DISCURSIVE FEATURES OF UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY RHETORIC TOWARDS THE MIDDLE EAST

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This paper examines the discursive features characteristic for the rhetoric of United States foreign policy towards the Middle East, and how they are employed in the pursuit of its objectives. It investigates the selective and strategic nature of U.S. rhetoric towards key Middle Eastern actors. The study is based on four case studies of U.S. proclamations issued towards Syria, Iran, ISIL, and Egypt during the specific timeframe of the second Obama administration. The research integrates linguistics and international relations with Critical Discourse Analysis as its primary theoretical framework. By addressing research questions concerning American identity and exceptionalism, discursive strategies and their linguistic realisations, the paper confirms the selectivity and strategic use of the rhetoric of the United States towards the aforementioned actors. It provides an original analysis of the U.S. foreign policy discourse employed towards the specific actors in pursuit of its strategic goals during period in question and contributes to the body of linguistic research on international relations.

Key words: critical discourse analysis; identity; political discourse; power relations; discursive strategies; foreign policy rhetoric; American exceptionalism; the United States; the Middle East

*Уортінгтон Х. **Дискурсивні властивості зовнішньополітичної риторики Сполучених Штатів на адресу Близького Сходу***

У статті розглядаються дискурсивні риси зовнішньополітичної риторики Сполучених Штатів щодо Близького Сходу, а також їхній вплив на досягнення відповідних цілей. Розвідка досліджує вибірковий і стратегічний характер риторики США щодо ключових гравців Близького Сходу. Дослідження базується на чотирьох тематичних дослідженнях заяв США щодо Сирії, Ірану, ІДІЛ та Єгипту протягом конкретного періоду другої адміністрації Обами. Теоретичну основу дослідження становить синтез лінгвістики, зокрема, критичного дискурс-аналізу та понять царини міжнародних відносин. Звертаючись до дослідницьких питань, що стосуються американської ідентичності та винятковості, дискурсивних стратегій та їх мовних реалізацій, стаття підтверджує вибірковість і стратегічне використання риторики Сполучених Штатів щодо вищезгаданих політичних гравців. Стаття попонує оригінальний аналіз зовнішньополітичного дискурсу США,

який використовувався щодо конкретних суб'єктів міжнародних відносин для досягнення своїх стратегічних цілей протягом розглянутого періоду, і робить внесок у лінгвістичні дослідження міжнародних відносин.

Ключові слова: *критичний аналіз дискурсу; ідентичність; політичний дискурс; владні відносини; дискурсивні стратегії; зовнішньополітична риторика; американська винятковість; Сполучені Штати; Близький Схід*

Introduction

The contemporary international order is marked by increasing global interdependence, resulting in challenging diplomatic engagements between global actors, characterised by strategic alliances and economic partnerships that serve as mechanisms to assert influence. This generates a complex world order in which power relations play an essential role in shaping global dynamics. This aligns with Simpson's (2004) concept of "legalised hegemony", which suggests that great powers (i.e., dominant political and economic actors), through their strategic positioning, significantly influence the international order. Bisley (2012) further emphasises the distinct role of great powers, characterising them as entities "different from ordinary members of international society", which play a critical role in upholding the fundamental principles of the global system and in contributing to the management of global order (p. 9). The United States, which is a great power, exerts substantial influence on global affairs through its economic strength, military capabilities and diplomatic engagements.

In the context of U.S. foreign policy, understanding American national identity is necessary for comprehending the motivations and objectives that guide the nation's actions on the world stage. I argue that it is the belief in American exceptionalism that significantly shapes U.S. foreign policy actions and influences how the nation perceives its unique role in the world. This concept, rooted in the idea that the United States is an extraordinary nation, has diverse impacts on American foreign policy (Restad, 2012; Szpunar, 2013). American exceptionalism influences the U.S. worldview and fuels the demand for foreign policy alignment with American values and interests, while underlining a commitment to spreading global freedom and democracy (Mertus, 2003). Furthermore, Restad (2012) argues that there is a dichotomy between American identity and U.S. foreign policy which resonates with the influence of exceptionalism on the nation's global engagement. Recognised as a constitutive myth of American national identity, exceptionalism significantly impacts how the U.S. perceives and enacts its role on the world stage (Szpunar, 2013).

Drawing on a broad understanding of global events and recognising the significant influence of American identity, the focal point of this paper lies in the exploration of the interplay of discourse and language. Essentially, the language the U.S. uses is integral to understanding how the nation performs its role and establishes its position on the evolving international scene. This research aims to provide insights into the ways the American government seeks to balance its obligations and wield influence in the pursuit of its objectives and in adapting to continual change. As Wetherell et al. (2001) put it when elaborating on the role of language in connection to culture and social interactions, "linguistic choices reflect power relations" (p. 284). In the dynamic setting of international relations, the discourse that shapes foreign policy plays a vital role in defining a nation's stance, intentions, and importantly its interactions with the global community. It follows that the present paper explores the discourse and its characteristics embedded in United States foreign policy rhetoric, particularly in its engagement with the Middle East.

