

# Why do Leaders Lie<sup>1</sup>, and Why do We Believe Them

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## ABSTRACT

The paper deals with lying, and deceiving of political leaders. It summarizes and contemplates on the Mearsheimer's book *Why Do Leaders Lie: The Truth About Lying in International Politics* (2011) and uses his explanation of concepts of *truth telling*, *deception*, and *lying*, as basic theoretical framework for further elaboration on why, and how, leaders lie. It attempts to cross-match, and synthesise it with the diversionary theory of war based on the article of Mitchell and Prins *Rivalry and Diversionary Uses of Forces* (2004) in order to provide some critically evaluated common grounds for further analysis of the topic. If leaders lie simply because they *can*, the author further addresses the question what makes the lies believable, and concludes leaders extensively appeal to public's emotions with different rhetoric skills. Therefore, lying should be considered, and analysed, as an interaction between more parties, not merely from the point of the leader's incentives, and skills. The paper offers brief argumentation based on the case of the Western interventions in the Balkan wars. Methodologically it adopts the interpretative, and critical, approach for the analysis of the secondary literature with the emphasis on works of Mearsheimer, and Mitchell and Prins, as the pillar pieces for author's further discourse.

**KEY WORDS:** lying, deception, diversionary theory, emotion's appeal, media.

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**POVZETEK**

Članek se ukvarja z laganjem in zavajanjem političnih vodij. Povzema in razglablja o Mearsheimerjevi monografiji *Why Leaders Lie: the Truth About Lying in International Politics* (2011) in uporabi njegove razlage konceptov resnice, laganja in zavajanja kot osnovni teoretski okvir za nadaljnjo razpravo v zvezi z vprašanji, zakaj, in, kako, politični vodje lažejo. Njegove predpostavke poskuša križati in sintetizirati z diverzijsko teorijo vojne, osnovane na članku Mitchellove in Prinsa, *Rivalry and the Diversionary Uses of Force* (2004), z namenom vzpostavitve kritično vrednotene podlage za nadaljnjo analizo teme. Če vodje lažejo preprosto zato, ker *lahko*, se avtor nadaljnje sprašuje, kaj *laži* naredi verjetne, in zaključí, da politiki v veliki meri apelirajo na emocije javnosti z različnimi retoričnimi veščinami. Na podlagi tega zaključka avtor predlaga, da se laganje in zavajanje obravnava in analizira kot interakcijo med večimi akterji, ne zgolj z vidika motivacije in sposobnosti političnih vodij. Članek ponuja kratko praktično argumentacijo na primeru zahodnih intervencij v balkanskih vojnah. Metodološko je tema obravnavana z interpretativnega vidika in pristopa kritične teorije za analizo sekundarne literature s poudarkom na omenjenih delih Mearsheimerja in Mitchella in Prinsa kot podlagi za nadaljnjo diskusijo.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** laganje, zavajanje, diverzijska teorija, emocije, mediji.

**INTRODUCTION**

John J. Mearsheimer, one of the most renowned scholars of International Relations, a (neo)realist, has in 2011 published a short book, in which he deals with the concept of lying in international politics. The implication of lying versus the truth easily obtains negative connotation on the moral premises, which has in the past few decades in the spirit of liberal theory command the international ideological atmosphere; however, Mearsheimer at the beginning points out that the research he has done ignores the moral judgement of this phenomena. And so does the following essay. Moreover, rather than deciding on the ethics, and morality of such behaviour, the article tries to approach it from the analytical point of view in order to decide how does lying in its many forms serve a certain political goal.

In the preface Mearsheimer confesses he has been discussing lying in international politics for a couple of years at different conferences and lectures, since the topic is, in his opinion, intriguing, nevertheless, he

did not believe in its capacity to be academically analysed. Over the period of these years he has found himself to obtain a more extensive amount of data, which has allowed him to proceed with a more profound research, and the latter resulted in a book titled *Why Do Leaders Lie: the Truth about Lying in International Politics* (2011). As the author of this article realises further on, the concrete theoretical framework is yet to be defined, since the phenomenon of lying is hard to be empirically tested, mainly due to different approaches to categorising such behaviour, and, on the other hand, the inaccessibility of information (when lying is conducted on the highest levels of politics). Therefore, the author aims to provide a broadly consensual theoretical foundation, which could assist in further studies of the topic.

