

Operation Epic Fury vs. True Promise 4: A Political Economy Analysis of Competing Media Discourse in the US-Israel-Iran War

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Abstract

Media discourses in the US-Israel-Iran war serve not only as information dissemination but also as strategic tools of political economy. Thus, this study investigates the competing media discourses surrounding the 2026 US-Israel-Iran war, through the combined framework of CDA and the political economy of communication (PEC). Using a comparative corpus-based approach, the paper analyzes news reports and opinion articles published by Tehran Times and CNN between 28 February and 8 April 2026. The corpus consists of 301 articles from Tehran Times with 192205 tokens and 143 articles from CNN with 221754 tokens. The findings reveal that CNN primarily framed the conflict through security-centered and strategic narratives aligned with Western geopolitical interests, while Tehran Times constructed counter-hegemonic discourses emphasizing resistance, sovereignty, and anti-imperialist ideology. Through CDA model, the study demonstrates how linguistic choices and discursive practices reproduced broader social structures and power relations. Simultaneously, the PEC framework highlights the influence of ownership, ideology, and geopolitical alliances in shaping war reporting. However, to address the limitations of this study, future research can include multilingual, multimodal, and audience-centered analyses. Ultimately, the study argues that contemporary media discourse functions as a site of ideological struggle where global powers compete to define legitimacy, morality, and political reality in international conflicts.

Keywords

Critical discourse analysis, Media discourse, Operation epic fury, Political economy, True promise 4, US-Israel-Iran war

Introduction

The relationship between media, war, and political power has long been a central concern in political economy and communication studies. Scholars argue that media institutions do not simply report conflicts but actively construct meanings through framing, selection, and emphasis, often reflecting dominant political and economic interests (DiMaggio, 2009; Klaehn, 2010). In the context of Middle Eastern conflicts, media discourse frequently becomes a site of ideological struggle where competing narratives attempt to legitimize actions, assign blame, and influence public opinion (Melki, 2014; Amer, 2017). As a result, war reporting is not neutral but shaped by structural factors such as ownership, state alliances, and geopolitical interests, which together form the basis of a political economy approach to media analysis.

Against this backdrop, the 2026 military conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran marked a significant escalation in prolonged regional tensions. On February 28, 2026, coordinated American and

Israeli strikes, code-named “Operation Epic Fury”, targeted senior Iranian officials in Tehran, resulting in the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In response, Iran launched “Operation True Promise 4”, a series of missile and drone attacks against Israeli and American military positions in the Gulf region. While the active hostilities ceased by early April, and a ceasefire was declared on 8 April, 2026, the media coverage of these events did not simply report facts. Instead, news organizations across the world constructed competing versions of reality, each framing their own side's actions as justified and the opponent's as aggressive.

Within this framework, framing theory helps explain how different actors construct specific interpretations of the same events. Media outlets often highlight certain aspects of a conflict while ignoring others, thereby guiding audiences toward particular understandings (Azpiroz Manero, 2013). For example, studies have shown that Western media frequently align with state perspectives, portraying allies in more favourable terms while framing adversaries as threats (Yaghoobi, 2009; Tahboun, 2024). Similarly, discourse surrounding Israel-Iran tensions has been shaped by narratives of security, resistance, and legitimacy, which vary significantly across media systems and political contexts (Alim et al., 2024). These differences demonstrate how media discourse operates as a strategic tool in international conflicts, often reinforcing broader political and economic agendas.

Building on these insights, the present study examines the competing media narratives surrounding “Operation Epic Fury” and “True Promise 4” within the broader US-Israel-Iran war context. By focusing on how these operations are represented across different media platforms, this research aims to uncover the underlying political and economic forces that shape discourse. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates about propaganda, media bias, and the role of communication in modern warfare (Phillips, 2023; Iqbal & Farukh, 2025). Ultimately, this study seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how media discourse not only reflects conflict but also actively participates in its construction and continuation.

The study of Shaikh (2025) compares Al Jazeera and CNN coverage of the Israel-Hamas war (2023-2025), finding that Al Jazeera emphasizes civilian casualties and historical context while CNN foregrounds Hamas as a security threat. Extending this line of inquiry, Hashim (2026) examines Fox News reports on the 2026 US-Israel-Iran war, demonstrating through Dijk's (1998) ideological square that headlines, modality, and contrastive language systematically portray Iran negatively and US-Israel positively. Similarly, Ismail et al. (2026) analyze 80-100 international headlines, revealing that Western media frame Iran as aggressor, Middle Eastern media emphasize Iranian resistance, and Asian media adopt neutral diplomatic tones.

However, these discourse-focused studies remain disconnected from the material consequences of the conflict they analyze. No et al. (2026) document the economic ramifications, \$110+/barrel oil prices and Strait of Hormuz disruption, while Shah et al. (2026) quantify \$492 billion–\$3.18 trillion global losses and GCC equity beta shifts (0.51→1.42), yet neither integrates linguistic analysis. Kumari et al. (2026) model gas crisis transmission mechanisms, and Magray et al. (2026) applies realism and deterrence theory to escalation dynamics, but none examine how competing media discourses around “Operation Epic Fury” versus “True Promise 4” actively shape, rather than merely reflect, these geopolitical and economic outcomes, leaving the present study's integrative political economy approach critically warranted.

Therefore, the review of these existing literatures reveals a notable gap in scholarship on the US-Israel-Iran war, particularly regarding how competing narratives around Operation Epic Fury and True Promise 4 are constructed and circulated across different media systems. While prior studies have explored media framing in geopolitical conflicts, they seldom adopt a political economy lens to comparatively interrogate the structural forces shaping discourse in American, Israeli, and Iranian contexts.

