

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DONALD TRUMP'S 2026 SPEECHES ON THE USA-IRAN CONFLICT: EXPLORING NATIONALISM, IDEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE "US VERSUS THEM" DICHOTOMY THROUGH VAN DIJK'S SOCIO-COGNITIVE MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the political speeches of Donald Trump in the context of the possible war between the USA and Iran in 2026, adopting the socio-cognitive model of Teun A. van Dijk in the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Objectives: to witness the development of nationalism, ideological differences and "Us versus Them" concept through language. They selected qualitative design and selected four speeches for closer inspection which were related to the conflict. These talks were analyzed from three different perspectives: macro, micro and socio-cognitive levels. The findings indicate that Trump present the USA as the champions of peace and civilization and Iran as a threat. He employs a variety of rhetorical devices, such as particular word selection, pronouns, metaphors, rhetoric, and exaggeration to support his actions and reinforce his ideas. The research demonstrates that speech can influence public opinion, stir the national sentiment and foster the balance of power. On the whole, it shows how political discussion contributes to the development of ideas, the construction of national identities and the legitimation of actions in international conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Political Discourse and the Role of Language in Politics

Undoubtedly, political discourse is powerful in the modern world because it helps form public opinion, develop ideology, and shape political reality in domestic policy as well as international relations. A Critical Discourse Analysis demonstrates that language is not neutral but connected to power and domination. The elites know it perfectly well since they use speeches, interviews, statements made in the media, and controversial debates to convince the audience and support government decisions in any way possible. Governments use language to interpret

certain concepts related to nationalism, security, warfare, and international politics in general. However, when the countries are in tension, political speeches play an even more critical role. They do not only provide information, but also appeal to the audience's emotions, strengthen the loyalty to the government's position, and transform beliefs. The speeches made by Donald Trump during the 2026 USA-Iran Conflict are an excellent example of political discourse as a means of using ideology and persuasion in practice. Indeed, Donald Trump used multiple techniques in his rhetoric to interpret the events from the viewpoint of the USA, framing Iran as a threat to

peace worldwide (Rahmani and Saeed 2024, Rouabhia 2024).

Power Politics and the USA–Iran Conflict

The conflict between the USA and Iran has been one of the most difficult geopolitical confrontations in modern international relations. The interaction between both nations was characterized by ideological conflicts, military opposition, economic sanctions, and nuclear controversies along with the struggle for dominance in the Middle East region. With respect to the 2026 conflict, political rhetoric has become a powerful tool for legitimizing actions taken by national leaders and gaining support at the domestic and international levels. Power politics implies the struggle between nations that is aimed at retaining authority and influence within the international community. In this regard, political statements can be used as instruments of legitimizing the decisions concerning military activities, economic sanctions, and foreign policy measures. Politicians tend to create discourses using notions of patriotism, safety, self-protection, and moral dominance in order to win approval from their audiences. Thus, in Trump's speeches, the USA can be presented as a guardian of peace, democracy, and stability in the world, whereas Iran may be represented as an aggressor or destabilizer. Such constructions show how the language of politics helps create a positive image of one's nation as opposed to the negative image of enemies. As such, analyzing the speeches of Trump in relation to the USA-Iran dispute gives important insights about the role of discourse as an effective tool of power politics and ideology in international disputes (Ahmad, Nazim et al. 2025).

Nationalism and the “Us vs Other” Ideological Framework

One of the distinguishing features of political discourse is the establishment of ideologies like nationalism and ideological polarization using "Us" versus "Other." Nationalism is seen as a concept that involves the creation of a national spirit and patriotism among people, especially at periods of war or political uncertainty. Politicians usually engage in nationalism as a way of creating cohesion and rallying people behind government

policies (Heiskanen 2021). Ideological representation can be achieved using the "Us vs Other" technique where political leaders create a clear divide between the in-group and out-group. In his book on Political Discourse Analysis, Teun A. van Dijk suggests that political discourse often uses the ideological square whereby speakers project the positive aspects of Us while pointing out the negative attributes of Them. Such political discourse techniques are employed as a strategy to present one's nation as rational, moral, peaceful, and justified, and their opponents as irrational, immoral, and a threat to peace. Some of the linguistic features that can be used in the speech of Trump about Iran can include pronouns like "we," "our," "they," and "them." Another set of language devices could be lexicon with terms like "security," "freedom," "terrorism," and "threat." Hence, nationalism and “Us vs. Other” theory play a crucial role in discourse analysis as they demonstrate how language creates identity, polarizes ideologies, and influences politics during periods of international conflict and political unrest (Cooper 2025).

