is anarchic. Second, it assumes that all great powers have offensive military capability. Third, it assumes that states are rational actors. Fourth, it assumes that survival is the main aim of states. Finally, it assumes that states' intentions towards each other cannot be known (Mearsheimer, 2014b, pp. 30-31). Mearsheimer's main book, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, was first published in 2001.

In Mearsheimer's view, the army is the most important variable to consider. In addition, powerful nations often attempt to establish hegemonic and hierarchical orders in which they hold the highest position, while regional powers seek to take advantage of their areas of influence (Alim, 2019).

Unlike realism and neorealism, neoliberalism focuses on the changes that have occurred in the last century, including the creation of international institutions and increased interdependence between states (Gasparini, 2023). States have lost influence in this new order based on cooperation and mutual interest, as there are other transnational, international or supranational actors at play, and cooperation prevails over confrontation. In contrast to the realist focus on security concerns, neoliberals emphasise that the new challenges are more related to economic and

environmental issues. Neoliberal theorists support the role of international organisations and coexistence and cooperation between states, also motivated by the growing and complex interdependence among them (Brown, 2022).

The theoretical roots of liberalism can be found in the theory of democratic peace (Walt, 2022a), which was first proposed in Kant's text *Perpetual Peace* of 1795 and in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* of 1835. This theory defends the idea that liberal democracies are less likely to engage in war, particularly with other democracies. According to Doyle (1986), cited by Gasparini (2023), 'The Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) asserts that democracies do not usually go to war against each other and that democracies go to war against autocracies, especially for self-defence, if attacked'. The reasons why democracies do not engage in armed conflict include, for example, that citizens do not want war, politicians are accustomed to negotiation and compromise, respect for human rights prevents war, and the economic benefits of trade outweigh the incentives of war.

3.2. International relations theories applied to the Ukraine war

Some of the main arguments used by neoliberal theorists are the following. First, Russia should not have serious concerns about its security due to the expansion of NATO, since small countries such as the Baltic states or Ukraine do not constitute a threat to a superpower like Russia (Person & McFaul, 2022). Additionally, Putin's response came many years after most NATO expansions had already taken place (Mulligan, 2022).

Furthermore, neoliberal authors consider the West's position to be coherent. According to Way (2022), Russia's violation of the international order jeopardised global security based on

institutions and sovereignty, prompting liberal democracies to act consistently in defence of the liberal international order (Way, 2022; Makarychev, 2022). Nevertheless, there are some critical voices among neoliberals. Gasparini (2023) notes that some other authors have recently disagreed with this point, as they consider that the Western response is 'eroding liberal values such as freedom of expression, economic openness and diplomacy'.

However, the theory of perpetual peace or democratic peace confirms that democracies only go to war to defend themselves from autocracies. Russia's invasion of Ukraine would, therefore, be a paradigmatic example of an autocratic country attacking a democracy (Applebaum & Goldberg, 2022). From this perspective, Russia would have tried at all costs to prevent the democratisation of Ukraine. In the words of Kramer (2022), 'Putin's fear of a successful, vibrant, democratic Ukraine on Russia's border is the real reason for the invasion. Nothing scares Putin more than for Ukraine to become a successful alternative model to the rotten, authoritarian system'. Fukuyama (2022) supports this idea and considers the expansion of democracy, rather than NATO, as the main reason for the Russian invasion. According to notable neoliberal thinkers, like Ikenberry, 'Ukraine's aspiration to join the liberal order would appear to be the driving force behind the Ukrainian people's decision to depose Yanukovich and chart their country's course towards the West' (Alim, 2019).

On the other hand, several authors within the realist camp have offered alternative explanations for the conflict. According to Walt (2022b), realists were the only ones to anticipate the conflict before it occurred. The claims made by the prominent American realist Mearsheimer have been very controversial, as he blames the West

for NATO expansion and for not taking Russian security concerns seriously. In his paper 'Liberal Illusions Caused the Ukraine Crisis', Walt (2022a) argues that NATO enlargement is one of the main reasons for explaining Russia's reaction. He summarises this as: 'Unpleasant as it may be, the United States and its allies need to recognize that Ukraine's geopolitical alignment is a vital interest for Russia'.