Against this backdrop, the present study addresses this omission by examining how these media institutions produce and legitimize divergent representations of the same conflict. In doing so, it moves beyond descriptive comparison to critically unpack the interplay of ownership, state interests, and geopolitical alignments in shaping media narratives, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of how

public perception is mediated within a contested socio-political landscape (Zurriyati Rahman & Alaqad, 2023).

The present study adopts the political economy of communication (PEC) as a central theoretical lens to understand how media discourse surrounding “Operation Epic Fury” and “True Promise 4” is shaped within broader structures of power. PEC examines the dynamic relationships involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of media within a wider social, political, and economic context (Mosco, 2009; Hardy, 2014; Wasko, 2005). Rather than treating media as an isolated institution, this perspective positions it as deeply embedded in ongoing geopolitical processes, where war reporting becomes closely linked to state interests, corporate ownership, and global power relations. In this sense, media narratives about the US-Israel-Iran war are not neutral reflections of events but are influenced by institutional priorities and ideological alignments that shape how reality is presented to audiences.

A key strength of PEC lies in its four foundational dimensions: history and social change, social totality, moral philosophy, and praxis. First, the principle of history and social change highlights that media systems evolve alongside political conflicts, technological developments, and economic transformations (Mosco, 2009). Applied to this study, contemporary war coverage must be understood within the longer history of Western-Middle Eastern relations and shifting global power structures. Second, the concept of social totality emphasizes that media operates within an interconnected system where political, economic, and cultural forces interact (Hardy, 2014). This means that coverage of military operations is shaped not only by journalistic practices but also by alliances, foreign policy agendas, and capitalist market pressures. Third, the moral philosophy dimension raises critical questions about the ethical role of media, particularly in times of war, where issues of bias, representation, and public interest become highly significant (Wasko, 2005). It suggests that media should ideally promote democratic communication, yet in practice, ownership concentration and advertising dependence often limit diversity and reinforce dominant viewpoints (McChesney, 2008; Bagdikian, 2004). Finally, praxis calls for active engagement, encouraging researchers to critically examine and challenge unequal media structures in order to promote a more balanced and inclusive communication environment (Mosco, 2009).

Furthermore, PEC also draws attention to the influence of ownership, commercialization, and state policy in shaping media content. Large media corporations, driven by profit and political connections, may prioritize narratives that align with dominant national or economic interests (Croteau & Hoynes, 2005; Bettig & Hall, 2012). In conflict situations, this often results in selective reporting, where certain perspectives are amplified while others are marginalized. As McChesney (2004, 2008) and Smythe (1977) argue, such structural conditions can weaken the democratic role of media by limiting critical debate and reinforcing hegemonic ideologies. Therefore, in the context of the US-Israel-Iran war, PEC helps explain why competing media outlets produce contrasting representations of the same events, reflecting deeper power struggles rather than purely journalistic differences.

To complement this structural analysis, the study integrates Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough’s (2013) three-dimensional model, to examine how these power relations are enacted through language. Fairclough (1995) conceptualizes discourse analysis at three interrelated levels: the textual level, which focuses on linguistic features such as vocabulary, tone, and framing; the discursive practice level, which examines how media texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted; and the social practice level, which situates discourse within wider socio-political and ideological contexts. This model enables a detailed exploration of how media narratives construct meaning, legitimize certain actions, and delegitimize others during wartime (Dahlgren, 2013; Kibarabara, 2023). For example, the choice of terms such as “defense”, “retaliation”, or “aggression” can significantly shape audience perception and align with broader political interests.

By combining PEC and CDA, this study develops a multi-layered analytical framework that connects macro-level structures with micro-level discourse. While PEC explains the institutional and economic forces behind media production, CDA reveals how these forces are translated into specific

linguistic and discursive strategies. This integrated approach is particularly effective for analyzing competing media discourses, as it uncovers both the structural inequalities and the communicative practices that influence public understanding of the US-Israel-Iran conflict. Consequently, the framework provides a deeper and more critical insight into how media narratives surrounding “Operation Epic Fury” and “True Promise 4” are constructed, contested, and sustained in the global information environment.

Method

Design of the Study

This study employs a comparative corpus-based approach to examine the competing media discourses surrounding “Operation Epic Fury” and “True Promise 4” in the context of the US-Israel-Iran war. Corpus-based discourse analysis is considered an effective method for identifying linguistic patterns, ideological tendencies, and framing strategies within large collections of texts (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). By integrating corpus linguistics with critical discourse analysis, the study explores how language is strategically used by different media institutions to construct political meanings and influence public perception during wartime.

Data collection

Data were collected from two international media outlets: Tehran Times and CNN. These outlets were selected because they represent contrasting geopolitical and ideological perspectives on the conflict. Tehran Times, an Iranian English-language newspaper, reflects narratives closely aligned with Iranian political interests, whereas CNN, a major American news network, represents dominant Western and US-oriented perspectives (Shaikh, 2025). Comparing these two outlets allows the study to investigate how media discourse is shaped by differing political, economic, and ideological environments.

The corpora consist of news reports and op-ed articles published between 28 February 2026, the beginning of the war, and 8 April 2026, the official ceasefire declaration, although political tensions continued beyond this period. The articles were retrieved from the official websites of the respective media outlets through the *Wayback Machine* tool. After collection, the textual data were cleaned using the *justText demo* tool, which removed irrelevant website elements such as advertisements, hyperlinks, and navigation menus, ensuring that only the main textual content remained for analysis. The final dataset contains 301 articles from Tehran Times with 192205 tokens and 143 articles from CNN with 221754 tokens.