While Mearsheimer deals with a much focused group of lying that occurs in politics, he offers a spectrum of cases, mostly from the foreign politics of the United States of America (USA), especially in relation to the Middle East. Nevertheless, his presupposition that leaders lie on the account of national interest narrows the area of analysis, therefore, this paper tries to fill the void with other theoretical framework, such as with the diversionary theory of war, which pays special focus on the leaders' personal interests.<sup>3</sup> The intent is to elaborate on the concept of lying, and deceit, from as many angles as possible to fully answer on questions why do leaders lie; how, and in what circumstances, do they lie; and why do we, most importantly, believe them.

As mentioned, the first part of the paper summarizes excerpts from Mearsheimer's work, and, in the second part, complements and contemplates them with additional theoretical overview, mostly based on the article of Mitchell and Prins: *Rivalry and Diversionary Uses of Forces* (2004). Thirdly, the synthesised conclusions of both provide some ground rules of the conditions, and limitations of lying, and, lastly, they offer the insight in the relation between the both ends of misleading communication, the *liar*, and the *deceived*. While Mearsheimer addresses the behaviour of the USA regarding the Iraq intervention, this paper attempts to apply some theoretical conclusions to the cases of the Balkan wars (Bosnian, and Kosovar) due to the fact scholars draw certain parallels between the both *wars of choices*.

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<sup>3</sup> It is, in that sense, consistent with some categories that Mearsheimer defined, but has not analysed since he believes lying for the leader's benefit should not have place in politics. The latter is, on one hand, to be expected from a realist that shall treat the state as the 'black box,' nevertheless, on the other, it is, paradoxically, a question of ethics and moralization, which he promises not to conduct.

Due to the discursive nature of the paper the author uses the interpretative, and critical methodological approach for examination, and comparison, of the literature in the strive to encompass the horizon of theoretical perspectives, and establish some probable theses for the following research.

### WHY DO LEADERS LIE? JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER

In the introductory stages of the book, Mearsheimer defines and categorizes basic concepts one is to use when discussing an untruthful expression; *the truth, lying, and deception*. *Truth is relative*; a profound philosophical thought, nevertheless, when addressing it in terms of international relations theory, the criticism of the rational choice theory<sup>4</sup>, *bounded rationality*<sup>5</sup>, to a degree explains it as a relativity of the set of information one is to possess in a particular time and place context. Mearsheimer (2011, pp. 15) is aware each individual has “limited knowledge and biases” regarding any situation, therefore he uses the term “*truth telling*” and considers that it occurs when an individual “makes a serious effort to overcome any biases or selfish interests that he might have and report the relevant facts in as fair-minded a way as he can;” and such presupposition one must bear in mind whenever addressing the concept of the truth.

On the contrary, he defines *deception* as a conscious action to “prevent others from knowing the full *truth* – as that individual understands it;” *lying* is thus “a form of deception,” nevertheless, “not all deception is lying” (*ibid*, pp. 9). *Lying* labels behaviour of an individual, when an untruthful statement is consciously communicated to a targeted audience with the intention the audience will perceive is as the *truth*; the latter can also involve denial of a *true* fact (*ibid*, pp. 16). *Lying*, however, constitutes only one of the three kinds of deceptions, while the other two include “concealment” and “spinning,” (*ibid.*). Both of them distinguish from lying because they do not involve telling a false statement, nevertheless, are not considered as truth telling due to the

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<sup>4</sup> Much criticism regards the generalisation of assumptions and predictions, and mathematical approach of the rational choice theory, which overlooks qualitative variables, typical for social sciences of the rational choice theory.

<sup>5</sup> A term was introduced by Herman A. Simon as an alternative to mathematical calculations of decision-making process in the rational choice and game theory. It supports the thesis of rational decision-making, however, it considers it as *optimization* of a fully rational process of weighing the available information (see Gigerenzer, Gerd, and Selten, Reinhard, 2002, *Bounded Rationality: The Adaptive Toolbox*. MIT Press).

awareness of the individual he is intentionally misleading the recipient of the message (*ibid.*). *Concealment* constitutes behaviour, in which an individual consciously withholds information, which could/would have altered one's position or argument. *Spinning* is, in a way, contrasting concealment, since it does not involve remaining silent, but pursues deception through means of tactical emphasis and presentation of the story. An individual uses *true facts*, yet exaggerates, distorts, and links them together in manners, beneficial to own advantage (*ibid.*).