He also claims (2022b) that 'the United States has repeatedly declared the Western Hemisphere to be off-limits to other great powers and has threatened or used force on numerous occasions to make that declaration stick'. This claim does not imply a positive view of Russia: 'The Russian leader deserves no sympathy ... If Russia has obvious reasons to worry about NATO enlargement, its neighbours have ample reason to worry about Russia as well' (Walt, 2022a). More specifically, Walt considers that both Russia and the West are to blame for the current situation. He highlights key events such as the promises made by US Secretary of State James Baker, the nomination of Georgia and Ukraine to enter NATO in 2008, and the support for the Euromaidan, which Moscow saw as a colour revolution.

Mearsheimer is undoubtedly the realist author who has been most accommodating to the Russian position and most critical of the Western stance. He states that the expansion of democracy has been counterproductive (Mearsheimer, 2014a). Additionally, he believes that the West is to blame for what happened in Ukraine. Like Walt, he considers NATO expansion a significant milestone, as well as the events of Maidan (Mearsheimer, 2014c). Mearsheimer believes that the involvement of the US was clear, although the extent of it is not known (Alim, 2019). He also emphasises the importance of Crimea and Sevastopol as red lines for Moscow.

Mearsheimer's position has been highly controversial and has sparked numerous reactions. In response to these arguments, neoliberal authors such as Ikenberry argue that the US offered Russia and the former USSR an invitation to join the international order and become part of institutions like the G-7. However, Russia has not accepted this invitation and has remained on the sidelines. On the other hand, other realist authors such as Lieven (2022) have aligned themselves with the positions advocated by Mearsheimer.

Recent contributions explore the war from the realism and liberalism theories (Chauhdry & Ali, 2024), concluding that both theories are suitable for explaining the war in Ukraine. Romanova and Pavlova (2024) delve into the role of Russia as a key actor in redefining realist theory, as foreign policy aligns with the three axes of realist theory (national interest, polarity and neighbourhood/coalitions), but also contributes with new ideas, such as the overpowering executive branch or the identity agenda.

Ganchev (2022) considers that the conflict can be explained through the concept of the Russian World, which encompasses the populations of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine and aims for their political union. According to Alejnikova (2017), cited by Ganchev (2022, p. 5), 'The Russian World is a Russian geopolitical strategy with the objective of uniting the lands of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus and other states in a global transnational structure, based on common cultural and civilizational values.

4. Methodology

In order to achieve the proposed objectives (see Section 2), qualitative research was carried out on a case study, specifically, the interview conducted by Tucker Carlson with Russian President Vladimir Putin on 6 February 2024. The interview,

which was broadcast in a pre-recorded programme, lasted 127 minutes and was transcribed by Rev.com (2024). The selection of the interview reflects the crucial moment at which it takes place and the international impact with which it is conceived, as the interviewer is American and the speech is addressed to a global audience. Furthermore, the length of the interview and the journalist's attitude were analysed. The journalist's attitude was described as 'a display of publicity and propaganda' and was characterised by 'self-congratulatory questions' (Sánchez-Vallejo, 2024). This analysis allows for the identification of a deliberate and extensive discourse in which Putin develops his narrative almost spontaneously and with hardly any interruptions or compromising questions.

This research employs a qualitative methodology of discourse analysis, specifically using the technique of thematic analysis at a referential and denotative level, complemented with a formal semiotic analysis, as recommended by Ruiz Ruiz (2009) for this type of text. The technique follows an inductive procedure, allowing for a process of progressive abstraction to identify themes, statements and keywords. In the second phase of the discussion, the findings were compared and contrasted in a deductive manner with the main theoretical postulates of international relations.