Data analysis

For data analysis, the study uses AntConc software, specifically the Word List and Concordance tools. The Word List tool was first applied to identify the most frequently occurring lexical items in each corpus. In corpus linguistics, frequency analysis refers to measuring how often words or linguistic features appear within a text collection, helping researchers identify dominant themes and discursive priorities (Biber et al., 1998). In this study, the top 10 most frequent content words were selected after excluding function words such as articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. From these frequent lexical items, the researcher selected three central lemmas, “Iran”, “war”, and “Israel”, for detailed concordance analysis because these terms appeared consistently and prominently across both media outlets, reflecting the main focus of the conflict discourse.

Following the frequency analysis, the Concordance tool was employed to examine how these selected lemmas were used in context. Concordance analysis displays a keyword together with its surrounding co-text, allowing researchers to investigate patterns of meaning, collocation, and ideological framing (Sinclair, 1991). Through this process, the study analyzes how Tehran Times and CNN linguistically

construct narratives related to legitimacy, aggression, resistance, and national identity. By combining quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative contextual interpretation, the methodology provides a systematic framework for understanding how competing media outlets shape public understanding of the US-Israel-Iran war.

Findings & Discussion

The findings reveal how linguistic choices, media production processes, and wider social structures interacted simultaneously in constructing public understanding of the US-Israel-Iran war.

Frequency Analysis

Frequency analysis of the Tehran Times and CNN corpora reveals significant differences and similarities in the way the US-Israel-Iran war was represented across the two media outlets.

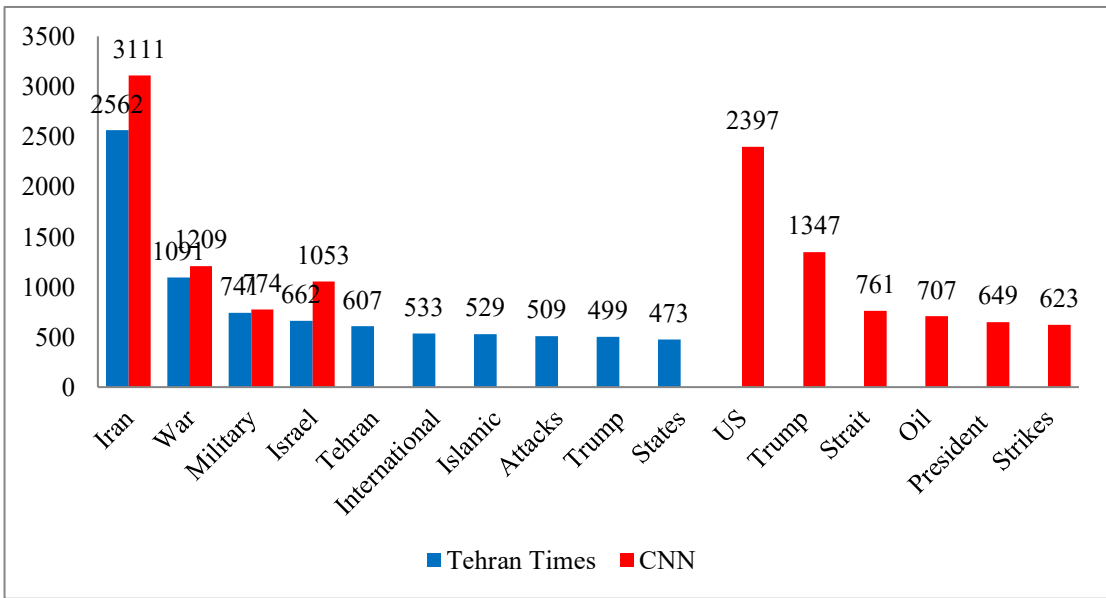


Figure 1. Top 10 most frequent lexicon

At the textual level, the most frequent words in both corpora: “Iran”, “war”, “military”, and “Israel”, show that the conflict was framed primarily through militarized and state-centered discourse. However, the frequency differences between the two outlets reveal distinct ideological orientations shaped by their institutional and political environments. In *CNN*, the term “Iran” appeared 3,111 times, while “US” occurred 2,397 times and “Trump” 1,347 times. The repeated emphasis on American state actors and leadership reflects how the outlet positioned the conflict within a US-centered geopolitical narrative. Through the lens of PEC, this lexical focus illustrates the influence of ownership structures, national political interests, and elite-driven news production on media discourse (Mosco, 2009; Hardy, 2014). At the same time, CDA explains how these repeated lexical choices normalized the idea of American involvement as central and legitimate within the conflict narrative.

In contrast, *Tehran Times* demonstrated a different textual pattern. Alongside “Iran” (2,562) and “war” (1,091), the corpus prominently featured terms such as “Tehran” (607), “Islamic” (529), “international” (533), and “attacks” (509). Through CDA, these lexical choices indicate a discourse focused on sovereignty, ideological identity, and resistance against foreign aggression. Simultaneously, PEC helps

explain why these themes emerged so strongly. As an Iranian media institution operating within a state-oriented communication structure, *Tehran Times* reflects broader political and ideological priorities connected to national identity and anti-Western resistance. Therefore, discourse production cannot be separated from the social totality in which media institutions operate, where political, cultural, and economic forces are deeply interconnected (Hardy, 2014). Consequently, Iranian English-language media frequently employ religious and anti-hegemonic language to challenge dominant Western narratives and reinforce alternative geopolitical perspectives.