Van Dijk’s Socio-Cognitive Model and the Significance of the Research

The selected methodology for the investigation of the issue in question is Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model. The selected model is chosen because it represents an elaborate theoretical tool to examine the connection between discourse, ideology, cognition, and power. In turn, the proposed model can be considered one of the most important ones in Critical Discourse Analysis due to its multidimensional perspective towards the analysis of linguistic phenomena. Specifically, the method includes macroanalysis, which focuses on themes and topics, and microanalysis, which involves syntax, lexis, rhetoric, and pronominalization. Furthermore, the author pays special attention to the connection between discourse and beliefs, ideological perception, and social attitudes of the target audience. The idea of ideological square proposed by van Dijk is particularly relevant for political speeches as they tend to represent positive images of the speaker and negative ones of their opponents (Van Dijk 2014). Thus, the selected

theoretical framework is appropriate for this paper since it allows conducting an analysis of discourses used in Trump's speeches during the USA-Iran conflict, which are filled with strong ideological references associated with nationalism, politics, and polarization. While numerous studies have focused on the political speech of Trump, there is a scarcity of literature regarding the analysis of the US-Iran issue of 2026 from the socio-cognitive perspective of van Dijk. Hence, this research aims to provide substantial contributions to the existing knowledge by analyzing the linguistic construction of nationalism and "Us versus Others" in Trump's discourses and their role in shaping public perceptions and legitimizing political acts.

An analysis of the speeches made by Trump during the USA-Iran conflict in 2026 reveals the considerable importance of political discourse as one of the primary ways of creating ideology, nationalism, and narratives within international politics. First of all, such an analysis proves that language used within the political context is not only informative, but also persuasive and ideological in nature, which can be viewed as means of legitimizing any political actions. By using nationalist discourse and the so-called "Us vs Others" framework, Trump's speeches promote a positive image of the United States, while at the same time presenting Iran as a threat to peace and stability in the region. Moreover, the research sheds light on the mechanisms through which political discourse helps to strengthen collective identity, mobilize population, and polarize ideologies in times of international disputes and tension. Applying Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model in the context of Critical Discourse Analysis, it becomes possible to understand the link between discourse, cognition, ideology, and power.

2. Literature review

There has been a growth in using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an approach to analyzing how power relations and ideologies are constructed by the use of language in politics. Rather than viewing language in terms of neutrality, CDA recognizes it as a social practice that is linked to political realities. It is also noted in many studies on political discourses that

languages have always been used by political actors in order to emphasize some ideologies at the same time hide others (Sajjad, 2015).

Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach has been influential in this area since it emphasizes the connection between discourse structures and shared beliefs and representations, thus giving an insight into the production and reproduction of ideology (Wang, 2010).

Ideology, Power, and Polarization

The most important issue recognized by researchers is the link between ideology and politics. In general, political speeches are always biased, meaning that they always seek to propagate a particular world view. One major finding in several studies is that politicians tend to differentiate between us and them, in line with the ideological square presented by van Dijk. For instance, when looking at Obama's speeches about the Middle East, it is clear how his policies can be described using positive words like peace, democracy, and development, while the opposition to American policy is referred to as unstable or violent (Sajjad, 2015).

Furthermore, an analysis of Putin's speech about Ukraine shows how Russia is perceived as a victim of Western aggression, whereas the USA and her allies are described as deceitful and aggressive (Kadim, 2023). Thus, ideological polarization can be seen as quite a common phenomenon in political discourse.

Representation of the USA and Iran (Self vs. Other)

In addition to this, research related to media discourse and online communication demonstrates that the use of modern communication tools makes such polarization even stronger because new media platforms tend to support only partisan views (Baum & Groeling, 2008). Moreover, an examination of political discourse during the time of President Trump showed that there is a growing tendency toward incivility and negative partisanship (Nithyanand et al., 2017). It is necessary to note that political discourse is characterized by the presence of certain representations of different groups of people. In general, the representation pattern

includes the description of the nation in question as reasonable and moral, whereas the “other” is always viewed negatively. For example, in studies conducted on American political speech, America is represented as an advocate of peace and stability even in the case of describing conflict scenarios (Sajjad, 2015). On the other hand, rival countries tend to be linked with danger and chaos. Such an approach is not only used by American speakers but also appears in other cases, including in the speeches made at the United Nations, where politicians try to establish themselves as responsible nations (Sharififar & Rahimi, 2013). Such linguistic representations can be constructed by using pronouns. For example, “we” and “our” tend to emphasize unity and positivity, while “they” and “them” create distance and negativity. Analysis of presidential debates shows that such a technique is actually used intentionally for self-promotion (Al-Azzawi & Saleh, 2021).