Political discourses have unique characteristics due to the close relationship between politics and language, as well as between power and language. Therefore, hermeneutic, linguistic and postmodern approaches have gained prominence in the last century, emphasising the importance of hidden meanings (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002). It is believed that political texts always have an empirical and objective component, as well as a subjective and intentional component. This dual approach corresponds to the two dimensions of

politics: as a struggle for power (politics) and as the development of policies that affect the community (policies) (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002, p. 14).

Conde Gutiérrez del Álamo (2009) summarises three levels of discourse analysis: the informational/quantitative, the structural/textual, and the social/hermeneutic levels, based on the contributions of Ibáñez (1979), Alonso and Benito (1998), and Ortí (1986). The first level is 'the most denotative and manifest dimension' (Alonso & Benito, 1998); the second one focuses on the context and intention of the sender (Conde Gutiérrez del Álamo, 2009); and the third one conceives texts in a more open manner (Alonso, 1996) and discourses 'as a social practice that is produced in relation to the social conditions' (Hernández-Naranjo, 1996, p. 215).

The author suggests using one level of analysis and supplementing it with another at a lower depth (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009, p. 11). Thematic analysis should be used to address the empirical, referential and objective dimension of political discourse, as 'it compiles a list and synthesis of the themes addressed in a textual corpus, without intending to interpret or theorize' (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2021, p. 136). This approach focuses on the themes or topics around which the discourse is developed. The selection of relevant topics, the order of their appearance and the time dedicated to each of them should be considered (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009, p. 8).

So, this research involves segmenting the textual corpus (the transcription of Putin's interview) to identify homogeneous themes until constructing a thematic tree (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2021, p. 138) where themes, statements and keywords are identified in a cascading form. The themes and statements in a text serve different purposes. The themes answer the question 'what specific

theme is proposed', while the statements answer the question 'what is reported, expressed, told' (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2021, p. 21).

The themes are complemented by a formal semiotic analysis that examines the 'effects of meaning of discourse at the level of enunciation' (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009, p. 11). In this case, the text is formally analysed using keywords, which are one of the rhetorical resources addressed in formal semiotic analysis (Lagunilla, 1999, p. 61). As Terán (2011, p. 191) explains, keywords represent or summarise the most significant social and political events that occurred during a particular historical period.

Regarding the relationship between facts, factual veracity and narrative, the model of Pamment et al. (2018) designed for international information influence activities is followed. In this case, it is a positive influence activity with a general scope. As can be seen in Figure 1, factual veracity is not relevant for the construction of false or misleading narratives, and the authors highlight the inclusion of emotionally charged elements to reinforce the narrative (Pamment et al., 2018). In this sense, identifying themes, statements and keywords has helped determine the semantic orientation of narratives.

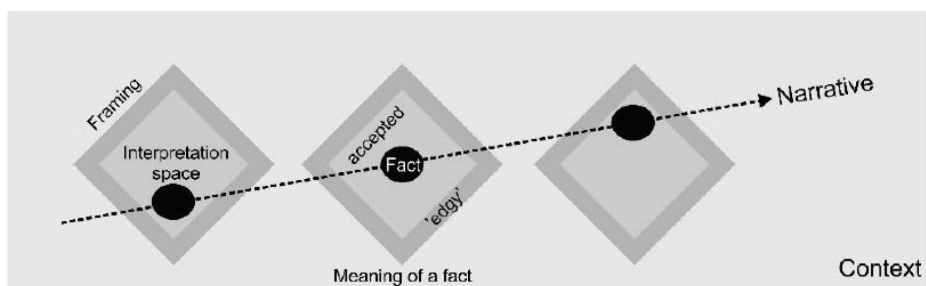
5. Results

During the interview, Putin discusses several themes, which have been categorised into the following sections: historical issues, NATO, Ukraine 2014, negotiations towards the Ukraine war and US-West and Russian affairs. It is important to note that although other topics were discussed during the interview, they were not included in this study as they were considered minor and treated as such, and have therefore only been briefly covered. The interview lasted over two hours and covered a wide range of topics, including religion, AI and the imprisoned North American journalist.

