

Political Mythmaking and Threat Representation in Donald Trump's Discourse on Iran: A Diachronic Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores the construction of political myths and the representation of threat in Donald Trump's discourse during his first presidency on Iran (2017-2020). The study used a qualitative diachronic Critical Discourse Analysis approach to examine a selection of presidential official speeches and statements where Iran had been a major foreign policy concern after the heightened tensions between the US and Iran. The analysis focused on how the lexical selection, evaluation, security framing and oppositional binary pairs helped create the image of Iran as a threat. The findings of the study have brought out three major discursive themes. The first one is that of existential threat of Iran, which is associated with nuclear threats, terrorism, regional destabilization and chaos and immorality. The second theme is that of political mythmaking of American exceptionalism and national protection, which portrays the United States as a powerful and moral nation that is supposed to protect global and national security. The third discursive theme was one of moral polarization and enemy creation, in which Iran is presented as a dangerous country and the US and its leader as morally right and necessary to protect from threats. The study concludes that the discourse about Iran by Trump is not just an account of foreign policy issues but is involved in active meaning-making that ties the issue of threat with national identity and legitimacy of leadership.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Donald Trump, Iran, political discourse, political mythmaking, threat representation

INTRODUCTION

Political discourse has long been regarded as a powerful tool to enable the construction of social realities, to manage public perceptions and to legitimize specific ideological positions. Language is not just a neutral means of communication of political messages; instead, language is a powerful instrument of power usage, persuasion, and representation of both friends and enemies. In terms of CDA, political language becomes a platform of ideologically, socially, and politically charged negotiations and reproductions of ideology, power, and social identities (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2018). Political discourse of many political leaders tends to represent complex geopolitical realities in simple ways using narratives, metaphors, and symbols resonating with the collective beliefs and emotions. The use of such discursive strategies becomes especially prominent in times of international conflicts when political discourse helps build up national identity and external threats (Al-Husseini, & Al-Obaidi, 2026; Chilton, 2017; Wodak, 2021). For that reason, political discourse has become one of the most researched spheres of analysis in terms of how language affects political perception and cognition.

Among the rhetorical strategies available to politicians, political myths stand out. It should be noted that political myths do not imply the existence of fictional stories. On the contrary, political myths are myths that serve to simplify complex phenomena in politics and create common frames of interpretation of reality for the audience (Bottici, 2007; Flood, 2019). Political myths enable the creation of narratives about greatness, persecution, heroism, and the existential danger of the political actor. In contemporary research, there is a lot of evidence suggesting that mythmaking in politics continues to play an important role in the populist discourse of contemporary politics, as well as in the context of nationalism (Welker, 2025; Wodak, 2021). In this case, political myths often involve the separation of the in-group from the out-group based on some moral superiority of the in-group and the irrationality of the out-group.

Another key aspect of political discourse relates to the representation of threats. Threat representation is understood as the discursive representation of people, groups, or countries as a source of danger and as a subject that requires a response in terms of politics, military action, or ideological mobilization. In previous studies, scholars have found that politicians regularly apply linguistic techniques such as fear appeal, securitization, dehumanization, and moral polarization when representing their opponents as existential threats (Musolff, 2016; van Dijk, 2018). Such techniques become particularly common in foreign policy discourse, which tries to secure public consent for sanctioning, diplomatic pressure, and/or military intervention. By repeatedly mentioning danger, insecurity, and instability, political rhetoric helps to normalize certain foreign policy agendas at the expense of any other perspective on international relations (Chilton, 2017; Wodak, 2021). In this regard, an investigation of threat representation sheds light on the language, ideology, and decision-making process.

Among the most prominent contemporary political leaders with an especially interesting discursive practice worthy of academic research is Donald Trump. The discourse of the politician is marked by populism, adversarial frames, emotive rhetoric, and frequent positioning of his political opponents as threats to the safety of the nation and its stability. Recently, some specific elements of the discourse of Donald Trump have been revealed, such as divisiveness, repetition, confrontative narration, and use of threatening rhetoric based on fear (Zhou et al., 2024; Prahallad & Mamidi, 2025). Moreover, scholars have noticed that the speeches of Donald Trump feature binary oppositions that define patriots and insiders as opposed to dangerous outsiders (El Bakri, 2025). These features make the discourse of the politician an ideal case for researching the myths and threat narratives in political discourse.