Discursive Strategies in Political Speeches

In addition to ideology, the literature on the topic highlights a number of discursive strategies utilized by political leaders in speeches. Such techniques vary in terms of linguistic layers and contribute significantly to meaning-making. The first one is lexicalization, meaning that words can be chosen in such a way that they influence the audience's interpretation of the message. Politicians tend to pick words with positive or negative connotations, using them as a means of persuasion of their own interpretation of events. Examples of such words may include freedom, security, or threat (Kenzhekanova et al., 2015). A second important tactic of rhetoric is the use of a metaphor, especially a war metaphor. Studies of the discourse of Donald Trump prove that he tends to use militarized metaphors to frame political problems as a war, which further leads to increased polarization of society (Alserda, 2024). Hyperbole and exaggeration may be regarded as other means that are frequently employed by politicians. They may use such strategies to emphasize the seriousness of the problem in question, thus justifying any actions taken by them. Also, appeal to authority is a common tool used for building an argumentative case (Aydın, 2016). Victimization is another strategy that is

widely utilized. Leaders try to represent their country as victims of aggression or some injustice, which helps them explain why they should engage in either defensive or aggressive actions. The example of conflict-related discourses is self-evident (Kadim, 2023).

War Rhetoric and Legitimization of Conflicts

Also connected to the two types of rhetoric are the war rhetoric strategies. Research demonstrates that political discourse often tends to frame the conflict as a necessity and legitimize actions taken to combat it. Through the emphasis of danger and threats, politicians can rationalize any actions as needed. The speech of Obama regarding the Middle Eastern politics presents both concepts of peace and cooperation and rationale behind intervention. Likewise, war rhetoric in Trump's political discourse adds another layer of aggression to the already polarized political atmosphere (Alserda, 2024). These approaches present highly complex situations in a simplistic moralistic manner to make them understandable for the general public.

Using van Dijk's Model of Social Cognition in Discourse Analysis

Van Dijk's approach to studying political discourse is utilized in almost all studies presented above. Most researchers use macro-discourse, micro-discourse, and sociological aspects of the analyzed discourse as its components (Susanti et al., 2022). While using the theory is quite widespread, some researchers do not implement all possible levels of the model in their studies. In other words, some scholars tend to stick to textual analysis of discourse, identifying linguistic markers and neglecting cognitive aspect of audience reactions (Gadalla, 2012).

Research Gaps

While prior research has been instrumental in shedding light on political discourse, ideology, and power dynamics, there are several areas that require further exploration within this field. First, the body of literature does not contain enough studies dedicated to the examination of Donald Trump's speeches with respect to the Iran-USA controversy based on van Dijk's socio-cognitive

theory. While there are several works devoted to the analysis of Trump's discourse from the perspectives of metaphorical language use, polarization, and populism, these works fail to provide insights into the construction of ideological frameworks, especially the ideological square, in Trump's foreign policy discourse towards Iran. Thus, the representation of "US vs THEM" in Trump's speeches about Iran should be given additional attention. Second, a great number of studies are preoccupied with linguistic features such as lexis, pronoun usage, and rhetorical strategies but often lack discussion of their socio-cognitive functions. In other words, scholars seldom pay attention to how discursive strategies used by Trump impact the cognitive processes of his audience and solidify their ideological beliefs. Furthermore, despite the recognition that media play a vital role in political communication, the interplay between political speech and digital media as well as its impact on the creation of conflict discourse has not yet been extensively explored. Regarding the conflict between Iran and USA, it becomes necessary to examine the ways in which the discourse of President Trump is amplified and interpreted via digital media.

Conclusion

It becomes apparent from the literature that political discourse is indeed an effective instrument for ideologization, influencing public opinion, and providing legitimacy to political acts. Using a range of tactics, such as polarizing, metaphorical, and lexical discourses, political leaders create differences between "us" and "them" and push forward their own ideologies. However, it is important to carry out more research on how the discourse utilized by Trump when discussing the USA-Iran relations is analyzed based on van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of analysis.

Research Objectives

- The aim is to identify the linguistic strategies employed in Donald Trump's speeches during the USA-Iran conflict within the socio-cognitive framework of Teun A. van Dijk.

- The objective is to investigate how the ideological framework of "Us versus Them" is created in Trump's political discourse about Iran.
- To find out how nationalism and ideological polarization impact the representation of the United States and Iran in Trump's discourse.
- To find out how the linguistic strategies, such as lexicalization, pronoun use, metaphors, and hyperbole, were used to legitimize political actions and conflict narrative.
- To explore the ideological implications of Trump's political discourse during the USA-Iran conflict.

Research Questions

- What linguistic and discursive strategies be identified in Donald Trump's speeches during USA-Iran conflict based on the sociocognitive model by van Dijk?
- In what way does the "Us versus Them" ideological framework appear in Trump's political discourse about Iran?
- How do nationalism and ideological polarization affect the representation of the United States and Iran in Trump's discourse?
- Which linguistic strategies including lexicalization, pronoun usage, metaphors, and hyperboles are used to legitimize political actions and conflict discourse?

3. Research Methodology

Research Design

This paper adopts a qualitative research design that involves Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) under the socio-cognitive model of Teun A. van Dijk. The qualitative method is appropriate since the study attempts to examine ideological meanings, linguistic approaches, and discourse patterns contained within Donald Trump's political speeches about Iran.

In this research, there is an interest in analyzing how language can be utilized to construct political ideologies, nationalism, polarizing, and the "Us vs. Them" concept in political discourse. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive perspective is employed because it links discourse, cognition, and society in the investigation of political discourse.

