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عشر

ادعاءات بوتين بشأن الحرب في أوكرانيا: دراسة معرفية

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المستخلص :

الدراسة الحالية مخصصة للتحقيق في مزاعم بوتين بشأن الحرب في أوكرانيا من وجهة نظر معرفية. قيل إن بوتين يتبنى استراتيجيات تلاعب وإقناع مختلفة في خطابه لتبرير قراراته المتعلقة بالحرب في أوكرانيا. جرى الاعتقاد بأن الاستراتيجيات التي استخدمها تحتوي على عناصر معرفية مختلفة لها تأثير على تفسير خطابات بوتين. لذلك ، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد العناصر المعرفية الموجودة في الخطابات المختارة ومعرفة منطقية ادعاءات بوتين وتبريرها فيما يتعلق بالقضية الأوكرانية. تتميز الدراسة بكونها نوعية في طبيعتها، حيث استندت إلى نظرية فان دايك الأيديولوجية (٢٠٠٠). تم اختيار اثنين من خطابات بوتين كعينات للدراسة الحالية. بعد تحليل البيانات المختارة ، تم التأكيد على أن بوتين استخدم استراتيجيات معرفية مختلفة حاول من خلالها التلاعب وإقناع جمهوره بمنطقية ادعاءاته وتبريراته. أثبتت المعايير التي انتهكها والاستراتيجيات المعرفية التي اعتمد عليها أنه غير منطقي وأن قراراته كانت غير معقولة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: ادعاءات بوتين، المبررات، حرب أوكرانيا.

Putin's Claims on the War in Ukraine: A Cognitive Study

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## Abstract :

The current study is dedicated to the investigation of Putin's claims on the war in Ukraine from a cognitive point of view. Putin is said to adopt different manipulative and persuasive strategies in his speeches to justify his decisions concerning the war in Ukraine. The strategies he used are thought to contain different cognitive components that impact the interpretation of Putin's speeches. Therefore, this study aims at identifying the cognitive elements found in the selected speeches and figuring out the logicity of Putin's claims and justification concerning the Ukrainian issue. The study is qualitative in nature as it is based on Van Dijk's (2000) ideological square. Two of Putin's speeches have been selected as samples of the current study. After analysing the selected data, it is assured that Putin used different cognitive strategies via which he intended to manipulate and convince his audience of the logicity of his claims and justification. The criteria that he violated and the cognitive devices which he depended on proved him to be illogical and his decisions were unreasonable.

Keywords: Putin's Claims, Justifications, Ukraine war .

## 1. Introduction

Van Dijk (2006) favoured a rather narrow view of politics and political speech, claiming that the study should concentrate on discourse that is created by the key participants in the polity. Conceptions of politics and political discourse should extend beyond the polity into the domain of the "life-world". One major premise behind this point of view is that what constitutes politics must be defined contextually and is ultimately a matter of interpretation (Aron, 2015).

The Ukrainian crisis, as a political issue, is escalated in 2014, resulting in a military war between Ukraine and Russia in eastern Ukraine, as well as, the annexation of several Ukrainian regions. It is considered that this conflict is both the effect and the expansion of NATO and Russia's antagonistic and hostile policies towards Ukraine's disputed boundaries (Aron, 2015).

The most recent debate on what precipitated Putin's entry into independent Ukraine is presented by McFaul, Mearsheimer, and Sestanovich



(2014). According to Mearsheimer, Russia is moving forcefully to oppose NATO expansion. Because Ukraine functions as a buffer state, a move to the West would put NATO directly on Russia's doorstep, threatening its safety (Mearsheimer, 2014). According to McFaul, Mearsheimer, and Sestanovich, Putin's activities are motivated by a desire for regime stability and internal peace. Thus, the Russian invasion of Ukrainian territories is a direct outcome of Russia's own difficulties, notably its shrinking economy (Mearsheimer, McFaul, & Sestanovich, 2014, p. 1-3).

On February 24, 2022, Putin launched attacks against Ukraine which reflected the birth of a new era in modern world politics. Putin lays forth a broad range of arguments, justifications, and historical reasons in order to encourage Russian military soldiers, describe his strategic vision, persuade the world community of the legality of his war, and weaken the confidence of the Ukrainian population and armed forces. Thus, the current study investigates Putin's claims and justifications for his war against Ukraine.