The frequency of “Israel” also reveals important ideological contrasts between the two outlets. *CNN* mentioned “Israel” 1,053 times, significantly higher than the 662 occurrences in *Tehran Times*. Concordance analysis showed that *CNN* often associated “Israel” with terms such as “security”, “retaliation”, and “defense”, constructing Israeli military actions as legitimate responses to threats. Conversely, *Tehran Times* linked “Israel” with “attacks”, “occupation”, and “aggression”, framing Israel as a destabilizing force in the region. Through Fairclough’s textual analysis, these collocational patterns demonstrate how language constructs moral divisions between victimhood and aggression. From a PEC perspective, these representations reflect broader geopolitical alliances and ideological interests embedded within each media institution. The findings, thus, argue that conflict reporting often reproduces political ideologies by morally legitimizing one side while delegitimizing the other.

Discursively, the findings further demonstrate how media production and circulation processes were shaped by institutional structures and political-economic conditions. *CNN*, as a large corporate media organization with global influence, relied heavily on elite-centered discourse that prioritized official statements, military strategies, and political leadership. The prominence of words such as “President”, “Trump”, and “strikes” illustrates how the war was narrated through institutional authority and governmental decision-making. Fairclough’s concept of discursive practice explains how these narratives were produced and circulated through professional journalistic routines that privilege elite voices. Simultaneously, PEC reveals how these practices are connected to ownership concentration, commercialization, and state interests within capitalist media systems (McChesney, 2008). In this sense, *CNN* did not simply report the conflict but reproduced dominant geopolitical perspectives aligned with American political structures.

On the other hand, *Tehran Times* reflected a different mode of discursive production shaped by Iranian political and ideological contexts. The repeated emphasis on terms such as “Islamic”, “international”, and “attacks” suggests an effort to construct a counter-hegemonic narrative that challenged Western representations of the conflict. Through CDA, this discourse can be understood as an attempt to shape audience interpretation by foregrounding resistance and national sovereignty. At the same time, PEC highlights the historical and institutional conditions influencing such discourse. The Iranian media system operates within a broader socio-political framework where media institutions often function as instruments of national ideology and strategic communication. Therefore, the discursive practices of *Tehran Times* cannot be separated from the historical tensions between Iran and Western powers, particularly the United States and Israel.

At the level of social practice, the findings reveal how both media outlets contributed to broader social processes, ideological struggles, and transformations in global communication. The repeated use of militarized vocabulary such as “war”, “military”, “attacks”, and “strikes” normalized conflict as a central framework for understanding international relations. Through CDA, this normalization reflects the ideological power of discourse, where repeated linguistic patterns shape public perception and social consciousness over time (Fairclough, 2013). Simultaneously, PEC explains how these militarized narratives are connected to broader structures of political power, economic interests, and global capitalism. War discourse not only informs audiences but also supports systems of political legitimacy, military expansion, and geopolitical influence.

These findings also demonstrate the PEC dimension of history and social change. The discourse surrounding the US-Israel-Iran war reproduced long-standing historical tensions rooted in decades of sanctions, regional rivalry, and ideological conflict. However, the presence of competing narratives between *CNN* and *Tehran Times* also reflects changing global communication structures. Unlike earlier conflicts dominated almost entirely by Western media institutions, contemporary digital communication allows non-Western outlets to circulate counter-discourses globally. Through this shift, media power is becoming increasingly multipolar, although Western organizations still maintain significant influence over international information flows.

The principle of social totality is equally visible in the findings. The conflict was represented not only as a military struggle but also as an economic and geopolitical crisis connected to energy markets, regional alliances, and global stability. This is particularly evident in *CNN*'s frequent use of terms such as "Strait" (761) and "oil" (707), which framed the war in relation to global economic concerns surrounding the Strait of Hormuz and international energy supplies. Through CDA, these lexical patterns emphasize economic insecurity and geopolitical risk, while PEC explains how capitalist economic interests influence media framing. The war was, therefore, constructed as both a political and economic event, reflecting the interconnected relationship between communication, capitalism, and international power structures.

Moreover, the findings reveal the PEC dimension of moral philosophy through the ethical framing of legitimacy and victimhood. Both outlets attempted to morally justify their preferred geopolitical positions. *CNN* framed military intervention as necessary for regional security and stability, while *Tehran Times* framed resistance as a legitimate defense against foreign aggression. Through CDA, these moral evaluations were embedded within lexical choices and narrative structures. Through PEC, however, such moral framing reflects the broader ideological role of media systems in shaping public consent and maintaining political authority.

Finally, the principle of praxis becomes evident in the broader implications of these competing discourses. By exposing how language, institutional interests, and geopolitical power interact within media representations of war, the study encourages critical awareness of the ideological role of journalism in conflict situations. The integration of CDA and PEC demonstrates that media discourse is both a linguistic and structural phenomenon: words gain political power because they are produced within specific institutional, historical, and economic contexts. Consequently, audiences are not merely consuming information about war but are engaging with narratives shaped by competing systems of political and ideological influence.

Concordance Analysis

The top ten concordances analyses of *Tehran Times* and *CNN* reveal how the lexical items: "Iran", "Israel", and "war" operate as central discursive nodes through which competing meanings of war, legitimacy, and geopolitical responsibility are constructed.