The Middle East is of immense geopolitical significance for the United States due to its strategic location and vast energy resources. U.S. foreign policy initiatives to maintain stability in major oil and natural gas-producing nations attest to the strategic significance of the region's energy reserves (Yergin, 2006). Moreover, the Middle East is a complex geopolitical region with persistent conflicts and regional rivalries that pose security threats, which go beyond energy-related concerns. The United States has been actively engaged in the region to further its interests on these issues. In terms of power relations, the U.S. seeks to maintain influence and alliances in the region to counterbalance other major powers. Additionally, in pursuing its interests within the region, the U.S. contends with the security threats and furthers its commitment to promoting democratic values and principles (Buzan and Waever, 2003).

Given the complexity and distinct intertwinement of elements influencing the formation of foreign policy rhetoric, it would be unwise to confine the present research to a narrow scope of disciplines that individually provide suitable frameworks. This approach aligns with Dunmire's (2012) views on conducting discourse analysis, who states that such research cannot effectively analyse its subject of study by working only within a linguistic and discursive framework, and "must draw upon methods, frameworks, and contents of other disciplines" (p. 735). Consequently, an interdisciplinary approach is adopted, with linguistics serving as the primary field of study, complemented by insights from international relations.

At the core of the investigation lies the study of language use that constructs the rhetoric which then represents the official U.S. stances in world affairs. From the realm of linguistics, the study employs critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 2003; Wodak, 1989, 2001, 2007; Van Dijk, 1998, 2006; Reyes, 2008, 2011) as its primary theoretical framework.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodological approach characterised by its critical and socio-political orientation, focusing on studying discourse and examining language use as a form of social practice. In this study CDA functions as a foundational and overarching framework that allows for the exploration of the role of identity and the formulation of discursive strategies within American foreign policy rhetoric. Consequently, the paper addresses political discourse, situated within broader societal and historical frameworks, which is not viewed as merely a means of communication but an integral aspect of politics itself (Chilton and Schäffner, 2002). The persuasive nature of political discourse is apparent in its strategic deployment of rhetorical devices and linguistic strategies to influence public opinion and craft political narratives. Analysing various political discourse genres, such as speeches, reveals the distinct characteristics and communicative objectives inherent in political communication (Billig, 2003; Virtanen and Halmari, 2005). As Chilton (2004) points out, political speech is a thoughtfully constructed form of communication that reflects the speaker's objectives and intentions while resonating with the audience. Addressers deliver prepared speeches, blending monologue with dialogical features (cf. Esser, 1993 and Hoey, 2001), to live audiences or temporally connected recipients via live broadcasts. Audience impact on message interpretation is influenced by the collaborative nature of content construction, with perception and production exerting reciprocal influence (Hoey, 2001; Muntigl, 2002). It follows that the complex nature of political discourse is explored through a diverse array of analytical perspectives, addressing a broad spectrum of topics (Dontcheva-Navrátilová, 2017, p. 65).

To inquire into the specific linguistic realisation for the studied discursive strategies, the research draws upon affiliated disciplines, specifically, critical stylistics (Jeffries, 2010) and systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1973, 1985, 1989). This linguistic examination, grounded in the stylistic analysis toolkit (Jeffries, 2010), seeks to systematically analyse the role of language as a strategic tool in shaping and executing U.S. foreign policy objectives in the Middle East.

Finally, to conduct a comprehensive research analysis, the linguistic investigation is supplemented with pertinent remarks from the field of international relations (Huntington, 2005; Hixson, 2008). Nonetheless, it is essential to emphasise that this paper primarily focuses on linguistic aspects. Therefore, frameworks from the theoretical background of international relations are only addressed to a limited extent. However, by integrating perspectives from both linguistics and international relations, this interdisciplinary approach enhances the depth and breadth of the analysis, offering a broader viewpoint on discourse in articulating and executing foreign policy processes.

In the context of existing research, the present study provides a unique discursive snapshot of U.S. rhetoric in relation to the selected actors and the specific timeframe of the second Obama administration, thereby enriching existing research in the realms of linguistic studies and international relations.