Data Collection

For this study, the dataset includes four press conferences by Donald Trump relating to the political tension between US and Iran.

The selected speeches have:

- references to Iran
- narratives of political conflict
- discourses of national security
- representation of ideologies
- persuasive political rhetoric

The chosen speeches have been gathered from various public media sources and transcribed manually.

Sampling Technique

The technique adopted by this research is purposive sampling since the speeches have a direct correlation with the research questions and provide good instances of political discourse in terms of nationalism and conflicts.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Speeches were analyzed employing the socio-cognitive framework of Critical Discourse Analysis proposed by Teun A. van Dijk.

Three levels of analysis were employed as follows:

1. Macro-Level Analysis

Macro-level analysis focuses on the overall meaning and ideological structure of the discourse.

A. Global Topics and Themes

This section examines:

- Main topics discussed in the speech
- Recurring themes
- Topic organization and transitions
- Thematic hierarchy
- Foregrounded and backgrounded information

Analytical Questions

- What are the central themes of the speech?
- Which issues receive greater emphasis?
- Which topics are marginalized or omitted?
- How are themes organized to achieve persuasive goals?

B. Ideological Positions

This section identifies ideological representations through Van Dijk's ideological square.

Areas of Analysis

In-Group Representation ("Us")

- Positive self-presentation
- Construction of national identity
- Heroic or moral characteristics

Out-Group Representation ("Them")

- Negative other-presentation
- Demonization or delegitimization
- Attribution of blame

Value Systems

- Moral values
- Political beliefs
- Nationalistic assumptions
- Economic and military ideologies

Analytical Questions

- How is the speaker's group portrayed?
- How is the opposing group portrayed?
- What values are promoted?

C. Presuppositions and Implications

This section investigates hidden meanings embedded in discourse.

Areas of Analysis

- Assumptions presented as facts
- Implied meanings
- Unstated conclusions
- Taken-for-granted knowledge

Analytical Questions

- What assumptions does the speech rely on?
- What ideas are implied rather than explicitly stated?
- What information is omitted?

2. Micro-Level Analysis

Micro-level analysis examines linguistic and rhetorical features of the discourse.

A. Lexical Choices (Vocabulary)

Analysis of word selection and semantic meanings.

Areas of Analysis

- Connotation

- Semantic fields
- Euphemisms
- Dysphemisms
- Evaluative language
- Metaphors

Analytical Questions

- What vocabulary is used to describe different actors?
- What emotions do specific words evoke?
- How do lexical choices reinforce ideology?

B. Syntactic Structures

Analysis of sentence structures and grammatical patterns.

Areas of Analysis

- Declarative sentences
- Imperatives
- Passive and active voice
- Personal pronouns
- Repetition
- Lists and accumulations
- Conditional structures

Analytical Questions

- How does sentence structure create authority?
- How are agency and responsibility assigned?
- How does grammar support persuasion?

C. Modality and Certainty

Analysis of the speaker's degree of commitment to statements.

Areas of Analysis

- High certainty expressions
- Possibility and probability
- Obligation and necessity
- Threats and promises

Analytical Questions

- How certain does the speaker appear?
- How are future actions presented?
- What level of authority is communicated?

D. Rhetorical Devices

Analysis of persuasive linguistic strategies.

Areas of Analysis

- Hyperbole
- Historical comparisons
- Metaphors

- Repetition
- Emotional appeals
- Religious references
- Self-praise

Analytical Questions

- Which rhetorical devices are employed?
- How do they influence audience perception?
- How do they strengthen ideological messages?

3. Socio-Cognitive Analysis

This stage examines the relationship between discourse, cognition, and society.

A. Speech Acts

Based on Speech Act Theory, the analysis identifies communicative functions.

Categories

- Asserting
- Justifying
- Threatening
- Persuading
- Promising
- Praising
- Memorializing
- Shaming

Analytical Questions

- What actions are performed through language?
- How does the speaker attempt to influence audiences?

B. Institutional Context

Analysis of the political and institutional setting.

Areas of Analysis

- Speaker's authority
- Intended audiences
- Political circumstances
- Institutional power

Analytical Questions

- What institutional role does the speaker occupy?
- How does the context shape discourse?

C. Power Relations

Analysis of dominance and control within discourse.

Areas of Analysis

- Representation of authority
- Construction of legitimacy
- Exclusion of alternative voices
- **Power asymmetries**

Analytical Questions

- Who is empowered?
- Who is marginalized?
- How is dominance justified?

D. Mental Models and Representation

A core component of Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach.