Iran has been a key theme in Trump's foreign policy discourse. Throughout his campaign and post-presidency rhetoric, as well as during his presidential administration, Trump has consistently emphasized that Iran represents a substantial threat to the US' interests, regional stability, and international security. In his speeches, media interviews, social media messages, and other official statements, Trump has been using the rhetoric of terrorism, aggression, nuclear threat, and radical ideologies in his references to Iran. Contemporary studies in the field of discourse analysis have revealed that Trump's rhetoric with regard to Iran is based on the processes of constructing an enemy, securitization of the conflict, and moralization of the conflict as both justified and unavoidable (Ahmad et al., 2025; Degaf, 2025). Furthermore, other researchers have observed that references to Iran in Trump's discourse are usually presented against the background of the rhetoric of American superiority and exceptionalism (Al Hussaini & Noreen, 2025; Bibi et al., 2025).

Despite the increasing number of studies that address the political rhetoric of Trump, there are still some limitations associated with the existing literature on the matter. First, the majority of the studies focus only on separate speeches, election campaigns, or individual political events without considering long-term discursive shifts that occurred at various stages of his political career. Second, while the topics of populism, persuasion, and ideologizing have already been examined in previous literature, not enough attention was given to the problem of political mythmaking and threat representation in the context of Trump's rhetoric about Iran. Third, there were few attempts to consider the problem from the diachronic point of view that will help trace the shift in representations of Iran depending on changes in political and geopolitical situation. Thus, the necessity to conduct a comprehensive CDA of the topic of myth-based threat constructions in Trump's rhetoric about Iran arises (Welker, 2025; Ahmad et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2024).

In light of the above shortcomings, the current research focuses on the linguistic construction of political myths and threats in the discourse of Trump on Iran through a diachronic CDA. With reference to the perspectives of CDA offered by Fairclough (2015), van Dijk (2018), and Wodak (2021), this research endeavors to examine the impact of linguistic, rhetorical, and ideological aspects on the representation of Iran throughout various stages in the political discourse of Trump. The objective of the study is thus to make some contribution to the ongoing debate surrounding political mythmaking, foreign policy discourse, and language and international politics. Therefore, this research sought to answer the following research question:

How are political myths and threat representations discursively constructed and transformed in Donald Trump's discourse on Iran across different periods of his political career?

LITERATURE REVIEW

CDA and Political Discourse

CDA has emerged to be one of the most important methodologies used to explore the connection between language, ideology, and power in political communication. In contrast to seeing language as an innocent medium of communication, CDA sees discourse as a social practice that plays a part in creating power relations in society. The most recent studies on CDA have continued to apply Fairclough's 3D model and the socio-cognitive model of van Dijk in order to examine how politicians utilize language to legitimize policies and ideologies, mold public opinion, and create narratives (Atmawijaya & Sartika, 2024). The key point about political discourse is that it is not only a form of communication but also an instrument of dominance and perception formation.

Recent studies have shown that political speech often depends on deliberate language selections that shape social and political reality in accordance with certain ideological interests. For example, Ahmad et al. (2025) found that Trump's social media discourse about international conflicts was based mostly on ideological framing and binary opposition of the ally-enemy type. This finding corroborates the previous CDA claims that the political language is never objective but always ideologically motivated.

One more notable trend in CDA research in recent years refers to increased attention paid to digital political discourse. Social networks have opened new ways of communication between politicians and their audiences bypassing the role of mass media. As Ahmad et al. (2025) suggest, Trump's digital discourse reveals the way politicians use such media in order to influence people's perception of the conflict through oversimplifying it and using emotionally colored discourse. Also, Lacatus (2021) finds that social media allow politicians to reinforce the populist narrative by constantly drawing the divide between "the people" and their opponents.

It is notable that the expanding area of CDA literature shows the need for studying discourse not only from a linguistic point of view but also with a broader sociopolitical perspective. It has been noted by Atmawijaya and Sartika (2024) that the language used in politics reveals the deeper anxieties and power struggles within society. In general, all these studies show that CDA continues to be an important approach to understanding politics.

Political Mythmaking in Contemporary Political Communication

In recent times, political mythmaking has been the subject of more scholarly investigation because of its importance in molding public perceptions about political events and identities. Political myths are defined as simplified reality that provides emotionally charged interpretation of social and political processes. Recent studies demonstrate that political myths are extremely significant elements of modern political communication, particularly in regard to populism and nationalism (Welker, 2025; Ungureanu & Serrano, 2020). In political myth creation, political elites generate stories about national decline, national ascendancy, heroism, or threats to the nation.

Using the case study approach to analyze geopolitical mythmaking in the discourse of far-right media outlets, Welker (2025) showed that political myths often work through creation of the moral dichotomy of in-group versus out-group. In this way, complex international conflicts are being transformed into symbolic battles

between good and evil, which makes it easier to mobilize people ideologically. Similarly, Ungureanu and Serrano (2020) demonstrated that populist political discourse contains lots of myth-driven constructions of leaders as the protectors of the nation from its internal and external enemies.