5.1. Historical background

During the interview, Putin referred to historical events dating back to the 8th century, highlighting the historical, economic and cultural ties between Ukraine and Russia. From this viewpoint, he justifies his claim over Ukraine and his perspective on Ukrainian identity. He considers Ukraine as an artificial state that has never been independent. In his historical-narrative speech, he emphasises the significance of history and cultural identity, including faith, in the Russian perspective on the current relationship with Ukraine.

Figure 1. Misleading narratives based on facts



Source: Pamment et al. (2018).

The argument that Ukraine is historically part of Russia and not an independent country is based on key concepts such as Russian lands, centralised Russian state, borders, outskirts, strengthened, interconnected economies, ties, family, culture, language or even sovereignty. These words are closely related to the following core messages:

More than 90% of the population there spoke Russian. Family ties, every third person there had some kind of family or friendship ties, common culture, common history. Finally, common faith and coexistence with a single state for centuries, and deeply interconnected economies. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

The frequent references to the First and Second World Wars serve the purpose of proving that European countries, later in the speech referred to as US satellites, aimed to colonise Ukraine in order to weaken Russia's borders. He uses the terms 'Ukrainianisation' and 'ethnic group' with the clear aim of linking the idea of creating an artificial identity to manipulate the local population and weaken Russia. Additionally, words such as 'border' or 'territory' were also key to Putin's argument. The president of Russia even asserts that one of the main reasons for continuing the war is that they are fighting for 'denazification', which means to eliminate Nazism from Ukraine.

No, we haven't achieved our aims yet, because one of them is denazification. This means the prohibition of all kinds of neo-Nazi movements. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

He also identifies three main reasons why Ukrainians have Nazi sympathies. Firstly, he claims that Ukrainians collaborated with Hitler during WWII in their fight against the Polish. Secondly, he argues that after gaining independence, Ukrainians erected monuments to those who fought alongside German troops during WWII. Finally, he points out that Zelensky

applauded a man who fought against Russia in WWII (a Nazi, according to him). It is important to note that these are Putin's evaluations.

Can we say that we have completely uprooted this ideology if what we see is happening today? That is what denazification is in our understanding. We have to get rid of those people who maintain this concept and support this practice and try to preserve it. That is what denazification is. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

So, the core messages in this line used keywords that increased the emotional effect by linking Hitler, the Second World War, denazification and Ukraine with the idea that Ukrainian people are Nazis and they have a duty to fight those who killed Russians as well as being a current threat to their country.

Putin also discussed the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a mutual agreement to move closer to the West. The core message contains several keywords with emotional connotations, such as 'ideological dividing lines', 'agreed voluntarily', 'collapse of the Soviet Union', 'cooperation' and 'associateship'. These phrases have a positive tone and are intended to inspire hope in the idea of a closer relationship with the West.

5.2. NATO

Putin's speech focused on Russia's concerns about NATO expansion in the east and the inclusion of Ukraine in the alliance. NATO was approached from the perspective of Russia's concerns. He argued that this expansion poses a direct threat to Russia's security and violates previous promises made to Russia. Additionally, he stated that this expansion shows a clear sign of rejection of the US towards Russia.

After 1991, when Russia expected that it would be welcomed into the brotherly family of civilised nations, nothing like this happened. You tricked

us. ... We are a market economy, and there's no Communist party power. Let's negotiate. (Putin, during the analysed interview)..

We never agreed to NATO expansion, and moreover, we never agreed that Ukraine would be in NATO. We did not agree to NATO bases there without any discussion with us. ... Ukraine is a neutral state, and in 2008 suddenly the doors or gates to NATO were open to it. Oh, come on. This is not how we agreed. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

Those messages contain keywords such as 'negotiate', 'security system', 'agreed', 'neutral state' and 'tricked us'. Analogies such as 'family of civilised nations' are also used. These elements convey negative connotations and feelings towards NATO expansion and its sensitive implications for Russians. Overall, Putin's speech suggests three main negative perspectives towards NATO: unfulfilled promises, hostile behaviour and a threat to Russia's security.