Data, methodology and research questions

The research focuses on Barack Obama's second term with a specific focus on the case studies of foreign policy proclamations towards Syria, Iran, ISIL, and Egypt, which were chosen for their relevance and because they reflect a diversity of U.S. relations. More specifically these are: the Syrian Civil War (SCW) – Case study Syria; the Iranian nuclear programme – Case study Iran; the activities of the terrorist organisation ISIL – Case study ISIL; and the political unrest resulting from the Arab Spring in Egypt – Case study Egypt. In order to ensure accuracy and eliminate interpretation biases, the paper examines the official proclamations issued by the U.S. government. Twenty proclamations, five per case study, were selected systematically from the White House archive, ensuring a diverse range of research material. It was important to consider that the foreign policy issues under scrutiny were ongoing, making it desirable to select references that, if feasible, would span the entire presidential term., i.e., from 20 January 2013 to 20 January 2017. When the selection process reached theoretical saturation, it was deemed completed, providing ample and high-quality data for analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In total, 26,788 words were reviewed (Syria 4,959, Iran 9,407, ISIL 10,065, Egypt 2,357). Nevertheless, the length of the studied proclamations is generally not indicative of the anticipated research outcomes.

Moreover, the format of the proclamations, genre and audience specification was taken into account. The proclamations were categorised based on their form of production, i.e., spoken, written, or written to be spoken, although the latter was

the prevalent case as the studied dataset was prepared political speeches. Consequently, the primary focus was on the linguistic, specifically lexico-grammatical aspects of these texts, excluding considerations of prosodic and para-linguistic features. This methodological choice allowed for a more focused examination of linguistic content while setting aside the auditory elements that typically accompany spoken language. Indexical features of the addresser, whether the President or the Press Secretary, such as sex and social status, were also disregarded for analytical purposes.

The research methodology drew on Grounded Theory principles as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), adopting an inductive approach and focusing on empirical observations to generate new insights. During the phases of open and axial coding, ten concepts of discourse were coined, forming the basis for the research analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Flick, 2002). Each concept was assigned a number and consists of a concise key-term description, accompanied by a brief specification. To enhance clarity, distinct colours were employed to emphasise specific instances of language use associated with key terms, facilitating differentiation between concepts.

Table 1
Colours Assigned to the Concepts of Discourse

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.

The research methodology incorporated a four-level qualitative content-discourse analysis, focusing on concepts of discourse, discursive strategies, lexico-grammatical features, and their cumulative impact. Understanding the interconnected nature of the individual analysed components, essential for comprehending United States foreign policy rhetoric, *Figure 1* illustrates the interplay between the four analytical levels.
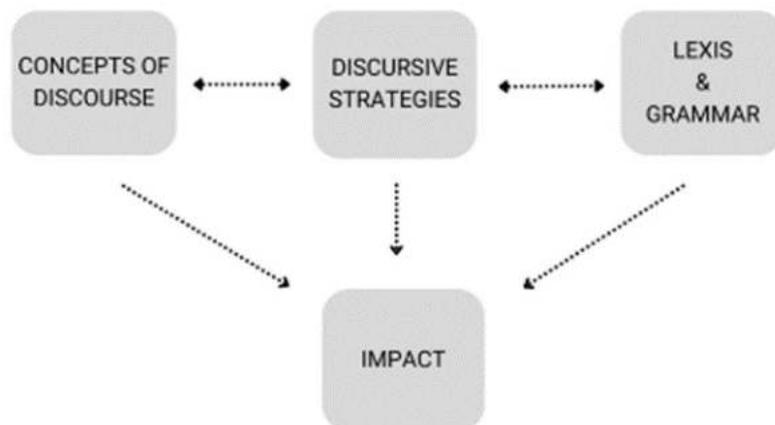
Figure 1. The Four-level Qualitative Analysis Model

Following the above, the methodology approach is based on the fundamental assumption that the United States employs selective foreign policy rhetoric towards specific actors in the Middle East. The subsequent formulation of research questions guided the selection and analysis of the dataset. A general research question and three specific questions were formulated to address the subject of study:

RQ   What discursive features characterise the rhetoric of the United States foreign policy towards the Middle East, and how are they employed in the pursuit of its objectives?

RQ1   What is the role of American identity in the creation of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East?

Existing research in the social sciences establishes a link between American national identity and U.S. foreign policy (e.g., Kagan, 2004; Huntington 2005; Mead, 2013). RQ1 was designed to explore this connection in seeking to comprehend how American identity influences and shapes U.S. foreign policy decisions, particularly those related to the Middle East. The goal was to specify facets of national identity that guide the approach and objectives of U.S. foreign policy towards the region. I intended to present the prominent themes in U.S. rhetoric by synthetising observed patterns acquired from the dataset. These themes, which I labelled concepts of discourse, were further discussed in connection with the notion of identity and in the context of the examined cases.

RQ2 What discursive strategies are manifested in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy rhetoric, and how are they linguistically realised?