Table 1. Concordance analysis of the lemma "Iran"

Left context	Hit	Right context
Tehran Times		
Struggle against occupation and illegal war against	Iran	
the consequences of his illegal war against	Iran	— a conflict that analysts and officials now
Trump saying, he wants "unconditional surrender" from	Iran	a demand he had also raised during
out strikes at the time along southern	Iran	A map he presented showed that an
Benjamin Netanyahu, launched his war against	Iran	a month ago, he believed the airstrikes
relentless U.S. and Israeli attacks on	Iran	A political source speaking to the Tehran
imposed a full trade embargo and labeled	Iran	a "rogue state." The strategy was simple:

Trump's decision to wage war against	Iran	a war deemed illegal under both the
on Iranian oil exports which have cost	Iran	about three-to-four trillion dollars, the
Over more than a month of fighting,	Iran	absorbed heavy losses in civilian areas while
CNN		
off-ramp" to end the war with	Iran	
briefed Trump on potential military options in	Iran	
to move quickly and decisively in attacking	Iran	
off-ramp" to end the war with	Iran	
negotiation table and end the hostilities" in	Iran	
vowed Friday to "escalate" its offensive in	Iran	A fresh wave of overnight strikes killed
night session due to incoming missiles from	Iran	a Knesset spokesperson said. The session was
reason" he calls what's happening in	Iran	a "military conflict," instead of a war.
" that he calls what's happening in	Iran	a "military conflict," instead of a war. "
remaining sympathy for them internationally." In	Iran	a new academic term will begin in

Initially, the concordance lines show that *Tehran Times* consistently frames the conflict as an "illegal war against Iran", associating it with terms such as "occupation", "illegal war", "trade embargo", and "rogue state". For instance, phrases like "struggle against occupation and illegal war against Iran" and "Trump's decision to wage war against Iran" construct a strongly evaluative discourse that delegitimizes US and Israeli military actions. The repeated use of legal and moral terminology such as "illegal" and "war deemed illegal under international law" reflects a discursive strategy of juridical resistance. From a CDA perspective, this linguistic pattern constructs Iran as a victim of structural injustice. From a PEC standpoint, this reflects a counter-hegemonic discourse shaped by state-aligned media ownership and geopolitical positioning, where media functions as an ideological apparatus responding to Western dominance in global communication systems.

Nevertheless, *CNN*'s concordance patterns surrounding "Iran" construct a more strategic and security-oriented discourse. Expressions such as "briefed Trump on potential military options in Iran", "escalate its offensive in Iran", and "decisively in attacking Iran" position Iran within a framework of military planning, strategic escalation, and state security operations. The repeated framing of events as a "military conflict" rather than a "war" further indicates a discursive attempt to normalize and technocratize the violence. Through CDA, this reflects lexical mitigation strategies that soften the moral weight of military action. From a political economy perspective, this discourse aligns with institutional structures of Western media systems, where state actors, defense sources, and official briefings shape news production routines, reinforcing dominant geopolitical narratives and legitimizing interventionist perspectives.

From discursive practice lens, the concordance data reveal how both outlets construct meaning through selective framing and intertextual sourcing. *Tehran Times* repeatedly embeds Iran within narratives of economic harm ("cost Iran about three-to-four trillion dollars") and humanitarian suffering ("absorbed heavy losses in civilian areas"), emphasizing structural violence produced by sanctions and military strikes. This reflects a broader ideological process in which media discourse functions as resistance against global power asymmetries. In contrast, *CNN* constructs discourse through official political and military voices, as seen in references to Trump, Israeli leadership, and military briefings. This indicates reliance on elite sources, a pattern widely identified in political economy scholarship as reinforcing hegemonic power structures in Western journalism. This also reflects [Herman and Chomsky's \(2008\)](#) propaganda model, which argues that mainstream media rely heavily on elite information sources due to structural constraints of ownership, funding, and access. Even oppositional media such as *Tehran Times* still depend on political elites for legitimizing discourse. Thus, both outlets reproduce elite-centered knowledge, even if their ideological positions differ.

At the level of social practice, these discourses reveal how language contributes to shaping public understanding of international conflict. The repeated framing of Iran as either a “victim of illegal war” (*Tehran Times*) or a “site of military escalation” (*CNN*) demonstrates how ideological meaning is stabilized through repetition and institutional authority. These competing narratives do not merely reflect reality but actively organize how societies interpret legitimacy, violence, and global order. As Fairclough (2013) argues, discourse is socially constitutive; it reproduces or transforms power relations depending on how meaning is circulated and normalized. This leads to Entman’s (1993) concept of framing, where media select certain aspects of reality and make them more salient to promote interpretation, evaluation, and action.

When viewed through the political economy framework, these findings become even more significant. Historically, the discourse reflects long-standing tensions between Iran and Western powers, but it also shows a shift in global media representation where non-Western outlets increasingly challenge dominant narratives. This indicates a process of social change in global communication, where media power is becoming more multipolar, even though asymmetries persist. In terms of social totality, both corpora reveal how war discourse is embedded within economic interests (oil, sanctions), political authority (Trump, Israeli leadership), and military-industrial considerations, showing that media narratives cannot be separated from broader capitalist and geopolitical systems.

The moral philosophy dimension is clearly visible in the contrasting ethical framings. *Tehran Times* constructs a moral narrative of resistance and legality, emphasizing “illegal war” and “occupation”, while *CNN* constructs a moral narrative of security and strategic necessity, framing escalation as “decisive” and “offensive”. These competing moral structures guide audience interpretation of legitimacy and responsibility, illustrating how media discourse functions as a site of ethical contestation in global politics. Finally, in terms of praxis, the findings highlight the importance of critical media literacy, as audiences are exposed to systematically different constructions of the same event depending on media ownership, ideology, and geopolitical alignment.