Areas of Analysis

Participants

- Representation of self
- Representation of opponents
- Representation of allies
- Representation of citizens

Events and Sequence

- Construction of historical narratives
- Chronological organization
- Cause-and-effect relationships

Causes and Effects

- Attribution of responsibility
- Blame assignment
- Justification of actions

Emotional Responses

- Fear
- Pride
- Patriotism
- Anger
- Optimism
- Contempt

Implicit Meanings

- Shared background knowledge
- Ideological assumptions
- Hidden messages
- Unstated implications

Analytical Questions

- What cognitive frames are activated?
- How are events interpreted?
- What emotions are elicited?

- What implicit assumptions guide audience understanding?

4. ANALYSIS

This study looks at four US president speeches using van Dijk's CDA framework. The talks, which happened between February 28 and April 6, 2026, discuss the start, growth, and wrap-up of U.S. actions against Iran. Together, they create a picture of how war is declared and celebrated. First, the president announces the war (February 28). Next, he talks about a big operation and a key enemy leader's death (March 1). Then, there's an update on the winning side (April 1). Lastly, he holds a press conference connecting strikes and a rescue effort to Easter (April 6). Overall, the talks show how leaders use words to legitimize and brag about military efforts. So, these four texts offer a rare look at that process.

Each of the four speeches shows three main analysis patterns. On a big picture level, or the Macro level, all speeches show the US as the defender of civilization against Iran's evil regime. When you look at the Micro level though, even as the speeches move from formal proclamations to more boastful narratives, the goal stays the same – making American military action seem normal and making the enemy less human. At what they call the Sociocognitive level, the speeches keep creating mental models that deny Iran's independence, shut out opposing views, and reinforce American exceptionalism and divine mandate ideas.

1. Macro-Level Analysis: Global Topics, Ideological Positions, and Presuppositions

At a bigger picture level, the four speeches all follow a similar theme that builds over time. On February 28, the first speech sets up the main idea: Iran has been aggressive for 47 years, so unilateral military action is justified. The next day, the stakes get raised when the second speech declares Operation Epic Fury and reports that Khamenei has been killed, painting this as a triumph destined to happen. In April, things keep rolling. On April 1, the third speech is basically a victory celebration. It lists Iran's military losses and ends with some tough ultimatums. Then, at the press conference on April 6, the story gets even more

dramatic. They describe rescuing downed airmen as a miraculous Easter resurrection.

Across the four texts, the speeches draw a clear In-Group/Out-Group line. The U.S. is shown as free, favored by God, and orderly. Meanwhile, the Iranian regime gets tagged with negative terms, like it's the obvious enemy such as 'wicked,' 'vile,' 'fanatical,' and 'the world's number one state sponsor of terror.' In all four speeches, this binary stays the same, indicating it's more of a fixed ideological framework than a reaction to changing events. By April 6, Iran is portrayed as so dismantled that it can barely even communicate anymore 'like 2000 years ago, with children bringing a note back and forth,' completing a rhetorical arc from existential threat to humiliated non-entity.

Presuppositions deepen across the text. The February 28 speech presupposes that diplomacy has been wiped out ('Iran refused, just as it has for decades and decades'), while the March 1 speech drops any reference to prior diplomacy fully ('These intolerable threats will not continue any longer'), implying it was never viable. By April 1, the speaker presupposes his right to determine Iran's new government's legitimacy ('The new group is less radical and much more reasonable'), and by April 6, regime change – denied as a stated goal – is simultaneously claimed as a naturally achieved outcome ('We have regime change, we do'). The progressive naturalisation of regime change across these presuppositions is one of the most analytically significant patterns in the corpus.

2. Micro-Level Analysis: Lexical Choices, Syntax, Modality, and Rhetorical Devices

At the micro level, the speeches employ a consistent set of lexical and syntactic strategies, though the register shifts from formally presidential in February to colloquial and performative by April 6. Across all four texts, the U.S. is consistently the grammatical agent of constructive action ('we destroyed,' 'we protected,' 'we rescued'), while Iran occupies the patient role when it suffers harm and the agent role only when it inflicts harm ('Iran carried out,' 'Iran launched,' 'Iran refused'). This agent/patient distribution is systematic rather than incidental, functioning to

naturalize American violence as reactive and Iranian suffering as self-caused.

The modality pattern across all four speeches is notably uniform: high certainty dominates ('They will never have a nuclear weapon'; 'Iran's navy is gone'; 'It will be certain death'), with hedging appearing rarely and only on minor tactical points. This near-total suppression of epistemic qualification presents outcomes as established facts rather than uncertain military claims, foreclosing the possibility of challenge or debate. In the February 28 speech, the certainty is prospective ('We will prevail'); by April 1, it is retrospective ('Iran's navy is gone... their air force is gone'), converting promise into reported fact.

The April 6 speech marks a rhetorical departure through the elaboration of sacred narrative. The rescue of downed airmen is mapped onto the Easter resurrection story: 'Shot down on Good Friday... hidden in a cave on Saturday... rescued at sunrise on Easter Sunday. God is good.' This typological framing – absent from the earlier speeches – recruits a specifically Christian cultural register to sanctify military action, broadening the ideological work of the text beyond secular patriotism into theological legitimation. Across all four speeches, divine appeals appear consistently in the closing benedictions ('May God bless the United States of America'), but only in April 6 does the sacred frame saturate the body of the speech itself.