In relation to American politics, some empirical analyses have detected the presence of mythmaking in Donald Trump's rhetoric. According to Atmawijaya and Sartika (2024), Trump's political discourse often involves symbolic use of the nation's identity, economy, and culture. This results in the emergence of political myths in which political problems are described as existential problems and thus require decisive leadership.

Furthermore, recent literature shows that political myths are now communicated through digital media platforms. Lacatus (2021) reports that the campaign discourses of Trump included many emotional narratives based on fear, nostalgia, and identity. In this way, it was possible to reinforce one's ideology while reducing geopolitics to simple myths. Thus, political mythmaking constitutes an important aspect of modern political discourse and is associated with other dimensions of identity formation and political persuasion.

Threat Representation and the Construction of Political Enemies

The threat representation is one of the most analyzed themes in modern studies of political discourse. Individuals, groups, and even states can be represented by political leaders as threats to national security, cultural identity, and public stability. According to the recent findings in the field of CDA, such representations are produced using various linguistic techniques such as fear appeal, securitization, moral polarization, and construction of enemies (Degaf & Ashfiya, 2025; El Bakri, 2025). These techniques are employed for the purpose of legitimizing political actions because there are certain actors considered dangerous, and therefore, they need to be responded appropriately.

There were quite a few studies conducted lately on how Trump constructed the external enemies using threat narrative. El Bakri (2025) identified that the political discourses of Trump are associated with the images of terrorism, instability, and security threats in terms of foreign actors. Using the vulnerability of the country, Trump produced his own narrative where he introduced the notion of the necessity of having a strong leader. Similarly, Al-Sabbagh et al. (2025) discovered the use of ideological polarization and fear appeal in relation to Muslims and Middle Eastern politics.

The representation of Iran became an essential element of Trump's threat construction in his discourse. Ahmad et al. (2025) also identified such trends in the case of social media discourse of Trump, where Iran was presented as a dangerous state, whose activity needed to be controlled through powerful interventions of America. Such results show that there is a significant similarity in the process of threat construction at different platforms.

The study by Degaf and Ashfiya (2025) on the speech of Trump on Iran in 2025 can be considered as an additional contribution to this topic. As the authors pointed out, the enemy construction occurred through the moralizing discourse, according to which the actions of Iran could not be tolerated anymore, and any military intervention was inevitable and ethical. The rhetoric of Trump was the way to legitimate any preemptive actions against Iran because of the framing of this country as the main existential threat for the USA. Similar conclusions have been made by those researchers who studied the current geopolitical discourse and found out that Iran becomes one of the elements of discourse on global insecurity and ideological struggles (Al Hussaini & Noreen, 2025; Ahmad et al., 2025).

Donald Trump's Rhetoric and Foreign Policy Discourse on Iran

Recent scientific research on Donald Trump's rhetoric is concentrated on this phenomenon as an innovative form of political communication characterized by populism, aggressiveness, and emotionalism. Thus, for example, Prahallad and Mamidi (2025) discovered that Trump was engaged in political debates by using aggressive rhetoric techniques, fear appeals, and ideological frames. In turn, Zhou et al. (2024) found that Trump's discourse as a president was characterized by unusual uniqueness, polarization, and rhetorical intensity when compared to

those of other US presidents. Thus, this phenomenon attracted the attention of scholars as far as the impact of Trump's discourse on public opinion and political behavior is concerned.

The existing research, which focuses on Trump's rhetoric about Iran, suggests the frequent use of securitization and enemy construction. For example, Ahmad et al. (2025) found that while discursively constructing Iran as a geopolitical threat, Trump also stressed America's power and global leadership. Such facts suggest that Iranian representations are highly connected with American exceptionalism and security.

Moreover, recent literature has indicated that the rhetoric on Iran by Trump is not confined to political speeches but involves social media communication, interviews, campaign speech and public speech. As was pointed out by Degaf and Ashfiya (2025), the rhetoric on Iran in Trump's later years also utilized moralizing language and threat representations in Trump's rhetoric, showing some consistency in his rhetoric during different political periods. Similarly, Bibi et al. (2025) found that rhetoric on Iran by Trump used persuasive techniques that served to justify the use of military and diplomatic power.