Table 2. Concordance analysis of the lemma “Israel”

Left context	Hit	Right context
Tehran Times		
a never-ending nightmare for America and recent weeks by the United States and	Israel	
the recent aggression by the USA and this war are the United States and	Israel	According to a report by the Public
military aggression by the United States and	Israel	According to international rules, whenever one p
on WHO, ICRC to hold U.S	Israel	According to the IRGC, Tangsiri was overseeing
failure to hold the U.S. and	Israel	accountable for violation of humanitarian law TE
Pezeshkian include: That the U.S. and targets affiliated with the U.S. and	Israel	accountable for violations in Gaza, Lebanon, and
Iran intends to use nuclear weapons against	Israel	acknowledge Iran’s sovereign rights and its across the Persian Gulf. Beyond the Strait after acquiring them. The US and Israel
CNN		
Bnei Brak after missile fired toward central	Israel	0:48 A CNN team about 5 kilometres away witness
“desperate,” “scared” and “injured.” Strikes on the aftermath of a strike hitting Dimona,	Israel	A fresh wave of missiles were launched
fire directed toward the the State of	Israel	A spokesman for the Fire and Rescue
vessels belonging to the United States and	Israel	a statement from the IDF said. Over 1,000
responding to several impact sites in central	Israel	according to IRIB. “Imposing transit fees is according to Israel’s Magen David Adom

injuries after a cluster munitions strike in	Israel	according to its national emergency service, Mag
been killed and more than 200 injured in	Israel	according to Magen David Adom, the country'
e damaged. Tehran retaliated with strikes against	Israel	according to the Israeli military. Israel's
and damaged several buildings in Eshtaol, central	Israel	according to the country's national emergency

The concordance analysis of the lexical item “Israel” further reveals how *Tehran Times* and *CNN* constructed sharply contrasting geopolitical realities through discourse. At the textual level, *Tehran Times* consistently associated “Israel” with collocates such as “aggression”, “violation”, “accountable”, and “military aggression”. Phrases including “the recent aggression by the USA and Israel”, “failure to hold the U.S. and Israel accountable”, and “military aggression by the United States and Israel” construct Israel within a discourse of institutional violence and international illegitimacy. The repeated co-occurrence of “Israel” with the United States also indicates a discursive merging of the two actors into a singular hegemonic alliance. Through CDA, these lexical patterns frame Israel not as an isolated nation-state but as part of a broader structure of Western military and political dominance in the Middle East. Simultaneously, from a PEC perspective, such representation reflects resistance against unequal global power relations and challenges the dominance of Western-centered international narratives. The discourse therefore functions as a symbolic critique of geopolitical hegemony embedded within global media systems.

However, *CNN* constructed “Israel” through a discourse centered on security, humanitarian suffering, and national defense. Concordance lines such as “injuries after a cluster munitions strike in Israel”, “more than 200 injured in Israel”, and “responding to several impact sites in central Israel” foreground the physical and emotional consequences of attacks on Israeli territory. Unlike *Tehran Times*, which focused on structural accountability, *CNN* emphasized immediacy, civilian vulnerability, and emergency response. Through CDA, this lexical framing humanizes Israeli experiences of conflict and directs audience empathy toward the Israeli population. From a political economy perspective, however, this representation also reflects the influence of Western media institutions that frequently align with broader geopolitical alliances and security-oriented frameworks. Thus, the discourse contributes to maintaining existing social structures in which Western allies are more likely to be framed through narratives of defense and victimhood rather than aggression.

At the level of discursive practice, the two outlets relied on different institutional voices and narrative strategies to construct authority. *Tehran Times* frequently invoked international law, humanitarian organizations, and state sovereignty, as seen in references to the WHO, ICRC, and “international rules”. This discursive strategy situates Iran’s position within global legal and ethical frameworks, thereby challenging dominant Western interpretations of legitimacy. Through PEC, this reflects a broader communicative struggle in which non-Western media seek to gain discursive credibility by appropriating the language of international law and human rights. Conversely, *CNN* relied heavily on military updates, emergency services, and official Israeli statements, including references to the IDF and national emergency agencies. This reflects a professionalized journalistic structure where institutional and military sources become primary definers of reality. Consequently, the production and circulation of discourse remain connected to broader systems of political authority and elite information management.

Crucially, one of the dominant narratives frequently used to justify Israeli military actions in Western political and media discourse is the historical memory of the Holocaust, during which six million Jews were systematically killed during World War II. This historical trauma has understandably become central to Israel’s national identity and security discourse. However, within contemporary geopolitical debates, criticism of Israeli state policies and military aggression is often immediately framed as anti-Semitism, creating a discursive environment where political accountability becomes difficult to address

openly. Through the lens of CDA, this demonstrates how historical suffering can be mobilized within discourse to construct moral legitimacy and silence opposing perspectives.

Simultaneously, this selective moral framing reveals broader inequalities in how historical suffering is remembered and politically utilized. For example, the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 resulted in the deaths of more than 100,000 civilians, representing one of the deadliest civilian tragedies of World War II (DW Documentary, 2025). Yet, unlike the Holocaust, this suffering has not occupied the same central position within global political discourse or international media narratives.

This contrast illustrates how systems of power influence collective memory, determining which historical traumas receive global recognition and which remain comparatively marginalized. Consequently, the discourse surrounding Israel and anti-Semitism reflects not only historical remembrance but also broader struggles over narrative authority, moral legitimacy, and geopolitical power in the contemporary international order.

Furthermore, at the level of social practice, the discourse surrounding “Israel” demonstrates how media narratives shape collective understanding of power, morality, and geopolitical order. *Tehran Times* constructed Israel as a symbol of regional militarism and Western intervention, thereby reinforcing anti-hegemonic political consciousness among audiences. This discourse contributes to social processes of resistance, solidarity, and ideological mobilization within contexts critical of Western foreign policy. Meanwhile, *CNN* framed Israel within narratives of national insecurity and civilian suffering, reinforcing social processes tied to fear, protection, and security consciousness. These contrasting representations influence how audiences emotionally and politically engage with the conflict, shaping broader perceptions of justice, legitimacy, and international responsibility.