The latter two forms of deception are generally most widely used in everyday life, as well as in international politics. At the inter-personal level of relations the reason for more extensive use probably lies within the religious norms, and morally acceptable social behaviour, which judge lying as *wrong*, and *bad*; nevertheless, the decision to deceive instead of telling the *truth* is always a strategic one, thus the choice of the form of deceiving is a result of weighing the possible outcomes, specifically benefits and risks. Obviously, with concealment and spinning the benefits can be – in the appropriate environment – the same as with *lying*, while risks, on the other hand, possibly much lower. Same as regular individuals, state leaders do not wish be to perceived as liars, since being caught at *lying* can cause a negative domino effect of their public (and personal) image.

One of the most important presuppositions Mearsheimer sets for his following discourse on types, and causes of deception in the international politics is that all leaders *deceive* in conviction that it is for the benefit of the state, regardless if they are *deceiving* international or domestic public. Nevertheless, *lying* in domestic politics is almost always considered wrong when detected (*ibid*, pp. 7), and frowned upon the least; however, mostly when a leader has been caught at *lying* about a particular matter, which has resulted in failure. The public will be extremely more likely to overlook the lie when the final result will bring success. On the other hand, *lying* to international community Mearsheimer separates on “*strategic and selfish*,” and further on focuses on the first type. *Strategic* lies are told to the foreign leaders and the public “in the service of the national interest,” whereas *selfish* lies intend to protect and advance individual interests of leaders or their close friends (*ibid*, pp. 11). The second type, as mentioned, is discussed more within the framework of diversionary theory; nevertheless, it is surprising that such a controversial topic is not scientifically analysed more, while it is firmly present in the media, and public political discourse.

Mearsheimer divides the lies into seven variations: “*inter-state lies, fearmongering, strategic cover-ups, nationalist mythmakings, liberal lies, social imperialism, and ignoble cover-ups,*” with respect to the purpose(s) they serve (*ibid*, pp. 21–23). His subsequent analysis answers the questions of what are the strategic motives, potential benefits, and costs of each type of lying (*ibid*, pp. 10–11). *Inter-state lying* occurs in rivalry situations, when a lie, directed at other countries gains a strategic advantage over them, or prevents them from gaining advantage at own expense. While actions are directed at foreign audience, state’s leadership often ends up deceiving domestic public as well. *Fearmongering* labels lying to domestic public about a foreign policy threat in order to make the nation perceive the threat seriously, and accept the necessary sacrifices. *Strategic cover-ups* intend to hide failed, or controversial policies from domestic, and sometimes foreign, audience, but Mearsheimer emphasises it is for the benefit of the state, and its people as not to endanger the morale. *Nationalist mythmaking* explains the invention of new *truths* about the state’s history. It mainly involves denying certain (usually negative) nation’s or ethnic group’s action, or, in contrast, falsely claims others. Leaders tell similar stories about others, to built or strengthen the identity of a “we,” possibly against “them.”<sup>6</sup> *Liberal lies* are told to disguise behaviour of a state that contradicts the internationally accepted liberal norms, and law. *Social imperialism* addresses *lies* leaders tell about other countries in order to divert domestic public’s attention from internal problems, or promotion of narrow, elitist interests. *Ignoble cover-ups* are, in contrast to strategic cover-ups, designed to hide the failures of the leaders for their own protection.