Although a considerable amount of literature exists on Trump's rhetoric and discourse, there remain several significant issues in need of further investigation. For instance, most of existing literature examines speeches and political events or focuses on the period that is relatively short. Very few researchers have tried to find out how representations of Iran changed over the course of different political stages in the political life of Trump. At the same time, interaction between political mythmaking and threat representation in Trump's discourse on Iran has hardly been explored. This is why the diachronic CDA approach can be considered helpful for conducting such research.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The current study adopts a qualitative research design based on diachronic CDA. The study was not concerned with the statistical measurement of language, but rather with the production of meanings, ideologies and political representations through discourse. The study was synchronic in that it looked at Trump's discourse on Iran in selected key moments of his first presidency, particularly the 2017 speech on Iran strategy, the 2018 speech on JCPOA withdrawal, and the 2020 remarks after U.S.–Iran escalation. This study aimed to investigate whether the representation of Iran in Trump's language was consistent over time or subject to change depending on the political and geopolitical contexts, by comparing texts from different periods.

CDA was chosen as the main analytical approach because it offers a useful framework for the study of political language as a form of social and ideological practice. The CDA in this paper revealed how Donald Trump's lexical choices, themes, metaphors, and argumentation have been used to construct the political and security image of Iran. It is an investigation of the discursive construction and perpetuation of political myths such as America's power, protection of its people, the danger of the enemy, and its moral leadership. The methodology in this case is interpretative and analytical, which requires the researcher to examine speeches, statements, interviews and social media statements of Trump for patterns of meanings. Such analyses would be carried out by considering both the language features and the political context of their production.

Corpus of the Study

The data set used in this research is an intentionally chosen part of the discourses made by Donald Trump about Iran, more specifically during his presidency (from 2017 to 2020). This time span was selected because it is the era in which Iran became one of the topics in the foreign policy discourses of Donald Trump, especially in relation to the JCPOA, sanctions, nuclear armaments, terrorism, etc. The corpus included key official speeches and statements where Iran was a major subject, including Trump's remarks on Iran strategy in 2017, his speech in 2018 announcing the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, and his remarks following the escalation between the United States and Iran in 2020. The selected documents were chosen because of their representativeness for key stages in the formation of the discourse on Iran by Trump, as well as their demonstration of threat representation,

mythmaking, moral polarization, and protection. Given the qualitative CDA design of the study, the objective was not to analyze every public reference to Iran, but to analyze representative texts where the discursive construction of Iran was particularly visible. The selected corpus thus allowed the study to explore how Iran was constructed as a threat in the official discourse of Trump's first presidency.

Data Collection Procedure

The present study was conducted through a systematic search of publicly available materials concerning Donald Trump's discourse on Iran. First, an extensive search was conducted to identify speeches, interviews, official statements, press briefings, campaign addresses, debate transcripts, and social media posts in which Trump mentioned Iran, Iranian leaders, the nuclear agreement, sanctions, terrorism, regional security, or U.S.-Iran relations. Second, the materials gathered were screened to ensure that Iran was not mentioned in passing or incidentally but was a meaningful part of the political message. Third, the texts selected were chronologically organized within the first presidential term of Trump and were about significant moments of 2017, 2018, and 2020, when Iran was a focal point in official presidential discourse. Finally, the texts were prepared for analysis. Irrelevant material surrounding the text was removed, transcripts were checked for accuracy, and each item was saved with information about its date, source, genre and political context. This process made it possible to create a coherent and strong corpus for analyzing the development of political mythmaking and threat representation in Trump's discourse about Iran.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data was analyzed using a diachronic CDA method. To begin with, the chosen texts were repeatedly read to get an idea of how Iran was represented in Trump's discourse. In this phase words, expressions, metaphors and evaluative description of Iran were repeated. Second, the texts were coded in terms of specific discursive patterns such as construction of threat, representation of an enemy, moral discourse, fear appeal, national protection, American mightiness and myth making in politics. Third, the coded data was compared diachronically in order to understand how Trump's discourse on Iran evolved over time. This diachronic analysis could reveal whether the same discourse was used again, or if there were new constructions as the response to political changes. Fourth, the results were explained in relation to the larger picture of US-Iranian relations and theory of CDA. The objective of the study was not only to illustrate how Trump spoke about Iran but to explain how Iran was framed as a political threat and how these discourses served to mythologize.

RESULTS

Iran as an Existential Threat

The first key pattern observed in the corpus was the construction of Iran as an existential threat. In the rhetoric of Trump, Iran was not depicted as an ordinary diplomatic adversary or a state with negotiable political agenda. Rather, Iran was constructed as a threatening power that posed dangers to the US, its allies, the entire Middle East, and the international system at large. Threats are frequently constructed using lexicalization, moral evaluation, repetition, and security-based construction in political discourse (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2018; Wodak, 2021). The studied texts portray Iran as a dangerous entity because of its nuclear threat, terrorism, regional destabilization, aggression, and irrational leadership.