5.3. Ukraine 2014

In his speech, Putin describes in detail what happened in Crimea in 2014. Although he highlights several points, there are two key ones that should be noted: the change in the Ukrainian government and the Minsk agreements. Regarding the change in government, he describes it as a coup d'état supported by the US, which indicates foreign intervention in local Ukrainian issues. In addition to this, Putin also believes that the war in Ukraine began in 2014 because of the coup.

This is a coup d'état. Just imagine someone in the United States wouldn't like the outcome. ... After President Kuchma, Viktor Yanukovich won the elections. However, his opponents did not recognise that victory. The US supported the opposition, and the third round was scheduled. What is this? This is a coup. The US supported it and the winner of the third round came to power. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

The keywords on this occasion are clearly related to the negative idea of an illegitimate government: 'coup', 'coup d'état' and 'support'. Concerning the Minsk agreements, the current Ukrainian government has been criticised for not implementing them, despite their potential as a peaceful solution. At some point in Putin's speech, he accused the US, UK, Poland, Germany and France of failing to comply with the agreement. These countries were guarantors of a signed agreement between the Yanukovich government and the opposition.

Firstly, the current Ukrainian leadership declared that it would not implement the Minsk agreements which had been signed, as you know, after the events of 2014 in Minsk, where the plan of peaceful settlement in Donbas was set forth. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

These core messages are related to the keywords 'Minsk agreements', 'peaceful settlement', 'military force' and 'military action'. These terms are associated with the contrasting ideas of Russia being a seeker of peace and the Ukrainian government being a betrayer of the agreements. The message conveyed is that Russia feels betrayed by the West's unfulfilled promises and justifies its actions as a defence of its national interests and the Russian-speaking populations in Ukraine. The strength of the message lies in the presentation of a coherent narrative that seeks to legitimise Russia's stance on the crisis.

5.4. Negotiations towards the Ukraine war

Putin used the historical perspective, NATO expansion, the Minsk agreements and what happened in Crimea (2014) to justify Russia's actions towards Ukraine. He claimed that everything was done to protect the security of Russians. Putin also stated that while Russia is willing to negotiate to end the war, Ukraine is not. Based on

the ineffective attempt at negotiation in Istanbul (2022), he asserts that the West, represented by former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, had vested interests. Additionally, he remarks that the Ukrainian Government made a decree banning any negotiations with Russia.

We did not refuse to talk. We're willing to negotiate. It is evident. ... The financial support, 72 billion US dollars, was provided. Germany ranks second. Then other European countries come. Dozens of billions of US dollars are going to Ukraine. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

President of Ukraine issued a decree prohibiting negotiations with us ... We have never refused, and the fact that they obeyed the demand or persuasion of Mr Johnson, the former prime minister of Great Britain ... We could have stopped those hostilities with war a year and a half ago already, but the British persuaded us, and we refused this. Where is Mr Johnson now? The war continues. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

The main keywords of these core messages are 'talk', 'peace', 'negotiate' or 'negotiations', 'refused', 'decree', 'satellite state of the USA', 'financial support', 'hostilities' and 'persuasion'. These words have a negative connotation, which implies Putin's desire to highlight the fact that Russia wanted to negotiate, while Ukraine refused, and the influence of the former UK Prime Minister and the US on the war. Emotional adjectives have been used with the intention of appealing to the reader: 'seems ridiculous and very sad to me'. Putin aims to link the emotion of sadness with the concept of an ongoing war driven by Western interests.

5.5. US-West and Russian affairs

Putin expresses disappointment with the West's reaction to the collapse of the USSR and the lack of integration of Russia into Western military and economic structures. He describes throughout his speech the Russian feeling of isolation and betrayal from the West, including Europe and the US.