But, as mentioned, in his book, Mearsheimer examines the lies leaders tell in international sphere for the benefit of their states. Therefore, in the continued study he illuminates the concepts of social imperialism, and ignoble cover-ups, since he believes they do not represent a legitimate form of social/political behaviour, and have a corruptive nature. He argues that strategic lies are different, since they “aim to facilitate general welfare, and /.../ can do good things for a country, although there is always the possibility they will do more harm than good,” (*ibid*, pp. 24). On that premise, the author disagrees

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<sup>6</sup> This author believes especially this type of lying can be extensively applied to the case of the Balkan wars from the point of view of the internal structural relations of the Balkan states, and, as following, suggests additional examination complemented with studies which have been done in the context of emotional (ab)use of tradition, history, and religion, as the culprit of the Balkan bloodsheds.

with Mearsheimer, and is critical towards the naivety, and moralization, of the context, and adds that, while a particular lie is labelled as a selfish lie, the latter does not definitely exclude the possibility such a lie could serve as well in the general welfare. Therefore, additional literature is needed to provide a fuller understanding of lying in politics.

Luckily, quite some research has been done regarding the excluded categories of *lying* beforehand the publishing of Mearsheimer's book. In his definition of social imperialism he renews the theory of diversionary use of force, and suggests state leaders *lie* to divert domestic attention, while the theory itself primarily focuses only on the use of military force to reach the same goal. Mearsheimer's adaptation is probably more up to date, since aggression, and national use of military power, have been rather limited, and reduced in the past decades. Nevertheless, the ongoing research of the theory of diversion advocates for the relevance, and importance of so called social imperialism, and to some extent the ignoble cover-ups, which are both tackled in the next chapter of this paper, where diversionary theory, and the concept of externalization of conflict are further explained, and cross-examined with the theoretical framework offered by Mearsheimer.

## WHY LEADERS LIE? DIVERSIONARY THEORY

Diversionary theory claims that a state, more specifically its government, or leadership, diverts the attention from domestic issues to international ones in order to benefit its position; either due to the pre-election period, either to buy time to deal with a certain internal crisis, or to trigger the rally-around-the-flag effect.<sup>7</sup> It does so by initiating, or getting involved in an external conflict; "leaders who face domestic discontent may engage in international conflict to generate events that obscure problems being experienced at home (Ward and Widmaier in Mitchell and Prins, 2014, pp. 939). From this point of view, it is tightly connected not only to social imperialism, but as well to fearmongering, and strategic cover-ups.

Diversionary theory originates from the sociological concept of "groups-in" and "groups-out," and research on public perception of its leaders from as early as 1960s (Coser in Mitchell and Prins, 2004, pp.

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<sup>7</sup> Lecture on National Security and Asymmetric Threats (Metropolitan University Prague, unpublished).

939). It implies that popularity of a leader among domestic population is higher during an international crisis (what results in the rally-around-the-flag effect); nevertheless, the empirical research lacks the credibility since it is hard to determine the level of popularity of the leader simultaneously in the absence of international crisis. However, basic sociology of groups introduces very similar concept of “we” against “them,” and the latter generally explains the empowerment of relations within a certain, possibly very heterogeneous and loose group, when faced with an outer threat. Therefore, it is very easy to imagine the position of the leader in such a group rises,<sup>8</sup> and consequently, it uncovers the motive for diversion, which is to be obtained with means of deception, what can go as far as to the use of military force. Diversionary theory, in its idea, presupposes that leaders usually *lie* out of their own interests, although it accepts the possibility of leaders’ intent to generate the rally-around-the-flag effect, per example, as to secure the national interest in cases of an actual external threat.

Authors like Smith, Walter, and Mitchell and Prins defined specific conditions, in which such distraction of domestic public can take place. Mitchell and Prins (2004), especially, focus on diversionary theory from the military point of view, and examine the rivalry, and strategic use of force, within which they conclude that states use externalization of conflict in an opportunity rich environments. They confirm the initial thesis of the diversionary theory, supporting as well Mearsheimer’s suggestion: democracies have most incentives to lie, manipulate, and distract their domestic public; nevertheless, they have the fewest opportunities to do so considering the transmission of information, and transparency of the democratic regimes. Because potential adversaries hold strong beliefs about democratic states’ willingness to stand firm in crises when domestic turmoil is high, the transparency of democratic regimes reduces the number of opportunities for diversionary force,” (Mitchell and Prins, 2004, pp. 958). Democracies will not be as likely to engage in military conflict to divert their public from domestic social, or economic problems as authoritarian regimes, which will be highly prone to get