3. Sociocognitive Level: Speech Acts, Institutional Context, Power Relations, and Mental Models

At the sociocognitive level, the four speeches collectively construct a mental model of the conflict in which the United States holds absolute sovereign authority not only over its own military conduct but over Iran's political future. This model requires the activation of deep cultural frames – American exceptionalism, liberation mythology, and divine mandate – that are never argued for but consistently presupposed. The speeches function not merely as communications about military events but as constitutive speech acts: the February 28 declaration ('A short time ago, the United States military began major combat operations in Iran') does not describe a

war – it is the public announcement that makes the war socially real for the American audience.

The power relations constructed across the corpus are strikingly asymmetric. The Iranian government is progressively stripped of sovereign legitimacy: first declared a 'wicked dictatorship' (February 28), then its supreme leader killed and 'formerly' prefixed to his title (March 1), then its new leadership's reasonableness attributed entirely to American military action (April 1), and finally its communication capacity reduced to pre-modern messenger systems (April 6). Iranian civilians are simultaneously constructed as victims longing for American liberation, passive beneficiaries who cannot determine their own political future – evidenced by the instruction 'When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take' in the February 28 speech.

One of the most significant sociocognitive features across the corpus is the systematic exclusion of perspectives. No speech acknowledges Iranian civilian casualties, Congressional oversight, international law, allied disagreement, or the epistemic limitations of intelligence claims. This exclusion is not random: the absence of counter-voices is constitutive of the discourse's authority, producing a discursive space in which American military action appears as the only possible and universally sanctioned response to Iranian conduct. By April 6, this exclusionary strategy is rendered explicit when a journalist from The New York Times is dismissed mid-press conference: 'You're fake. Go on, please.'

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The application of van Dijk's three-level CDA framework to the four speeches yields a set of integrated findings that illuminate both the internal structure of each text and the discursive logic that connects them across time. The results are presented below according to the three levels of analysis, with examples drawn directly from the speeches.

1. Macro-Level Results and Discussion

1.1 Thematic Escalation and the Architecture of Justification

The macro-level results confirm that the four speeches do not merely describe a sequence of

military events – they construct a cumulative justificatory architecture. Each speech begins from where the previous left off, building a narrative of inevitable, righteous, and successful American action. The February 28 speech establishes the premise (Iran is irredeemably evil and has rejected diplomacy); the March 1 speech celebrates the first major payoff (Khamenei killed, command decapitated); the April 1 speech converts partial success into comprehensive victory; and the April 6 press conference sacralises that victory through divine narrative.

The thematic hierarchy within each speech reinforces this cumulative logic. In the February 28 speech, the nuclear threat is mentioned three times – more than any other theme – establishing it as the primary justification. By April 1, the nuclear threat has receded because it has been narrativised as resolved: 'The regime then sought to rebuild their nuclear program at a totally different location, making clear they had no intention of abandoning their pursuit of nuclear weapons.' The repeated invocation of a 47-year history of Iranian aggression serves to compress diverse and contested events into a single, morally uniform record of evil, activating a historical frame that presupposes American victimhood and Iranian guilt as permanent conditions rather than political interpretations.

1.2 Ideological Binary and Its Reinforcement Across Speeches

The In-Group/Out-Group binary identified at the macro level in each individual speech is not simply repeated across the corpus – it intensifies. In the February 28 speech, the Iranian regime is 'wicked' and 'radical'; by April 6, they are 'crazy bastards' who shoot women between the eyes and are 'coming for Europe.' The escalation in pejorative vocabulary tracks the escalation in military action, suggesting that the language of dehumanisation serves a specific institutional function: to pre-empt moral objection by rendering the enemy categorically beyond the scope of ethical consideration. Van Dijk's observation that CDA reveals how discourse naturalizes ideological positions is strikingly confirmed here: across four speeches, the proposition that Iran deserves to be 'brought back to the stone ages' is not argued but

assumed, and the audience is positioned to receive it as common sense.

American exceptionalism functions as the ideological spine of all four texts. The claim 'No president was willing to do what I am willing to do tonight' (February 28) is both a personal boast and an ideological proposition: that American greatness depends on willingness to act unilaterally. This exceptionalism is explicitly extended by April 1 to a global economic argument ('America is now again the richest, most powerful nation in the world by far') and by April 6 to a geopolitical vision ('To the victor belong the spoils. We haven't heard that in maybe hundreds of years'), normalising imperial extraction as a natural consequence of military superiority.