Importantly, these discourses also reveal significant dimensions of social change. The *Tehran Times* corpus demonstrates how non-Western media increasingly challenge the symbolic dominance of Western news institutions by producing alternative narratives rooted in sovereignty, accountability, and anti-imperialist discourse. This reflects an ongoing transformation in the global communication landscape, where media power is no longer entirely monopolized by Western actors. Through digital communication and transnational news circulation, alternative geopolitical perspectives now possess greater visibility and influence than in previous decades. As a result, the global information order is becoming more contested and multipolar.

Concurrently, the *CNN* discourse reflects the persistence of established social structures within international journalism. The prioritization of Israeli security concerns, reliance on official state narratives, and focus on emergency response reinforce broader ideological frameworks associated with Western geopolitical interests. This demonstrates that despite increasing media plurality, dominant institutions still retain substantial power in shaping international public opinion. Through PEC, this highlights how ownership, institutional access, and geopolitical alignment continue to influence which narratives gain legitimacy and global circulation.

Moreover, the discourse surrounding “Israel” reveals how social processes are increasingly mediated through emotional and humanitarian framing. *CNN*’s emphasis on injuries, fear, and civilian suffering reflects a broader shift in contemporary war journalism toward affective storytelling, where emotional narratives shape political understanding. Conversely, *Tehran Times* employed legal and political framing to emphasize accountability and structural injustice. These differing communicative strategies demonstrate how media discourse not only informs audiences but also organizes emotional responses, political identities, and collective memory.

Emphatically, the *Tehran Times* discourse functions as a direct challenge to Western hegemonic media representation. By repeatedly linking the United States and Israel to terms such as “aggression”,

“violations”, and “occupation”, the outlet disrupts dominant Western narratives that often portray military intervention as necessary for security and stability. This counter-hegemonic framing is significant because it exposes how international news discourse is deeply unequal, where Western perspectives have historically defined what is considered legitimate violence or acceptable political action.

In this sense, the Iranian discourse attempts to reclaim narrative authority and reposition the Global South within international communication. While Western media frequently universalize their own geopolitical assumptions, *Tehran Times* contests this symbolic dominance by foregrounding perspectives rooted in sovereignty, resistance, and historical injustice. Therefore, the discourse surrounding “Israel” becomes not only a representation of conflict but also a struggle over who has the power to define truth, legitimacy, and global political reality.

Table 3. Concordance analysis of the lemma “war”

Left context	Hit	Right context
Tehran Times		
It was not Iran that started this	War	
the country has prepared for a prolonged	War	
Headquarters, which is the body overseeing the	War	
it cannot predict the trajectory of the	War	
an undeniably heavy price during the ongoing	War	
the holidays and the height of the	War	
are met.” Five Conditions for Ending the	War	I. A complete halt to “aggression and assassination
Iran’s anti-US-Israeli	War	A conflict set to reshape the global
to close path to swift end to	War	—a development that clearly distresses Western ca
what can be described as a “civilizational	War	a form of conflict that extends beyond
CNN		
wounded on the first day of the	War	
up to \$200 billion to fund the Iran	War	
wounded on the first day of the	War	
injuries on the first day of the	War	A CNN analysis of satellite imagery and
part of the next phase of the	War	A CNN team in Tehran saw blackened
” and criticized their limited involvement in the	War	a day after threatening to “obliterate” Iran’
would like a decisive end to the	War	A fresh wave of attacks began in
Pentagon weighs its next steps in the	War	a month after it started. It is
been targeted by Iran during the current	War	a NATO-style security guarantee after that
.” In a primetime address, Trump called the	War	a response to 47 years of violence by

Concordance analysis of the lexical item “war” reveals another important dimension of how *Tehran Times* and *CNN* constructed the US-Israel-Iran conflict through competing ideological frameworks. Textually, *Tehran Times* framed the war as a historically significant and ideologically transformative event. Concordance lines such as “Iran’s anti-US-Israeli war”, “a civilizational war”, and “a conflict set to reshape the global” suggest that the outlet represented the conflict as extending far beyond immediate military confrontation. The phrase “civilizational war” is particularly significant because it expands the meaning of war from a territorial dispute into a broader ideological and cultural struggle. Through CDA, this lexical framing constructs the conflict as part of a larger historical confrontation between opposing worldviews and political systems. From a PEC perspective, this reflects how media discourse can articulate resistance to dominant global structures by framing geopolitical conflict as a challenge to Western-centered political and cultural authority (Tahboun, 2024).

On the other hand, *CNN* constructed “war” through a managerial and operational discourse focused on strategy, cost, and military progression. Phrases such as “Pentagon weighs its next steps in the war”, “part of the next phase of the war”, and “up to \$200 billion to fund the Iran war” frame the conflict through institutional calculation and political administration. Rather than emphasizing ideological transformation, the discourse presents war as a measurable geopolitical event managed through military planning and economic resources. Through CDA, this lexical pattern normalizes war as a strategic process rather than an exceptional human crisis. Simultaneously, PEC highlights how such representations align with broader structures of military-industrial power in which war becomes integrated into political decision-making, defense economies, and global security systems.

At the level of discursive practice, *Tehran Times* frequently linked war to endurance, sacrifice, and long-term resistance. Expressions such as “prepared for a prolonged war” and “paid an undeniably heavy price during the ongoing war” create a discourse of collective resilience and national perseverance. This framing contributes to a social process in which conflict becomes embedded within national identity and historical memory. The discourse encourages audiences to interpret hardship as part of a larger political struggle tied to sovereignty and survival. In this sense, media discourse functions as a mechanism for producing social cohesion and ideological solidarity during periods of crisis (Amer, 2017).