### 1.1. Problem Statement

Politicians frequently conceal their intentions. That is one of the fundamental elements of political speech and may be seen in the language by different cognitive strategies to influence the addressed community. Most studies regarded manipulation as an assortment of language techniques unique to political discourse (Allison, 2014). This is because, in today's political arena, a language, or rather a word, is the primary weapon for exercising authority; it is the tool for establishing social authority (Allison, 2014).

Putin masked his war games by utilising the strategies of manipulation to justify his war on Ukraine and to maintain his image of a "lawful actor". To support his decisions, Putin experimented with the legal framework for military operations as well as the notion of self-determination (Allison, 2014, p. 4). He makes many claims employing ambiguous legal terminology, and his disdain for international law filled the world at large with doubt and fear (Allison, 2014). Putin is believed to present his claims and justifications by using different cognitive strategies via which he aims to influence the minds of the addressed community. The strategies he depends on makes his



language somehow ambiguous and have different interpretations, messages and purposes that cannot be figured out by common people who lack such cognitive knowledge.

This study intended to explain Putin's claims and to identify Putin's cognitive strategies that he employed in his speeches on the Ukraine crisis. It is also going to investigate and identify the direct and indirect ideologies which are used by Putin in his speeches and by which he tried to make his claims persuasive and logical.

### 1.2. Research Objectives

The present study aims at:

1. Finding out the ideologies utilised by Putin in his speeches on the Ukraine Crisis and
2. Identifying the cognitive features and the functions of language that are found in Putin's speeches.

### 1.3. Research Questions

The current study intended to answer the following questions:

1. What are the ideologies used by Putin in his speeches on the Ukraine Crisis?
2. What are the cognitive features of Putin's language concerning the war in Ukraine?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive linguistics is a recent field that indicates a scientific theory to linguistics which began in the 1970s and has grown in popularity since the 1980s. It is "a method of studying languages based on the notion that our linguistic talents are deeply embedded in our general cognitive powers" (Dabrowska & Divjak, 2015).

Multiple studies and ideas, such as cognitive psychology, ethnography, and gestalt psychology, have had a significant impact on cognitive linguistics (Evans & Melanie, 2006). Language, cognition, and communication are all topics of interest in cognitive linguistics. Evans (2007) argued that cognitive linguistics is significant since it concentrates on the relationship between mind, language and socio-physical experience.



Cognitive linguistics concentrated on the interpretation of language by taking into account its relationship to the mind. That is to say, how language is constructed in the human brain, the ideologies which are expressed through this language and the perception of these ideologies by other humans' cognition (Alghezzy & Hussein, 2021).

Cognitive Linguistics views language to be a component of human cognition because language and cognition are mutually constitutive. Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2007) believed that cognitive linguistics investigates language in its cognitive functionality, with cognitive defined as "the critical role of intermediary informational structures in our experiences with the environment" (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2007, p. 5). Cognitive Linguistics is referred to as an "enterprise" or a "movement" since it lacks a defined philosophy. The cognitive linguistic approach to language is guided by three fundamental hypotheses. First, it rejects the idea that the mind has an autonomous language capacity. Second, grammar is interpreted in terms of conceptualization, according to Cognitive Linguistics. Third, linguistic knowledge arises through language usage (Croft & Cruse, 2004, p.1).

Wen and Taylor (2021) defined the primary goals of Cognitive Linguistics as follows: "First, investigate and comprehend how cognitive mechanisms such as categorization, metonymy, metaphor, memory, imagery, and attention are used during language activity. Second, to enhance psychologically viable language models that encompass linguistic characteristics such as figurative language and idioms" (p. 1).

Cognitive Commitment is an important Cognitive Linguistics feature. It is characterised as "a dedication to making somebody's explanation of human language conform with what is commonly understood about the mind and brain, from other fields in addition to our own [i.e., linguistics]," (Lakoff, 1990, p. 40). Cognitive Linguistics is distinguished by two essential principles; the generalisation principle and the cognitive principle, that are recognised as cognitive grammar and cognitive semantics (Gharab & Atia, 2020). The main scholars that are considered as the founders of cognitive linguistics are; George Lakoff, Ron Langacker, Len Talmy, and W. Langacker (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003).