2. Micro-Level Results and Discussion

2.1 Lexical Patterns: Euphemism, Dysphemism, and Semantic Fields

The micro-level analysis reveals a systematic asymmetry in the lexical treatment of American and Iranian violence. American military force is consistently euphemised: 'combat operations,' 'objectives achieved,' 'strikes,' and 'authority and support' replace direct reference to killing and destruction. Iranian violence, by contrast, is dysphemised into visceral imagery: 'soaked the earth with blood and guts' (February 28); 'responsible for the slaughter of countless thousands of innocent people' (March 1); 'shooting women between the eyes' (April 6). This lexical asymmetry is not stylistic variation – it is a discursive strategy that constructs American violence as institutional and legitimate while constructing Iranian violence as personal, excessive, and barbaric.

A notable micro-level shift across the corpus is the progressive incorporation of commercial and sporting metaphors in the April speeches. The April 1 speech describes Venezuela as a 'joint venture partner,' frames military conquest as economic 'investment,' and compares the duration of Operation Epic Fury to the Vietnam War as if in a sports league table. The April 6 press conference explicitly invokes 'To the victor belong the spoils.' This commercial register, absent from the February 28 speech, suggests an evolution in rhetorical strategy: as military victory is achieved

and the need for initial justification recedes, the discourse shifts toward framing the geopolitical outcomes as natural market consequences rather than political choices.

2.2 Syntactic Dominance and First-Person Singular Authority

The syntactic analysis reveals a clear pattern of first-person singular dominance that intensifies across the corpus. In the February 28 speech, the subject pronoun 'we' predominates, constructing collective national action. By April 1 and April 6, 'I' increasingly displaces 'we': 'I killed General Qassam Soleimani'; 'I terminated the nuclear deal'; 'I gave the order to knock out the biggest bridge in Iran and within ten minutes after I gave that order, that bridge was over.' This syntactic shift concentrates all institutional authority in a single personal will, constructing the speaker as the singular author of historical outcomes and, by extension, as the sole legitimate decision-maker – a construction that implicitly excludes Congressional, allied, and international legal frameworks from relevance.

The modality results confirm what the syntax suggests. High certainty markers dominate all four speeches: outcomes are declared as facts ('Iran's navy is gone'), imperatives replace requests ('Lay down your weapons'), and conditional threats present only binary choices ('full immunity OR certain death'). Hedging appears in only two contexts across all four speeches: acknowledgement of potential American casualties (where uncertainty is a human concession) and minor tactical uncertainty about Iranian military assets (April 6: 'Personally, they say there might be eight [mines]. I don't know. I think they might be none'). The near-total suppression of epistemic qualification is analytically significant: it functions to pre-empt doubt and foreclose the legitimacy of any alternative interpretation of events.

2.3 Rhetorical Devices: Sacred Narrative as the Culminating Strategy

The rhetorical analysis identifies the April 6 Easter typology as the most significant single device across the corpus. The mapping of the pilot rescue onto the passion and resurrection of Christ –

'Shot down on Good Friday... hidden in a cave on Saturday... rescued at sunrise on Easter Sunday. God is good' – draws on a pre-existing cultural narrative of sacrificial suffering followed by miraculous triumph. Unlike the other rhetorical devices deployed across the speeches (repetition, hyperbole, antithesis), this device does not merely amplify a political claim: it places the military operation within a sacred narrative framework that renders critique not just politically inconvenient but spiritually transgressive. The phrase 'God is good' is repeated four times in the April 6 speech, functioning as a liturgical refrain that invites collective affirmation rather than critical evaluation.

3. Sociocognitive Results and Discussion

3.1 Speech Acts and the Performative Construction of War

The sociocognitive analysis confirms that the February 28 declaration ('A short time ago, the United States military began major combat operations in Iran') functions not primarily as an informational statement but as a performative speech act – one that constitutes the social reality of war for the American public. Unlike a military order or an intelligence briefing, the televised presidential address transforms private military action into public, nationally ratified fact. Subsequent speeches build on this performative foundation: the March 1 announcement of Khamenei's death ('Iran's formerly Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei is dead') is simultaneously an announcement and a delegitimation – the prefix 'formerly' strips the title before the sentence ends. The April 6 boast 'I gave the order... and within ten minutes... that bridge was over' performs omnipotence as presidential competence.

The speech act of mourning in the March 1 and April 1 speeches deserves particular attention. The public grieving of fallen American soldiers ('As one nation, we grieve for the true American patriots who have made the ultimate sacrifice') is not merely an expression of sorrow – it is a strategic speech act that mobilises grief to legitimate continuation of the operation. In April 1, fallen soldiers' families are directly cited as demanding the operation's completion: 'Every single one of

the people, their loved ones said, Please, sir, please finish the job. Every one of them.' The instrumentalisation of grief as a call to military action transforms mourning from a space of reflection into a speech act of mobilisation, silencing any interpretation of casualties as grounds for reconsideration.