Exploration of RQ2 involves the identification and analysis of discursive strategies employed in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy rhetoric directed at selected Middle Eastern actors, namely, Syria, Iran, ISIL, and Egypt. This investigation aimed to identify the linguistic methods exercised by the United States in conveying its foreign policy messages, with special attention to how these strategies are linguistically realised. I drew on existing analytical frameworks applied by linguistic scholars while examining the discursive strategies of the public actors and institutions, as well as on the critical analysis of strategies for presenting "others" by Van Dijk (1993) and Wodak (2001). Additionally, I incorporated Reyes' (2011) insights into strategies utilised in the process of legitimisation within political discourse. The recognised discursive strategies were further studied from the perspective of their language realisation, for which I primarily turned to the analytical toolkit introduced by Jeffries (2010) for implementing stylistic analysis. Conveniently, this set of ten linguistic tools aligns closely with the above frameworks.

RQ3 Is U.S. foreign policy rhetoric towards the Middle East selective and strategic?

Finally, the premise that the United States treats various Middle Eastern actors differently based on whether they are perceived as allies or foes underlaid the inquiry of RQ3. The discussion of findings related to RQ1 and RQ2, along with specific observations from the dataset, enabled me to confirm or refute the assumption that U.S. foreign policy rhetoric directed towards the studied actors exhibits selectivity and strategy. Specifically, I built on the theoretical foundations proposed by Fairclough (1989, 2003) and his perspectives on intertextuality. I critically questioned whether the U.S. adopts a deliberate and calculated approach in its rhetoric in its communication with the region, as opposed to a neutral or uniform approach.

Results and discussion

Concepts of discourse: the role of American identity in the creation of U.S. foreign policy

American identity has historically shaped U.S. foreign policy, influencing interactions with the world based on a unique set of values and beliefs. This section explores the role of American identity in U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, addressing the first research question. The analysis introduces concepts of discourse in U.S. foreign policy rhetoric, reflecting the "American Creed", which is also evident in the National Security Strategy 2010 (NSS 2010). Given the substantial influence of American universal values and principles on policy decision-making, it is useful to refer to the NSS 2010. It comprises a collection of points serving as a means of communicating strategies to Congress, foreign governments, and the American public, detailing measures to mitigate threats posed to the United States by global circumstances.

The initial analysis involved identifying recurring phenomena in the dataset, leading to the creation of categories, labelled *concepts of discourse*. Table 2 provides an overview of the ten concepts.

Table 2. Concepts of Discourse

No.	CONCEPTS OF DISCOURSE
1.	**Values and principles**: Invoking American values and principles of democracy, peace, and human rights.
2.	**Safety, security, stability, and protection**: Securing safety, stability, and security. The U.S. acting as protector and peacekeeper.
3.	**Threats, warnings, and promises**: Averting threats posed to the U.S., its partners, and the world. Uttering warnings (reverse threats) to U.S. adversaries. Promising.
4.	**U.S. strength**: Stressing American leadership. Demonstrating U.S. strength and American exceptionalness.
5.	**Their badness**: Pointing out 'their' badness via expressing accusations about the threats 'they' pose. Endangering security.
6.	**Our goodness**: Pointing out 'our' goodness via invoking

achievements, self-praise, and good deeds.

7. **Assurance and consolation**: (Re-)assuring the American people and allies of U.S. strength, support, and loyalty.

8. **Praise, support, and unity**: Expressing praise and encouragement towards strategic allies and the American people. Stressing unity.

9. **Criticism, doubt, and mistrust**: Avoiding overt criticism of strategic allies. Criticising others. Expressing doubt and mistrust. Stressing cooperation and responsibility.

10. **Interests and partnership**: Pursuing U.S. foreign strategic and economic interests. Stressing stability and partnership.

The observations from the analysis for each concept, focusing on their interplay and mutual influence on one another are summarised below.

In the context of values and principles, the U.S. stands firm against perceived injustices, advocating for change and democratic principles. It consistently condemns actions contrary to democratic ideals, human rights, and international norms, whether in Syria, Iran, or Egypt. This commitment to values aligns with the overarching goal of safety, security, and stability. The U.S. emphasises the importance of partnerships in achieving these objectives, realising the strategic significance of alliances and the need for cooperation, especially in countering common adversaries like ISIL. Consequently, the pursuit of stability is seen as crucial in addressing regional conflicts and geopolitical tensions, while also safeguarding American interests. These interests are further examined through the concept of interests and partnership, which reveals the strategic importance of partnerships and alliances in protecting American interests and combating common threats. The U.S. seeks to strengthen its partnerships with allies like Egypt, recognising the mutual benefits of cooperation in promoting stability and security.

By means of threats, warnings, and promises, the U.S. employs a combination of diplomatic tools, conditional offers, and implicit reassurances to address complex challenges, as seen in its dealings with Iran's nuclear programme. While acknowledging the potential consequences of non-compliance, the U.S. emphasises the importance of adhering to diplomatic processes and seeking peaceful resolutions, highlighting the shared responsibility for security and peace among nations. This approach reflects an understanding of the interconnectedness of global security and the need for diplomatic and collaborative solutions.