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<sup>8</sup> Although, considering experience of the uprisings during the last couple of years (the Arab Spring especially), the groups of people from different countries have identified as ‘we,’ while the group they stood against – ‘them’ – were the leaders and governmental elites, and not an external group. Nevertheless, the evolution of events in the Middle East after the Arab Spring turned more into the *summer* of aggression, projecting again the empowerment of ‘national’ groups as to polarize against ‘them,’ the external threat, mainly rebels’ clicks and para-national terroristic organizations.

involved into an existing rivalry in order to do so. On the other hand, dictatorships have little incentives to *lie* to domestic public, since their leaders' power is not based on democratic elections, or democratic justification of power. Nevertheless, the categories of inter-state lies, national mythmaking, and liberal lies could be seen as types of behaviour dictatorships adopt, when getting involved into a rivalry game.

## OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY

At this point, it might become clear that the theoretical framework Mearsheimer sets is rather narrow considering the broad occurrence of the phenomenon of deception, since he, firstly, ignores the moral dimensions of it, and, secondly, he focuses on *strategic* lies, which, by his definition, encompass internationally told *lies* for the benefit of the state's national interest. Mearsheimer claims he encountered a substantial amount of literature on *lying*; nevertheless, he notes that rare authors have studied international lying with respect to the different types of it as suggested by Mearsheimer. Since the presented diversionary theory does focus on the use of foreign policy means to influence the domestic public for the gain of its leading elite, the Mearsheimer's finding about the void in the analysis of such behaviour in international politics opens many new dilemmas. While he only deals with the *lies* told for the sake of the state, a whole area of questions arises, when one assumes leader *lie* internationally for their own personal benefit as well. Nevertheless, the synthesis of some parts of the both theories offers some important conclusions.

Both approaches agree that the regime type of a state strongly influences lying behaviour, and argue that the means the leaders adopt depend on the environment, and opportunities. Both agree leaders are more likely to deceive domestic public, especially in democratic regimes, however, the diversionary theory amends the thesis with the fact that, while democracies have more tendencies, and reasons to behave deceitfully, they have fewer opportunities to do so due to the transparency, higher level of (less distorted) information, and general media freedom. The diversionary theory is less optimistic about the genuine motives of the leaders to take on lying and deception, since it constantly, as the main incentive, emphasizes leaders' aim to stay in power, whereas Mearsheimer does not evaluate such a 'side-effect' of successfully achieving a (well-intended) goal by the

means of *lying*; one would assume the lack of acknowledging a consequence as important as the 'side-product of power' is ignorant, or, the least, naive. Moreover, optimistic and naive must also be the public, falling for deception and lying. Nevertheless, if Mearsheimer presupposes lying serves the general welfare, does the public endanger such a goal when being sceptical, critical, or even rebellious? Or do we as well believe in the goodness of intentions behind the means adopted to fool us? If leaders lie, why do we believe them?

### WHY DO WE BELIEVE LIES?

Lies always have the potential of being exposed, and, consequently, worsen the situation; therefore, the risk is always high. Mearsheimer (2011) emphasized this is one of the main reasons leaders rather deceive than tell lies. Mitchell and Prins (2004), additionally, set the environment of opportunities as a highly important determinant when considering lying as a means of diversion, and deceit. Lying at the international, inter-state level is conditioned by the amount of trust between the states, and when these are rivalry states, the chances of effective lying strongly decrease (Mearsheimer, 2011; Mitchell and Prins, 2004). Moreover, damage done when leaders are lying to their own citizens can severely impact the domestic relations and "foster a culture of dishonesty," (Mearsheimer, 2011, pp. 105). Considering the risks of possible destructive consequences, and, secondly, limited opportunities, why do leaders lie? Leaders do lie, because they *can*; however, at this point the subject of analysis becomes the public to whom the lies are told. Regardless of the fact that the focus point of Mearsheimer's book, and this article, is set on leaders, the public is the main judge, the decision-maker of how a lie shall be received. As follows, the audience becomes the leading actor in this relation, and the one that decides whether a *lie* is a lie, or the *truth*. The power of defining the truthfulness, and therefore *reality*, lies in the hands of the audience. No lie comes useful, when not believed. Lies need to be *reasonable*, and we need a reason to believe them; or, at least, no reason not to believe them.