Categorization is critical in Cognitive Linguistics. "Concepts" refer to the cognitive or mental characteristics of categories. According to Rosch (1999), "concepts and categories do not reflect the word in the mind; they are a participating element of the mind-world as a whole" (p. 72). Cognitive Linguistics regards ideas as a significant topic since they allow a person to comprehend the information provided by the environment around him. According to Rosch (1999), "concepts constitute the natural connection between mind and world" (p. 61).

Van Dijk (2006) investigated the connection between discourse and language comprehension. He explored how people interpret information in media conversations. His research is turned into a cognitive model that demonstrated how meaning is generated in society (Van Dijk, 2000). Cognitive models are mental representations, ideas, and attitudes held by members of a social group. Racist organisations, for example, have shared concepts and views that govern their structure. Ideologies are generated and reproduced in a speech by continual processing of social cognition until they turn into a system of common aspects and ideas on which social groupings identify themselves and others. These ideologies exert power on the brains of social groupings that hold similar ideas and attitudes (Van Dijk, 2000).

## 2.2. Putin's War on Ukraine

On February 24, 2022, Putin started a military operation against Ukraine. His story depicted the birth of a new era in modern international politics. Putin sets forth a large range of arguments, justifications, and historical parallels to encourage Russian military soldiers, showcase his strategic vision, persuade the international community of the legality of his war, and lower Ukrainian public and military morale. For the past 30 years, Putin claims, there have been repeated attempts to strike a settlement with the key NATO members on the basics of equal and indivisible safety in Europe. Putin laid up the historical path which has evolved into this war for both the international community and Russian citizens. Putin wanted his people to look back in time to see how Russia has been treated unfairly. Putin regarded Russia's Slavic neighbour as a Trojan horse for moving the Western area of influence nearer to Moscow (Hassan, 2022).



Putin, according to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, is not concerned with transmitting the entire truth; rather, he selects a lead that best fit his narrative to criticise both the Ukrainian political leadership and the Ukrainian army. 'The problem is that a hostile anti-Russian feeling is growing in Russia's neighbouring territories, which, as I've mentioned before, are our historical land'. Putin portrayed a picture of a victimised Russia battling America's aggressions quietly and patiently. His rhetoric attempted to construct a situation in which Russia is the wounded victim, after which he exposed the West's underlying imperial goals. When discussing the United States, he used harsh and angry analogies and metaphors such as "euphoria" and "kingdom of lies" (Hassan, 2022).

To substantiate that assertion, the US Secretary of State publicly showed a vial of white powder for all to see, claiming that it is a chemical warfare agent created in Iraq. All of this is subsequently proven to be a scam and a fraud, and Iraq held no chemical weapons. It is ridiculous and upsetting, but it is true. 'We witnessed lies being spoken at the highest echelons of government and from the United Nations rostrum'. However, for Putin, the lies and deceptions did not end there but have spread across his country. Putin might well have adopted circular fallacies in justifying his war against Ukraine by drawing parallels to US military participation in the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

As Putin recalled these episodes to show how the US fought illegal wars without the UN Security Council's sanction, one cannot help but wonder how Russia's invasion differs from earlier predecessors (Hassan, 2022). Nevertheless, Putin drew his sweeping conclusion: Generally, it appeared that nearly everywhere, in many locations of the globe where the United States brought its rules and order, this generated awful, non-healing scars and the scourge of worldwide extremism and terrorism. Putin claims, perhaps ironically, that the operation is designed to keep the region safe from the disasters that other nations, most notably Syria, have experienced. He also addressed the Russian people, who will be directly harmed by the economic sanctions. He described the Russian people as "good" and "adaptable," and encouraged them to defend the homeland from NATO's



eastward incursion into Russian territory. “ Putin contended that he lost confidence for just a short period, but it is enough to alter the global balance of forces, as he informed his citizens. He implored the population to remember their predecessors' efforts in defending their nation against the Nazis, in addition to the nation's historic magnificence and the lessons to be learnt from earlier disasters. ‘The attempt to appease the invaders before the Great Wars of Independence showed to be a costly miscalculation for our country,’ he warned. In the early months after the war, we lost significant strategic terrain as well as millions of lives. We will not repeat the same error. We do not have the power to do so (Hassan, 2022).