After all, this is a policy of pressure, NATO expansion, support for the separatists in the Caucasus, creation of a missile defence system. These are all elements of pressure, pressure, pressure. Then dragging Ukraine into NATO is all about pressure, pressure, pressure. Why? I think, among other things, because excessive production capacities were created. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

Is it normal, from your point of view, sanctions, restrictions, impossibility of payments in dollars, being cut off from SWIFT services, sanctions against our ships carrying oil, sanctions against airplanes, sanctions in everything, everywhere? (Putin, during the analysed interview).

At least that's what they're talking about, and they're trying to intimidate their own population with an imaginary Russian threat. This is an obvious fact. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

'Pressure', 'NATO expansion', 'separatist', 'production capacities', 'sanctions', 'restrictions' and 'Russian threat' are the key terms used in this topic. The above core messages link the negative idea of pressure over Russia with traumatic events such as NATO expansion and US support for separatists in the Caucasus, as well as an 'imaginary Russian threat'. The words 'sanctions' and 'pressure', both with negative and geopolitical connotations, were frequently used in the discourse.

6. Discussion

The joint analysis of the theoretical framework and the interview with Vladimir Putin enables a comparison and identification of the main messages in the Russian president's narrative, as well as the identification of the theoretical inspiration behind his discourse (MO). Vladimir Putin's narrative is based on several core messages: the cultural and historical unity of Ukraine and Russia; the West has threatened and continues to threaten Russia's security, especially through NATO expansion; the Maidan protests were a coup promoted

by the US; Ukraine is governed by Nazis, making it illegitimate; and Russia desires peace, but the West is hostile (SO1).

These messages allow to draw several general conclusions (SO1). The narrative places significant weight on neorealist theories of international relations, with an emphasis on security. The discourse aligns best with offensive realism, as described by Mearsheimer. However, there are also ideas that align with neoliberal premises, alongside an emphasis on domestic politics and cultural and historical ties.

Most of the messages emphasised and reiterated by the president of Russia align with realist principles, in line with prior research that linked Putin with this movement (Gasparini, 2023; Kagan, 2023; Rösch, 2022). Specifically, it has been found that some of the ideas presented by Walt, such as the importance of security dilemmas and the great powers as the main actors, are relevant. Putin's discourse constantly refers to the security risks faced by Russia and the rational fear of states towards other powers: 'Let's not talk about who is afraid of whom'. Keywords such as 'pressure', 'NATO expansion' or 'Russian threat' are prevalent (SO2).

Walt and Mearsheimer concur on the importance of the balance of power and how regional powers take advantage of their dominance in their respective spheres of influence. Accordingly, this view aligns with the main thesis of offensive realism. Putin consistently refers to Eastern Europe as his sphere of influence, where he believes the US should not have intervened: 'I'm talking about the United States. The promise was that NATO would not expand eastward, but it happened five times. There were five waves of expansion'. Other neorealist ideas advocated by Walt and Mearsheimer include the notion that only the major players can make a difference. Putin insists on this idea,

understanding that Ukraine and even the EU are satellites of the US: 'Ukraine is obviously a satellite state of the US' (SO1 and SO2).

Additionally, he justifies the invasion as a defensive response, akin to Mearsheimer's defence: 'No, we will not do anything ... They also started preparing for military action. It was they who started the war in 2014. Our goal is to stop this war. And we did not start this war in 2022. This is an attempt to stop it'. This message is reinforced with keywords such as 'coup', 'coup d'état', 'financial support', 'hostilities', 'pressure' and 'persuasion'. In his speech, NATO and Ukraine are the aggressive and hostile actors:

In 2014, there was a coup. They started persecuting those who did not accept the coup, and it was indeed a coup. They created the threat to Crimea, which we had to take under our protection. They launched the war in Donbass in 2014 with the use of aircraft and artillery against civilians. This is when it all started. (Putin, during the analysed interview).