Meanwhile, *CNN*’s discursive practice emphasized immediacy, tactical development, and institutional response. References to “the next phase of the war”, “security guarantee”, and Trump’s “primetime address” demonstrate how the outlet structured the conflict through elite political communication and ongoing strategic evaluation. This reflects a broader social process in which public understanding of war is mediated through governmental authority, military expertise, and real-time crisis reporting. Consequently, audiences are positioned not as participants in a historical struggle but as observers of a continuously managed geopolitical operation.

In the social practice level, the competing discourses surrounding “war” reveal important transformations in contemporary global politics and communication. *Tehran Times* framed the conflict as historically transformative, suggesting that the war could “reshape the global” order. This discourse reflects broader social change in the international system, particularly the growing challenge to Western geopolitical dominance by non-Western states and media institutions. The representation of war as “civilizational” indicates an attempt to redefine global political conflict beyond traditional military boundaries, linking it to identity, ideology, and global power redistribution. Because, “Language is always ideological, and ideology depends on language, and language cannot escape ideology” (Lukin, 2019, p. 16). Through PEC, this reflects changing communication structures in which alternative media increasingly challenge dominant narratives and articulate multipolar visions of world order.

Conversely, *CNN*’s discourse reflects the persistence of existing social structures rooted in institutionalized military power and global security governance. By framing war through strategic planning, defense spending, and operational phases, the discourse reinforces established systems in which geopolitical conflict is understood primarily through statecraft, military management, and economic calculation. This representation contributes to the normalization of permanent geopolitical instability as a routine aspect of international politics. Through repeated references to military progression and political response, the discourse constructs war as an expected condition within global governance rather than a temporary disruption.

Furthermore, the discourse surrounding “war” also shapes broader social processes related to time, uncertainty, and political imagination. *Tehran Times* repeatedly emphasized duration and unpredictability through phrases such as “cannot predict the trajectory of the war” and “prepared for a prolonged war”. This creates a discourse of historical openness in which the outcome of the conflict remains connected to larger global transformations. Alternatively, *CNN* framed war through sequential

phases and policy decisions, presenting conflict as something that can ultimately be controlled and resolved through institutional mechanisms. These differing temporal frameworks influence how audiences imagine the future of international politics, either as an era of systemic transformation or as a manageable continuation of geopolitical order.

Importantly, the findings also demonstrate how discourse contributes to changing public perceptions of legitimacy and violence. *Tehran Times* explicitly rejected responsibility through the statement “It was not Iran that started this war”, thereby framing the conflict within a discourse of defensive resistance. In contrast, *CNN* frequently linked war to retaliation, response, and security necessity, embedding violence within a framework of strategic justification. Through CDA, these lexical constructions shape how audiences morally interpret military action. And PEC framework reveals how institutional interests and geopolitical alignments influence the production of moral legitimacy within international media systems.

Ultimately, the concordance analysis of “war” demonstrates that media discourse is deeply connected to broader struggles over historical meaning, political authority, and global transformation. The discourse reflects social structures by reproducing ideological and institutional power relations; it shapes social processes by organizing public understanding of conflict, identity, and legitimacy; and it contributes to social change by redefining how global audiences interpret war in an increasingly multipolar communication environment. Through the integration of CDA and PEC, the findings reveal that the meaning of “war” is not fixed but socially constructed through competing discursive and political-economic forces that shape the contemporary global order.

Conclusion

This study examined the competing media discourses surrounding “Operation Epic Fury” and “True Promise 4” through the combined framework of CDA and the political economy of communication (PEC). By comparatively analyzing the corpora of *Tehran Times* and *CNN*, the research demonstrated that media discourse is far from neutral; rather, it is deeply shaped by ideological positioning, geopolitical interests, and institutional power structures. The findings revealed that *CNN* largely framed the conflict through security-oriented and strategic narratives aligned with dominant Western geopolitical perspectives, whereas *Tehran Times* constructed counter-hegemonic narratives centered on resistance, sovereignty, and anti-imperialist discourse.

The study also demonstrated that media discourse functions as a powerful social force that both reflects and shapes social structures, social processes, and social change. The competing narratives influenced how audiences interpreted legitimacy, aggression, victimhood, and political morality, while also revealing broader transformations within the global communication order. The increasing visibility of non-Western counter-discourses suggests that global media power is becoming more contested and multipolar, even though Western media institutions still maintain significant influence over international news production and agenda-setting.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis focused only on two English-language media outlets, which may not fully represent the diversity of global media perspectives surrounding the conflict. Second, the study concentrated primarily on textual discourse and did not examine visual elements such as images, videos, headlines, or social media engagement, which also play important roles in shaping public opinion. Third, the corpus covered a limited timeframe between 28 February and 8 April 2026, focusing mainly on the most intense phase of the conflict. Future research should expand the scope by incorporating multilingual corpora, social media platforms, audience reception studies, and multimodal discourse analysis to explore how different populations interpret and negotiate competing war narratives across various communication environments.

Ultimately, this study argues that contemporary war reporting cannot be separated from global systems of power, ideology, and political economy. Media institutions often claim objectivity and neutrality, yet the findings demonstrate that international conflict reporting frequently reproduces selective moral frameworks that legitimize some forms of violence while condemning others. In this sense, global media discourse operates not merely as information-sharing but as a mechanism of ideological governance that shapes whose suffering is visible, whose resistance is criminalized, and whose violence is normalized. Therefore, critically examining media discourse is not only an academic exercise but also a political necessity in an era where information itself has become a battlefield for geopolitical influence, historical memory, and global authority.

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