In a speech to the international community, Putin asserted that this is a "just" and "pre-emptive" war. Now that Putin proceeded to say he had no other choice but to go to war to settle the crisis in the neighbouring territories that are considered as a direct threat for Russia. It is a matter of life and death for our country, a matter of our nation's historical destiny. This is not hyperbole; it is truth. It is not only a genuine threat to our interests but also the fundamental survival and sovereignty of our state. It is the red line, which many of us have debated several times, they have reviewed it. Putin's speech is well-written. On his appearance, he seemed to be defending military action. A deeper look revealed a bigger vision for a new world, one in which Russia, at least in Putin's eyes, reclaimed its natural position as a global force and a nation to be reckoned with, resurrecting the Soviet era's grandeur (Hassan, 2022).

### 1.3. Van Dijk's (2000) Ideological Square

Van Dijk's (2000) ideological square postulated four characteristics found in ideologies that allow powerful organisations to articulate complex ideological viewpoints. They are as follows: "a) Emphasise positive aspects of Us; b) Emphasise negative aspects of Them; c) De-emphasise negative aspects of Us; D) De-emphasise positive aspects of Them" (Van Dijk, 2000, p.44). These strategies could be adopted by language users to express different ideologies and various levels of meanings (Alhousseini, 2020).

Thus, the ideological structure of speech is reflected in the positive "Self" representation and the negative "Other" representation. The "We"





group is shown positively, while the "They" group is portrayed negatively. The vocabulary choices and other language elements reflect this "in-group" vs. "out-group" categorization. This media polarisation of "Self" vs. "Other" is founded on the following discursive practises (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 144):

Table 1.

*Discursive Strategies: From Van Dijk (1995)*

In-group	Out-group
Emphasis	De-emphasis
Assertion	Denial
Hyperbole	Understatement
Topicalization	De-topicalization
Sentential (micro)	Textual (macro)
High prominent position	Low non-prominent position
Headline, summarizing	Marginalization
Detailed description	Vague, overall description
Attribution to personality	Attribution to context

### 3. Methodology

The research methodology used in the current study is qualitative in nature. The aim of qualitative research analysis is to investigate things within their natural setting and it has nothing to do with summing up conclusions based on certain frequencies and percentages (Al-Mjdawi & Jabi, 2020). Similarly, Brymann (2012) defined qualitative methods as those which give the investigator the opportunity to see the situation through the person's point of view. As a result, the analytical technique could yield strong qualitative results, bridging the gap in social research. In other terms, qualitative research tended to focus on smaller sample sizes in which the researcher could function as an instrument and capture the material in a natural setting to find its significance using a range of qualitative methodologies such as explanation, interpretation, and investigation (Suter, 2011).

Curtis, Gesler, Smith and Washburn (2000, p. 1002) suggested that sample selection in qualitative research "has to be addressed carefully and is



essential to our comprehension of the validity of qualitative research". Evidently, there is occasionally an obvious need to specify a representative sample prior to, or before beginning, a qualitative inquiry approach in order to construct the resources for the study. In qualitative research analysis, the sample selection is based on the criteria of saturation and sufficiency. That is to say, the selected samples should be sufficient to the analysis and providing more samples would provide no additional information but it would lead to some redundancy and repetition (Nakhilawi, 2016).

As a result, the researcher in the current study argues that saturation is achieved by selecting 2 speeches by Putin from an online website. They varied in length and content in order to address the research questions directly associated with Putin's claims on the war in Ukraine. The study would tackle this problem from the cognitive point of view according to Van Dijk's (2000) ideological square.

#### 4. Data Analysis

##### 4.1. Analysis of Speech (1)

In this speech, Putin used different strategies in his attempt to positively present himself, the Russian people and the people of neighbouring territories. He also employed some other strategies to negatively present NATO and its allies and the Kyiv regime.