Furthermore, the portrayal of U.S. strength and exceptionalism emphasises its leadership role in addressing regional challenges, particularly evident in its efforts to combat ISIL and promote stability in the Middle East. However, this strength is tempered by a recognition of the limits of power and the complexities of regional turmoil, as seen in the cautious approach towards Egypt. Despite concerns about human rights violations and democratic backsliding, the U.S. maintains a supportive stance towards Egypt, reflecting a balance between promoting its interests and respecting national sovereignty. U.S. strength is consistently projected in its proactive approach to conflict resolution and leadership in international coalitions, reflecting a sense of American exceptionalism.

With regard to criticisms, doubts, and mistrust, the U.S. deals with complex relationships with allies and adversaries, balancing the need for cooperation with the imperative of defending its interests. While expressing concerns about violations of international norms and human rights abuses, the U.S. also seeks to maintain constructive engagement and dialogue, as seen in its approach towards Iran and Egypt. This stance reflects a recognition of the challenges inherent in pursuing U.S. interests while upholding principles of democracy and human rights.

Throughout these interactions, the U.S. employs a multifaceted approach that includes assurance and consolation, aimed at building trust and fostering cooperation with both allies and adversaries. This is complemented by emphases on praise, support, and unity, which may be considered essential components of U.S. engagement in the region, reinforcing the importance of collaboration and solidarity.

The U.S. international communication is then reinforced by highlighting the badness of their adversaries when critiquing actions contrary to its values and principles, such as chemical attacks in Syria, ISIL's terrorist actions, Iran's alleged support for terrorism and secret nuclear programme, and Egypt's human rights violations. Simultaneously, the U.S. points out its own goodness, presenting goodwill, resilience, and a commitment to international collaboration, portraying itself in a positive light by citing past successes and encouraging persistence in its ongoing fight against adversaries.

In line with the RQ1, the interconnectedness of these concepts also reflects the incorporation of various aspects of American identity into them. The key points that establish connections between the concepts and elements of American identity are outlined as follows:

Values and Principles:
o   Rooted in values of democracy, peace, and human rights.

o   Emphasised as the "American Creed".

o   Highlighting individualism, liberty, equality, and justice.

Responsibility and Duty:

o   Sense of responsibility and duty towards the global community.

o   Committed to safeguarding safety, stability, and security, domestically and internationally.

o   Emphases on cooperation and responsibility.

Approach to Threats:

o   Alignment with American exceptionalism and global responsibility.

o   Reflecting a shared commitment to addressing threats and promoting peace.

American Leadership and Exceptionalism:

o   Stress on American leadership and exceptionalism.

o   Derived strength from shared values and principles, which is defining.

o   Importance of upholding these ideals globally.

Reassurance, Support, and Unity:

o   Fosters cooperation and solidarity.

o   Reinforces a sense of American exceptionalism and responsibility globally.

Pursuing Foreign Interests:

o   Stress on stability and partnership in promoting values globally.

o   Balancing partnerships and alliances to advance American interests in line with the "American Creed".

Distinguishing "Their Badness" and "Our Goodness":

o   Adversaries' actions seen as threats to American values and security.

o   Emphases on American achievements and good deeds.

o   Shaping American identity and foreign policy approach.

Discursive strategies and their linguistic realisation: construction of United States foreign policy rhetoric towards the Middle East

In this section the focus shifts towards presenting and characterising the observed discursive strategies inherent in the analysed data that are crucial in shaping the concepts of discourse that construct United States foreign policy rhetoric. It also aims to offer insights into the selection and application of linguistic devices used to realise the discursive strategies. Through lexical and syntactic examination, this section seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how language

shapes and reflects the United States' approach to the construction of its foreign policy in the Middle East while addressing the second research question.

The "Us vs. Them" dichotomy, which is evident across all ten discourse concepts outlined above, serves as the overarching discursive strategy in this examination. The analysis is based on an integrated framework of discursive strategies comprising strategies such as argumentation, rhetorical figures, lexical style, storytelling, emphasis on negative points, and quoting credible sources Van Dijk (1993); referential nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation, framing, intensification, and mitigation Wodak (2001); emotions, hypothetical future, rationality, voices of expertise, and altruism Reyes (2011). This analysis is complemented by an analytical toolkit proposed by Jeffries (2010). This toolkit consists of ten comprehensive tools that aid in addressing and understanding linguistic realisations embedded within discourse.

It follows that the analysis offers a contrasting depiction of Middle Eastern actors, such as Syria, ISIL, and Iran (THEM) and the United States and allies (US), revealing deliberate communicative intentions and the use of linguistic structures and discursive strategies. When discussing THEM, negative viewpoints and actions were emphasised, while positive perspectives and achievements were highlighted when referring to US. Linguistic manifestations (Table 3) reflected these strategies, with THEM portrayed negatively and US positively in most cases.