3.2 Mental Models and the Exclusion of Alternative Perspectives

The mental models constructed across the four speeches share a consistent architecture: the United States as liberator and civilisational protector, the Iranian regime as irredeemably evil, the Iranian people as passive victims longing for American deliverance, and the international community as either grateful beneficiaries or ungrateful free-riders. This architecture is not argued into existence – it is activated through reference to shared cultural knowledge. The repeated invocation of 1983 Beirut bombing, the USS Cole attack, and the 1979 hostage crisis assumes that these events carry pre-established ideological meaning (Iranian culpability, American victimhood) that does not require re-examination.

The progressive stripping of Iranian sovereignty across the mental models constructed in the four speeches constitutes one of the most analytically significant results of this study. In February 28, Iran is a sovereign state with nuclear ambitions; in March 1, its supreme leader is dead and its command 'gone'; in April 1, its new government's legitimacy is attributed to American military action; in April 6, it can no longer communicate, its infrastructure is being systematically destroyed, and its political future is presented as contingent on American approval of a 'deal acceptable to me.' This discursive arc from sovereign state to failed entity under American administration mirrors the imperial logic van Dijk identifies in the ideological dimension of CDA: the naturalisation of power asymmetry through language that presents domination as liberation.

The systematic exclusion of alternative perspectives across all four speeches is the most consistent sociocognitive finding in this study. Congressional oversight, international law, the United Nations, Iranian political opposition,

civilian casualties, domestic antiwar opinion, and the epistemic limitations of real-time military intelligence claims are absent from all four texts. This exclusion is not incidental: it is constitutive of the discourse's authority. A speech that acknowledged international legal obligations, admitted uncertainty about civilian casualty figures, or incorporated dissenting American voices would be a fundamentally different – and discursively weaker – speech. The silence around these perspectives is itself a power relation: it places them outside the boundaries of what counts as relevant or legitimate in the discursive construction of the war.

3.3 Institutionalisation of Unilateralism

A final and overarching finding at the sociocognitive level is the progressive institutionalisation of unilateralism across the four speeches. The February 28 speech notes the absence of Congressional mention but does not actively attack multilateral frameworks. By April 1, allied nations are explicitly shamed for inaction ('Build up some delayed courage. Should have done it before. Should have done it with us as we asked'). By April 6, NATO is declared 'a paper tiger,' Japan, Australia, and South Korea are listed as nations that 'didn't help us,' and the speaker asserts: 'We don't need them, we have the USS Abraham Lincoln.' What begins as the absence of multilateral framing in February becomes by April a positive ideological position: American unilateralism is not a regrettable necessity but the natural and permanent order of global power. The discursive work performed across these four speeches does not merely justify a military operation – it constructs a vision of world order in which international institutions and alliances are optional, contingent on their willingness to subordinate themselves to American strategic will.

6. Limitations

The following points should be noted, as this study offers insightful reflections on the development of ideology, nationalism and the “Us versus Them” issue in the addresses of the controversial leader, Donald Trump, during the 2026 USA-Iran war. The results of this study might be constrained in scope, interpretation and

generalizability. It is helpful to be aware of these limitations as they will help define limits of the study and future directions. Even though there are some restrictions, the research, in general, provides a valuable contribution to the study of Critical Discourse Analysis that centers on the interrelation of language, power, and ideology in a modern political context.

This study has the following limitations:

- The study is limited to four speeches that were given by Donald Trump during the 2026 USA-Iran war, and so the data set of speeches for analysis is relatively narrow.
- The research is based on the viewpoints of Donald Trump, and does not contain speeches, statements, or reactions from the Iranian leaders, Iranian government officials, or other international political figures that have played an active role in the conflict.
- The study uses qualitative research design and has an interpretive nature, meaning that the results obtained from the study may vary based on the analyst's knowledge and interpretation.
- This analysis is limited to Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, and it avoids any other type of Critical Discourse Analysis methods that can give other insights into political discourse.
- The research mainly examines linguistic and textual analysis and does not cover the reception of the speeches, public opinion or the effects of the speeches on listeners and viewers.
- The analysis was not applied to media representations, newspaper coverage of the conflict, social media discussions and other platforms of communication, which could affect the overall picture of the circulation of the discourses.
- The findings cannot be generalized with regard to political speeches, political leaders or international conflicts, as the USA-Iran conflict was unique and the selected speeches were unique.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the discourse of Donald Trump's speeches in the USA-Iran conflict in 2026 from a socio-cognitive perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Teun A. van Dijk. It reveals that

politics is a significant factor in the creation of ideology, nationalism and power relations. Trump has made a point in his speeches to demonstrate that the U.S. is a legitimate and good player and Iran is a bad player and threat. Several linguistic devices were identified that were used to reinforce the ideological differentiation of "Us" and "Them": the use of pronouns, the leverage of certain lexical items, metaphor, hyperbole, persuasive rhetoric. It also showed the power of political language to shape public opinion, to sanction military operations, and to help to define a nation's identity in a time of war. The research utilizes Van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory to gain a greater understanding of the relationship between language, cognition, ideology and power in political communication. The study finally demonstrates that political speeches are not only informational, but also important factors in beliefs, attitudes, and political realities.

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