##### Extract 1

*"We have been patiently trying to come to an agreement with the leading NATO...the openness of the new, modern Russia, its readiness to work with the United States and other Western partners...we made yet another attempt to reach an agreement with the United States and its allies....we have been doing everything possible to settle the situation by peaceful political means...having justice and truth on our side is what makes us truly strong...It is not our plan to occupy the Ukrainian territory...We have been treating all new post-Soviet states with respect...we are acting to defend ourselves from the threats created for us..."*

In this extract, Putin is seen to emphasise the good characteristics of the Us and de-emphasise the bad characteristics of the Us. To achieve such an aim, Putin used different strategies including assertion, hyperbole,



sentential and attribution to personality. He asserted that Russia made many attempts to come to a deal of peace with NATO and its allies. Asserting such efforts could be understood that Putin is de-emphasising the negative aspects of Russia in seeking war and destruction. Hyperbole strategy, on the other hand, is used by Putin when he exaggerated the efforts of having a peaceful agreement and when he said “*having justice and truth on our side*”. He exaggerated when he said that Russia had absolute justice and truth on its side. Putin also employed a sentential strategy in his emphasis on defending Russia from threats, this is obvious when he said “*we are acting to defend ourselves*”. The sentential strategy is used to summarise and topicalise Russia’s aims in starting this war. Attribution personality, in the same vein, is adopted by Putin in presenting himself as the high authority on the behalf of the Russians and Ukrainians.

Putin is found to use positive representation strategies in his attempt to manipulate his use of language. Manipulating his language could be interpreted that Putin aimed at persuading the addressed community that he spent all his effort and made every chance to have an agreement with NATO and its allies in which he would guarantee the safety of Russia and the Russian people. He tried to convince the addressed people that wanted through that agreement to avoid this war and prevent this destruction and spare the lives of those innocent soldiers and citizens of both Russia and Ukraine.

Extract 2

“*they immediately tried to put the final squeeze on us, finish us off, and utterly destroy us...the fundamental threats which irresponsible Western politicians created for Russia...The bombing of peaceful cities and vital infrastructure went on for several weeks...the invasion of Iraq without any legal grounds...they have deceived us, or, to put it simply, they have played us...empire of lies...has been created inside the United States in recent years...West was actively supporting separatism and gangs of mercenaries in southern Russia...Those who aspire to global dominance have publicly designated Russia as their enemy...the possible bloodshed will lie fully and wholly with the ruling Ukrainian regime...*”



The second part of the cognitive analysis concentrated on emphasising the negative characteristics of Them and de-emphasising the positive characteristics of Them. Putin adopted several strategies such as denial, understatement, textual and attribution to context. Putin used a denial strategy to describe NATO's refusal of peace and their insistence on threatening Russia. He also used the same device to describe their insincerity and lies when he said "*they have deceived us*", "*they have played us*" and "*empire of lies*". By saying that, Putin tried to prove to his audience that they could not trust NATO and stay idle, they had to act immediately if they wanted to protect their country.

Understatement strategy also existed in this speech. Putin depended on this strategy in exhibiting the illegal invasions of the US to several countries and killing innocent people and bombing innocent cities as is found "*The bombing of peaceful cities*". He also followed the textual device in presenting the negative intention of the Western countries and their continuous threat to invade Russia. The last strategy that is followed by Putin is attribution to context. He did that by reminding his audience of what NATO and the US did in many countries and tried to link these events to what could happen to Russia if they did not act and defend their country and this is expressed in this quotation "*West was actively supporting separatism and gangs of mercenaries in southern Russia*".

Kyiv's regime, as an ally to the US, is presented negatively. Putin considered this regime the one who is responsible for any bloodshed and destruction. According to Putin, the Kyiv regime brought NATO close to Russia's borders and cooperated with them to occupy Russia. Putin, additionally, claimed that the Kyiv regime treated Ukrainian people with humiliation and this should be prevented, this is noticed in the example "*this operation is to protect people who have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kyiv regime*".

Depending on the strategies of negative representation, Putin mentioned several pieces of evidence which would prove that NATO and its allies are guilty. Through these strategies, he intended to convince the addressed people that the Western counties did not have goodwill towards



Russia. He tried to persuade them that all the West wanted is to come close to Russia's borders which are considered a real threat to Russia. Putin also represented the Kyiv regime as a hand for NATO to march towards Russia. By describing the Kyiv regime in such a way, Putin wanted to justify his war to the Ukrainian people and persuade them of his decision to start this war.