Realist theory does not consider the type of regime or the internal or ideological characteristics of states, as the interior of states are considered 'black boxes' (Kapstein, 1995). In this sense, the denazification of Ukraine does not follow the realist logic of international relations. Allusions to 'World War II', 'nationalists', 'denazification' or 'Hitler' imply a high emotional charge linked with the Great Patriotic War (a term referring to the Second World War) and the fight against Nazism as a national achievement (Zhurzhenko, 2015) (SO2).

Likewise, Putin dedicates a significant portion of the interview to describing the historical, political and cultural development of Russia and Ukraine, citing these issues as determinants in explaining political decisions made. He also uses key terms such as 'artificial state' and 'ethnic

group', and phrases like 'Ukrainianisation', 'cooperation', 'associateship' or 'ties' to convey his message (SO1).

The reference to common bonds can carry a high emotional connotation and could be accused of nationalism. The fundamental premises of classical realism and neorealism do not inherently assign importance to these aspects, which are subordinated to material issues such as military power, security and balance of power. However, it is worth noting that, from the neorealist perspective, the will of small countries is deemed unimportant, as Ukraine would be seen merely as a country under US influence: 'Ukraine refused to negotiate; I assume they did it under the instruction from Washington'.

Kagan (2023, p. 10) considers Russia's policy towards Ukraine not in terms of security but in terms of nationalism, as he states that liberalism promotes individual freedom over the state-centric nationalism advocated by Putin. Nevertheless, for Morgenthau, a leading figure of classical realism in the 20th century, nationalism was subject to criticism: 'nationalism was for him an ideology that has the potential to steer emotions and is therefore bound to lead to conflict and even war' (Rösch, 2022). In line with Kagan, Ganchev (2022) considers that Russia's behaviour can be explained on the basis of the geopolitical strategy of the Russian World, which aligns with Putin's historical discourse (SO2 and SO3).

Conversely, some messages anchored in neoliberal premises are identified. Regarding the Minsk agreements, Putin states: 'the current Ukrainian leadership, foreign minister, all other officials and the president himself said that they don't like anything about the Minsk agreements. In other words, they were not going to implement them'. Putin appeals to the international order and a world based on rules, which aligns

with neoliberal principles. The message is sustained by keywords such as 'Minsk agreements', 'peaceful settlement', 'talk' and 'negotiate', as well as the symbolic term 'family of civilised nations' (SO3).

Furthermore, one of Putin's key messages is the commitment to peace, and the pursuit of a negotiated solution is emphasised, in contrast to Ukraine and the West's refusal: 'Everybody wanted to resolve the issue by military force only. But we could not let that happen'. The keywords associated with this Western attitude are 'military force', 'military action', 'decree' or 'pressure'. Finally, Putin argues that Russia has endeavoured to integrate into the international order, but the West, led by the US, has hindered this through hostile policies: 'After the collapse of the Soviet Union, such an erroneous, crude, completely unjustified policy of pressure was pursued against Russia'. All types of messages find support in a neoliberal reading (SO1 and SO3).

7. Conclusions

In the interview, Putin's narrative seems to be more akin to the premises of neorealism, particularly offensive realism, although he insists on a defensive Russian position in response to Western hostility. This may be because acknowledging an aggressive or proactive attitude would contradict Putin's insistence on a non-aggressive stance. Instead, he emphasises peace and agreement, and prioritises security against external threats. Nevertheless, neoliberal theoretical arguments and historical, cultural and national ties also emerge as cornerstones of his discourse.

Further research may delve deeper into the importance of nationalism and historical arguments in Putin's narrative, as well as the notion of the Russian world. In this sense, analysing his discourse according to Russian theorists may

provide new insights, such as Duguin's concept of Eurasia (Duguin, 2014, 2016). Moreover, this research enables further comparison with Putin's discourses in other contexts, as well as comparisons of Putin's narrative with other key messages of Russian propaganda. Moreover, discourse analysis of other heads of state and politicians can provide useful comparisons of different war narratives.

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