Table 3. Linguistic Devices Observed in THEM and US Analysis

THEM: Syria, ISIL, and Iran		US: U.S., Egypt, Iranian people	
LINGUISTIC DEVICE	OBJECTIVE	LINGUISTIC DEVICE	OBJECTIVE
Explicit naming	Referring to THEM with negative connotations.	Inclusive 'we'	Engaging the audience by including them in positive statements.
Negative lexical choices	Using words that evoke horror or brutality.	Positive and neutral lexical choices	Employing words with positive connotations and maintaining a balanced tone.
End focus	Placing emphasis	Intensifier +	Amplifying

principle	on negative outcomes.	positive verb phrase	positivity in statements.
*Passive voice	Describing negative actions without assigning direct responsibility.	Polysyndetic coordination	Linking positive attributes across different domains.
Deixis	Referring to THEM with demonstrative pronouns.	Deixis	Referring to positive aspects or concepts.
Intensifier + negative noun	Amplifying negativity in statements.	Anaphoric reference to 'we'	Reinforcing positive collective identity.
*Mitigation	Downplaying the severity of negative actions.	Epistrophe and repetition	Repeating and reinforcing positive phrases for emphasis.
Three-part list	Enumerating negative aspects in a structured manner.	Negation	Highlighting the absence of negative actions or traits.
Explicit emotional enumeration	Describing emotional impacts of negative actions.	Active voice / Phrasal verbs	Conveying positive action.
Chronological sequencing	Reinforcing credibility to described events.	Imperfective aspect / Phrasal verbs	Describing ongoing positive actions.
Details	Providing specific examples or instances of negative actions.	Details	Providing specific examples to emphasise positivity.
Hyperbole, metaphor, and	Using figurative language to	Hypernymy	Addressing broader concepts

simile	emphasise negativity.		to mitigate negativity.
Modality and conditional sentences	Speculating on future actions and consequences.	Enumeration	Listing positive qualities or attributes.

Notable linguistic structures in Table 3 include mitigation and passive voice, employed within the strategies for THEM to soften the negative tone or obscure the agent of an action, a technique more commonly associated with the portrayal of US. This suggests that the U.S., in line with its objectives, employs a range of negative attributions and depictions depending on the intended recipient of the message.

To conclude, the observed communicative intentions towards THEM include framing events negatively, enhancing accusatory tones, attributing responsibility, maintaining credibility, provoking emotions, emphasising brutality, and encouraging compliance. Conversely, the intentions towards US are to create a positive image, express support and commitment, avoid direct accusations, emphasise engagement, recall past accomplishments, deny certain activities, and boost appeal to strength and unity.

Impact: strategic selection of U.S. rhetoric towards the Middle East

The final section addresses the third research question concerning the selectivity and strategy of U.S. foreign policy rhetoric, exploring the communicative intentions behind discursive strategies and linguistic devices. Drawing on the polarizing "us vs. them" strategy, the study contrasts the negative depiction of Middle Eastern actors such as Syria, ISIL, and Iran with the positive portrayal of the United States, Egypt, and the Iranian people. The analysis reveals deliberate linguistic choices aimed at framing events, enhancing accusations, attributing responsibility, maintaining credibility, evoking emotions, and encouraging compliance. Additionally, the study investigates textual absence and intertextuality to uncover implicit meanings and ideologies embedded in discourse. Finally, it examines commonalities and differences in U.S. rhetoric towards Syria, ISIL, Iran, and Egypt, exploring possible motivations behind distinct rhetorical approaches based on the occurrence of discourse concepts in each case study (see Figure 2).
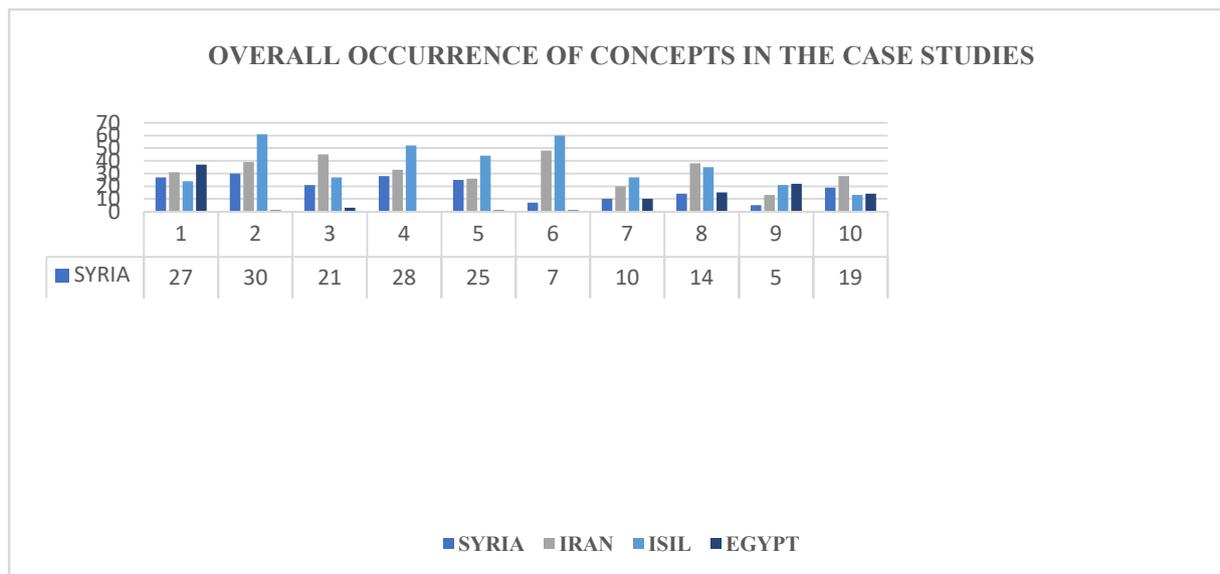
Figure 2. Overall Occurrence of Concepts in the Case Studies