#### 4.2. Analysis of Speech (2)

Putin adopted some of these strategies when describing the positive characteristics of the in-group and the negative characteristics of the out-group.

##### Extract 1

*I want to stress the following. We know that the majority of people living in the territories liberated from the neo-Nazis...I would like to emphasize that we will do everything necessary to create safe conditions for these referendums so that people can express their will”.*

The emphasis strategy is clearly expressed in this extract. Putin used this strategy in his attempt to concentrate on Russia's intention, by all means, to liberate the Ukrainian territories. His focus on such an issue could clarify his intention that he had nothing in mind behind such a war other than rescuing those people from the clutches of the enemy.

##### Extract 2

*“In this connection, the decision to start a pre-emptive military operation was necessary and the only option. The main goal of this operation, which is to liberate the whole of Donbass, remains unaltered”.*

The assertion strategy is proved to exist in the above extract. Putin continued to assert the aim of the military operation in Ukraine. He kept asserting that it is only to liberate the concerned territories. That is to say, Putin had no other intentions in invading Ukraine but to help those people who asked for Russia's help and to keep NATO's threat out of Russia's borders.

##### Extract 3

*“Today I am addressing you ...I have already issued instructions for the Government...what I would like to make public for the first time today...I have already signed Executive Order on partial mobilization”.*





Putin, furthermore, depended on attribution to personality strategy. In this extract, he used this strategy to present himself as the main person who had to take decisions on the behalf of his people. He thought that he took the right decisions for which he needed his people's support. He wanted to persuade his people that he took the decision of invading Ukraine because he realised the extent of the threats and knew what exactly to do to protect them.

Extract 4

*“ ...Western elites, who are doing their utmost to preserve their domination and with this aim in view are trying to block and suppress any sovereign and independent development centers in order to continue to aggressively force their will and pseudo-values on other countries and nations”.*

In this extract, Putin tried to negatively describe the out-group members including the West and the Kyiv regime. He did so by using the textual strategy. This strategy is could be seen in Putin's description of all that the Western countries worked on to dominate and suppress other countries. He focused on mentioning the West's continuous intervention in the internal affairs of other countries including Ukraine. His focus on such issues is regarded as a persuasive and manipulative strategy via which Putin would gain his people's support.

Extract 5

*“The goal of that part of the West is to weaken, divide and ultimately destroy our country. They are saying openly now that in 1991 they managed to split up the Soviet Union and now is the time to do the same to Russia, which must be divided into numerous regions that would be at deadly feud with each other”.*

In this extract, Putin adopted the denial strategy. He denied the West's intentions in seeking agreements for peaceful solutions. He said all that the West wanted is to invade Russia, divide it into regions and humiliate the Russian people. Putin's denial of such matters is a strategy that would make his audience regard his justifications as acceptable.

Extract 6

*“They turned the Ukrainian people into cannon fodder and pushed them into a war with Russia, which they unleashed back in 2014. They used the army*



*against civilians and organized a genocide, blockade and terror against those who refused to recognize the government that was created in Ukraine as the result of a state coup”.*

The attribution to context strategy is expressed in this extract. Putin mentioned some previous events that happened years ago and which he used as evidence of the crimes of the West. Putin presented such issues in order to manipulate the addressed community and gain their agreement with his decisions.

## 5. Conclusion

After analysing the selected data, it is assured that Putin's speeches contained different ideologies and cognitive strategies such as; assertion, hyperbole, sentential attribution to personality, denial, understatement, textual and attribution to context. Putin is found to use these strategies in his attempt to manipulate his use of language. Manipulating his language could be interpreted that Putin aimed at persuading the addressed community of the logicity of his claims. He depended on these strategies to positively represent himself and negatively describe the West and the Kyiv regime. Presenting himself in such a way is to prove himself as a protector of the Russian and Ukrainian people, while describing the West and the Kyiv in a negative way is to present them as the true enemies of Russia and Ukraine. He attempted to convince the addressed community that they were the direct threat to the stability and safety of Russia and he announced this war just to protect his country from such a threat. The evidence and justifications that Putin presented were not sufficient and cannot be regarded as true reasons to start such a war. This means that Putin is illogical and his claims were not based on rational reasons and justifications.

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