And "reason deceives us more than nature," as has Paul Virilo (1999, pp. 1) borrowed from Vauvenargues to open his first chapter on the Strategy of Deception. We believe a lie, when a lie seems *logical* to us (the lie is compatible with our perception), when we have no reason (awareness of (all) true facts) not to believe it, and, when we want to

believe it (it appeals to our emotions). All these scenarios are related to trust; which is especially relevant for democracies; and, *vice versa*, implies that distrust between rivalry states (as Mearsheimer, and Mitchel and Prins conclude) decreases the possibility of lying of their leaders.

Followed out of these personal insights of an individual, are constituencies of a basic methodological apparatus of classical rhetoric. Eugene Garver<sup>9</sup> uses Aristotle's Rhetoric, in words of Johnatan Shay (2000), as a "handbook for leaders," where he examines the importance of rhetoric in balancing the relationship between the leader, and the lead, in pursuing their aims, and fulfilling their parts. Aristotle notes that a leader (of a military) in his aim to obtain the trust of the lead (the soldiers) appeals to one's character (*ethos*), one's reason (*logos*), and one's emotion (*pathos*). If a leader, therefore, understands, and uses the channels, and triggers, of persuasion, that in fact already strongly implies a conscious alternation of information. Every single individual does it, sub-consciously, or consciously, since it is an instinctive approach to every situation. Stories will always be presented in a believable manner, adopted for a target audience. It is very fascinating though, leaders lie to a very broad domestic, and international audience, and, if believed, possess the power to determine the reality of everyone. The fact elites can be so widely successful in deception to an extent is supported by the concept of false consciousness, a Marxist notion, used mainly by Engels, and similar studies of other members of the Frankfurt Critical School such as Adorno, Horkheim, and Marcuse on the topics of manipulation, power- and social structures, and group behaviour.

Despite the fact that emotions are probably a concept of social sciences hardest to measure, it is indisputable they majorly impact our perception; moreover, even when we are aware we could be manipulated, we do allow others, and, especially ourselves, to be subjected to lying and deceit. Loseke (2009) reminds us that observers agree that emotional appeal is critical for persuasive communication, and later on deals with the question of evoking similar emotions in different individuals through the mechanism of "emotion codes." She specifically deals with the analysis of statements at the levels of

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<sup>9</sup> See Eugene Garver, 1994, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character*, University of Chicago Press.

high politics, and generally argues that rhetoric of emotion's appeal commonly accompanies speeches intended for activation of population when facing a probable war crisis, or such. The latter reminds one of types of lying, and deceit, mentioned by Mearsheimer, and Mitchell and Prins. Interestingly enough, current studies of war, and its dimensions, regularly include parameters of emotions, and their effect, despite the common belief that 'emotions make one irrational,' what testifies to the importance of emotion's appeal not as a negative pole of strategic action, but as a crucial part of it.

Jonathan Mercer (2010) argues that even rationality depends on emotion in co-creating beliefs. Following, "a belief that another's commitment is credible depends on one's selection (and interpretation) of evidence and one's assessment of risk, both of which rely on emotion." He notes, "feeling is believing, because people use emotions as evidence," (*ibid*, pp. 1) therefore, "the experience of emotion /.../ is not true or false," (*ibid*, pp. 3). Even though, he distinguishes rational knowledge from beliefs, he sheds attention on the impact of beliefs in designing policies. Despite the fact he understands knowledge as "risk free," one is to question the *relativity*, and process of acquiring knowledge as well. Research has shown that feelings influence explanations (Heider, and Ortony, Clore, and Collins in Mercer, 2010). Mercer (2010, pp. 6) offers another very important conclusion regarding trust – that it is mainly emotionally based, while one would presume trust bases on critically evaluated past experience. Trust does relate, on the other hand, to credibility. Mercer (2010, pp. 14) argues, credibility, as well, is an emotional belief, since the concept of credibility needs to be accompanied by strong emotion to turn into *knowledge*, a strong persuasion one can, and should, trust the credible actor. Once again, "one's assessment of actor's credibility depends on the selection (and interpretation) of evidence and on the calculation of risk," moreover, it depends on what evidence one decides to consider in the first place (*ibid.*).