In seeking a deeper understanding of why specific actors are viewed as adversaries while others are regarded as partners or allies by the U.S., it was crucial to explore multiple contributing factors. The United States shapes its perceptions of Syria, Iran, ISIL, and Egypt through the lenses of strategic interests, security considerations, and diplomatic objectives. While recognising challenges and threats, the U.S. prioritises the establishment of alliances and the advancement of stability as basic elements of its engagement in the region of Middle East.

Drawing on the findings from the analysis of the present dataset, it can be concluded that the one actor the United States perceives as an implacable enemy is ISIL. When addressing issues related to ISIL, the U.S. focuses solely on themes of security, stability, and the assertion of American strength in combating the threat. There is no emphasis on partnership strategies, as ISIL's actions are viewed as inherently destabilising and incompatible with diplomatic engagement.

The United States considers the Syrian regime an adversary on account of its brutality against its own people. The U.S. rhetoric emphasises values of democracy, peace, and human rights, indicating a stance in opposition to the actions of the Syrian regime. Moreover, the emphasis on security and stability in the region corresponds with efforts to address the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis, portraying the U.S. as an ally to those impacted by the turmoil. Nevertheless, the Syrian situation illustrates a blend of strong U.S.

condemnations alongside a neutral approach in categorising Syria as either a strict adversary or ally.

Regarding Iran, the U.S. rhetoric suggests a double-edged approach. While there are concerns about Iran's nuclear programme and associated security threats, there is also a recognition of shared interests and potential benefits, particularly in the context of the Iran nuclear deal. The U.S. expresses support for the Iranian people and highlights the potential positive outcomes of the agreement, indicating a willingness to engage diplomatically despite reservations about anticipated Iranian noncompliance. Therefore, a focus on cooperation prevails over overt condemnation. The shifting atmosphere of mutual relations, characterised by U.S. attempts to engage with Iran diplomatically and enhance relations, makes the stance towards Iran ambiguous, as it is viewed neither as an adversary nor as a friend.

Concerning Egypt, the United States appears to perceive it as a partner with whom it seeks to maintain a positive and constructive dialogue. While acknowledging human rights violations and undemocratic procedures, the U.S. expresses support for Egypt's transition toward democratic principles and integration of shared values. The discourse with Egypt prioritises mutual interests and cooperation aimed at fostering stability in the region, with less emphasis on overt criticism or highlighting negative aspects. This suggests a strategic focus on building a collaborative relationship with Egypt, rather than viewing it as an adversary.

It is noteworthy that all four cases entail U.S. disapproval and condemnation of human rights violations and breaches of democratic principles. Notably, Egypt receives the highest number of references in this regard, despite having the lowest word count in the analysed data. This atypical pattern, as compared to the other cases, reflects a strategic focus on other aspects of the relationship between the U.S. and Egypt. Rather than emphasising security concerns or pointing out negative aspects, the communication prioritises areas of mutual interest or cooperation aimed at fostering stability in the region. By downplaying mentions of threats or highlighting "their" negative aspects, the U.S. aims to uphold a positive and productive relationship with Egypt.

Based on the analysis of discourse concepts across the case studies of Syria, Iran, ISIL, and Egypt, the question of whether U.S. foreign policy rhetoric appears to be selective and strategic can be addressed by listing several key observations that support the conclusion:

1) **Selective use**: The U.S. uses the various concepts to varying extents in the individual case studies. This suggests a strategic approach, whereby its discourse is tailored to address specific concerns or priorities in the specific context. For example, while some concepts are highly prominent in certain contexts (e.g., safety, security, and stability in the case of ISIL), they receive minimal attention in others (e.g., safety and security in Egypt). This selective use suggests that the U.S. strategically chooses which concepts to employ.