The lies are, since intended for a broad audience to believe them, designed in a manner as to represent the leaders as trustworthy, and credible. The best tactic to persuade the public, as research suggests, is to appeal to people's emotions, what can be done with exploitation of collective memory (Carpenter, 2011; Binder, and Roberts, 1998, and others), strategically designed media campaigns (Mazzoleni, and Schultz, 2010; Slater, 2004), and appeal to social beliefs (as Mercer

(2010) suggests, credibility, nationalism, justice, etc., are beliefs) to create the context of false consciousness (Engels), which shall enable the leaders to deceive the public. As following, the author seeks to conclude that *lying* should not be regarded as an individual act, but rather as a *reciprocal relation*, since the act of lying (due to the strategic use of intentional lying) is to be fully deduced only after the audience's feedback.

### **DID LEADERS LIE IN THE BALKAN WARS?**

Many believe there are strong parallels between the US invasion in Iraq, and in the Balkans. Both were *wars of choices*, and, therefore, needed to activate the support of the public, domestic and foreign, with skilful means, and adjusted rhetoric, since the Iraqi, and Serbian, regimes did not directly threaten the USA (Editor's note, Blumenthal, 2003). Given the fact Mearsheimer uses lots of examples from the US foreign policy in the Middle East, there are some similarities with the case of the Balkan wars. "Both wars provoked strong public opposition in Europe and elsewhere and criticism that insufficient ground forces were being brought to bear against the enemy. Both wars ended with sudden U.S. victories. And both defined the national security visions of their respective administrations," (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, "in the case of Iraq, the Bush administration ignored NATO, /.../, went to war over the expressed opposition of much of the world, /.../ and left the future of the United Nations and NATO in doubt. In Kosovo, by contrast, the Clinton administration worked through NATO, keeping its shaky coalition together in the Western alliance's first war. Clinton's war brought Europe and America closer together and invested NATO and trans-Atlantic relations with a renewed sense of purpose," (*ibid.*). On the other hand, certain speculations accompanying the war in Kosovo have implied Clinton intentionally got involved in a non-relevant war in order to distract his own domestic audience from the scandal with Monica Lewinsky.<sup>10</sup>

Carpenter (2011, pp. 13–14), in his article *Cynical Myths and US Military Crusades in the Balkans*, after the examination of the numbers of casualties portrayed in media, and communicated by the leaders of

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<sup>10</sup>The latter story has been used as an inspiration for the film *Wag the Dog* (1997) that presents the designing of a campaign to distract the American public from a personal incident of the President.

the intervention versus the actual numbers of casualties of all parties in the conflicts,<sup>11</sup> argues that the inflated number of casualties in the Bosnian war served political purpose, mainly the mobilization of support for the US led Nord Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention. The importance of deploying NATO into its first war in 50 years renewed the purpose of the organization, and opened a new era of the US and European security, and foreign policy. As follows, many believe the circumstances, and public presentations have been adjusted to serve the purpose of establishing new practise of military, and humanitarian, intervention on the part of the Western allies.

Emphasis on the rhetoric of the leaders, and media broadcastings, has been of severe importance again so, when narrating a public discourse on the war in Bosnia, and later in Kosovo. Carpenter's article further deals with the media stories designed in order to (emotionally) appeal to the American, and Western-allies', public, and generate common Western support for the intervention. He recalls the "famous incident" of the television broadcasting the image of "an emancipated prisoner, Fikret Alić, ribs showing, looking out at reporters through barbed wires in what the media identified as a Serb-run detention camp," which attempted to revoke the memory of the Holocaust (*ibid*, pp. 15). He further explains the criticism does not apply to the reporters' incapability, and bad reporting, but tends to imply they "manipulated the camera angles /.../ to convey a deliberately misleading impression," (Brock in *ibid*.).

The parallels the media, and political officials, have drawn with the World War II horrors are discussed in ironically titled *The Only Good Serb Is a ...* by Binder and Roberts (1998), who shed light to the (*unprofessional*, and *unfair*) biases of public, and official, statements by Biden, Hoolbroke, and Madeleine Albright (at the time the US ambassador to the United Nations). They use Philip Jenkins' criticism of the one-sidedly attributed blame for the Bosnia war, and the analogies made between the Serbian behaviour in the war, and the Nazi's genocide of Jews. Jenkins related the ongoing massacre in the Balkans with the two indirectly coinciding events in the USA; the premiere of the film *The Schindler's List*<sup>12</sup>, and opening of the United

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<sup>11</sup> See International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ITFY), 2010, Office of the Prosecutor, »Bosnia and Herzegovina: Death Toll,« the Hague.

<sup>12</sup> The film was directed and co-produced by Steven Spielberg, and scripted by Steven Zaillian (1993).

States Holocaust Museum in Washington, what all together, in his opinion, created a context for the people's reminiscence of the World War II. He continues, if Bosnia was a 1990s Holocaust, then it should have had war tribunals and trials for the involved war criminals, what, in 1993, on the strong initiative of the previously mentioned Albright, resulted in establishment of the ITFY (Jenkins in *ibid*, pp. 40–42).

Kissinger stated before the war that “the proposed deployment in Kosovo does not deal with any threat to American security,” (Inhofe, 1999, pp. 2), what in fact disproves Mearsheimer's presupposition of leaders lying for national interest. The particular conspiracy implications about the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, in rough, do testify to the idea of the diversionary theory of war, however, there are little concrete empirical data to support the thesis the scandal was the main reason to externalize the domestic turmoil abroad. Nevertheless, the previously mentioned parameters of the NATO action, firstly, in Bosnia, and secondly, in Kosovo, argue to the interest of the re-establishment, and renovation of the purposes, and practices of the allied organization. And thus add another motive for lying, and deceit, in the international politics; the interest of the international organizations, and their survival, as actors (of ever-growing importance) in the international community. Since liberal institutionalists claim international organization is, indeed, more than a summation of its members, and takes on ‘a life of its own,<sup>13</sup> the evolving international system would offer a researcher a plethora of cases to support the thesis, starting with the European Union, and, as mentioned NATO.

## CONCLUSIONS

With respect to Mearsheimer's categories of lying the example of American behaviour within the context of the Balkan war definitely excludes only inter-state lying, since the countries were not in a rivalry relation. With a safe claim it positively affirms fearmongering was intended, while labelling the interventions as any sort of cover-ups is always risky to border onto grounds of conspiracy theories, and due to the lack of internal information almost impossible to definitely prove. Mearsheimer did not analyse, and offer cases for social imperialism, however, if amended with the context of the diversionary theory

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<sup>13</sup> Lecture on International Security Organizations (Metropolitan University Prague, unpublished).

it could come useful regarding the Balkan case. Nationalist myth-making, though, has the best potential for specific analysis of the states', and ethnic groups', relations in the Balkans.

Mearsheimer discusses *lying* with the conviction that leader lie for the well-being of the state; the diversionary theory, however, examines cases of deceiving the domestic public for leaders' personal benefit. They both agree the regime type massively influences whether the leader considers lying; and while democracies have more motives for lying, especially to their own nationals, they are less likely to pursue such behaviour because of a lower probability that the lies will be believed, and reach their purpose. On the international level, lying to other states will be considered as an attempt to protect the national interest; moreover, due to the credibility that democracies try to sustain in the international community, the chances their lies will be effective are far greater. Dictatorships, on the other hand, may have even stronger incentives to lie to international community, and especially to rivalry states, than democracies, but are faced with lower probability of being successful in such behaviour because of the lack of trustworthiness, and credibility in international environment.

It is possible to conclude that neither regime type has an optimal scenario, when it comes to balancing their motives, and the limited circumstances. In the end, lying in politics is ought to be a strategic act, and therefore, highly depended on the calculations of risks. These are, however, hardly detachable from one's beliefs, and emotions, regardless if on the part of the leader (*the liar*), or the lead (the receiver). Therefore, the author concludes lying, deceiving, and truth telling, should always be considered as an interaction, a construct established between multiple parties, not solely as a monologue of a leader, or the elite. There are numerous approaches a scholar could (and should) adopt while examining the concept of lying in politics. We also tried to point out some of the aspects of this topic in some selected cases of lying in the case of the Balkan wars two decades ago.

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