2) **Strategic silence**: The deliberate omission of explicit comments on ongoing events in Egypt and Syria points to features of absence in the text. This reveals the influence of contextual factors, along with the intentional exclusion of certain information, which suggests a careful selection of proclamations and facts based on perceived necessity and adequacy, and also challenges the notion that a larger dataset would guarantee more reliable findings. This indicates that the U.S. makes a strategic decision to avoid certain topics or frame the narrative in a particular way. Additionally, intertextuality, or the reflection of themes from other texts, suggests a strategic alignment of rhetoric across different contexts, further emphasising the deliberate nature of U.S. foreign policy discourse. A case in point is the observation that Syria-related addresses refrain from directly mentioning the extent of U.S. involvement in the Syrian Civil War, particularly regarding its support for the "moderate" Syrian opposition.

3) **Strategic priorities reflected in the distribution of the discourse concepts**: The distribution of the most and least prominent concepts across case studies indicates a strategic focus. The U.S. prioritises certain concepts and themes to advance its diplomatic objectives and strategic interests. For instance, in engaging with Iran, there is an emphasis on cooperation and diplomatic efforts, despite U.S. concerns about Iran's support for terrorist groups. This practice reflects the deliberate approach of constructively engaging with Iran to achieve a deal on its nuclear programme, even though it presents a security threat. This strategic prioritisation further supports the idea that the U.S. foreign policy rhetoric is not arbitrary but guided by specific considerations.

4) **Selective Criticism**: The lower frequencies or mitigation of references to themes such as criticism, doubt, and mistrust directed at Egypt and Iran in the analysed data indicate a selective approach to criticism. This suggests that the U.S. moderates overt criticism and focuses on cooperative aspects in its diplomatic engagement when it is in its strategic interest.

5) **Perception of adversaries**: The U.S. perceives specific actors as adversaries based on strategic considerations. ISIL is clearly identified as an adversary, with numerous references to its threat to security and stability as well as to U.S. strength. Syria is categorised as an adversary due to its human rights violations, while Iran occupies an ambiguous position, whereby the U.S. emphasises cooperation over overt condemnation.

6) **Strategic focus on Egypt**: Despite Egypt receiving the highest number of references for human rights violations, the U.S. strategically prioritises areas of mutual interest and cooperation. This is reflected in the high frequencies of concepts of shared values and principles and praise, support and unity, which may be interpreted as a deliberate effort to maintain a positive and constructive dialogue, downplaying negative aspects and emphasising collaboration for regional stability.

7) **Disapproval of violations**: Despite selective engagement and strategic priorities, the U.S. consistently expresses its disapproval and condemnation of human rights violations and breaches of democratic principles, as reflected in the relatively frequent references to values and principles in all case studies. This indicates a strategic commitment to upholding certain values and principles while pursuing diplomatic relationships.

To conclude, the observed patterns in the occurrences of the discourse concepts and the strategic focus of U.S. communication across the different case studies suggest that U.S. foreign policy rhetoric is indeed selective and strategic, which is adapted to address specific diplomatic objectives and security priorities while pursuing U.S. interests within each context.

Conclusion

This paper explored discursive features characteristic for the rhetoric of United States foreign policy towards the Middle East, and studied how they are employed in the pursuit of its objectives. It utilised an inductive approach, assuming that the United States employs strategic foreign policy rhetoric towards different actors in the Middle East. Formulated research questions guided the selection and analysis of the dataset, consisting of one general and three specific questions. The findings from each question are summarised below.

The analysis showed that U.S. foreign policy rhetoric is deeply rooted in democratic ideals, peace, and human rights, emphasising individualism, liberty, equality, and justice. The rhetoric aligns with American exceptionalism, global

leadership, and a strong sense of responsibility towards the global community, prioritising safety, stability, and security both domestically and internationally. There is also an emphasis on cooperation and shared responsibility to address threats and promote peace.

Examining discursive strategies, negative portrayals of Middle Eastern actors were evident, while the U.S. and its ally Egypt were presented positively. Strategies for THEM aimed to depict the out-group negatively using various linguistic devices. Conversely, strategies for the US maintained a positive tone, focusing on constructive perspectives and shared values.

The research also explored whether U.S. foreign policy rhetoric is selective and strategic. Findings indicated a tailored approach to addressing concerns, strategic silence on certain topics, and a deliberate focus on specific actors. Despite strategic considerations, there was consistent disapproval of human rights violations.

In conclusion, the study provides insights into U.S. rhetoric during the second Obama administration, specifically into the discursive features of U.S. foreign policy rhetoric towards the Middle East, revealing a purposeful and selective use of rhetoric to achieve diplomatic objectives and address security priorities. Overall, this study adds to the body of research in linguistic and international relations studies that address related topics of interest.

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