This threat construction was particularly clear in Trump's discursive framing of the JCPOA. In his October 13, 2017, speech on the Iran nuclear deal, Trump said: "We will not continue down a path whose predictable conclusion is more violence, more terror, and the very real threat of Iran's nuclear This extract is important because it links three powerful threat categories: violence, terrorism and nuclear danger. The words "predictable conclusion" render the future danger almost certain, not just possible, and "very real threat" makes it more urgent. From a CDA point of view, this language is not just a criticism of a diplomatic agreement but turns the agreement into a path to insecurity. In this manner, Trump's speech cast Iran as a future existential threat, which with its nuclear ability would threaten not only the United States but the whole world. This kind of framing is in

line with what Chilton (2017) and Musolff (2016) have identified as the use of political language to connect security concerns with fear, urgency and the need for protective action.

A similar case was Trump's May 8, 2018, address announcing the U.S. withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal. "The deal does nothing to constrain Iran's destabilizing activities including its support for terrorism," he said, adding that Iran's "bloody ambitions have become more brazen" (Trump, 2018). Such statements show how Iran was constructed as a threat on multiple levels. Iran is seen as an agent of regional instability through its "destabilizing" actions, and an enemy of global stability due to its alleged support for terrorism. The term "bloody ambitions" adds moral judgment as well as paints Iranian political goals in terms of violence and illegitimacy. This combination of negative attributes did not narrow down Iran to one problem like its nuclear program but represented Iran as a country dangerous with its nuclear activity, regional policy and ideology. It is typical for discourse about an opponent to put together several categories of threats and thus present the adversary as a bigger threat (van Dijk, 2018; Wodak, 2021).

Additionally, Trump's claim that Iran should never be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon further supported the notion of Iran as an existential threat. In his address on January 8, 2020, Trump said that "as long as I am President of the United States, Iran will never be allowed to have a nuclear weapon" (Trump, 2020). There are two discourse roles played by this sentence at once. The first role is that it characterizes Iran's nuclear capacity as an unacceptable and an ultimate threat. "Never" is not open to interpretation and makes the issue a matter of survival and security that is not negotiable. Second, it makes Trump himself the protector. The phrase "as long as I am President" ties national safety directly to his leadership, suggesting that the threat is one that only a strong personal authority can handle. Thus, the image of Iran as an existential threat is associated with a political myth of American decisive leadership and national protection (Bottici, 2007; Flood, 1996; Welker, 2025).

The diachronic corpus presented continuity and intensification in the portrayal of Iran as an existential threat. In the 2015–2016 campaign period, Trump's rhetoric was mainly tied to Iran with the alleged weakness of the nuclear deal and the failure of past U.S. leadership. More specifically, Iran's presidency between 2017 and 2020 was characterized by language of nuclear danger, terrorism, missile threats and regional aggression. Later campaign and post-presidential discourse continued the same themes, but often in tougher moral and security terms. This diachronic pattern suggests that Trump's discourse was not simply reactive to individual political events. Instead, it continued as a stable narrative form in which Iran was a recurring symbol of danger, disorder, and American vulnerability. Such repetition is important in political mythmaking, for myths are persuasive when they are repeatedly attached to familiar enemies, fears and national identities (Bottici, 2007; Flood, 1996; Welker, 2025).

Myth of American Exceptionalism and National Protection

The second dominant pattern discovered in the analyzed corpus was the creation of a myth of American exceptionalism and national protection in politics. The United States was constantly portrayed in the discourse on Iran by Donald Trump as something that exceeds the other countries because it possesses certain power, morality and protectiveness in order to fight against dangers and secure the world. It is important to highlight that myths in politics are usually formed through telling emotionally persuasive stories about national identity and collective future (Bottici, 2007; Flood, 1996; Welker, 2025). The myth of American exceptionalism and its formation in Trump's discourse on Iran were strongly related to the representation of Iran as a threat to the world. In fact, Iran was considered dangerous and unstable and the United States was supposed to bring back the order, to protect the allies and avoid any disaster. Thus, the construction of Iran as an enemy went along with the construction of America as a necessary protector.

This myth was readily apparent in Trump's October 13, 2017, speech on Iran strategy in which he unveiled "a new strategy to address the full range of Iran's destructive actions" and that the United States would "work with our allies to counter the regime's destabilizing activity and support for terrorist proxies" (Trump, 2017). The phrase "new strategy" depicts American action as well-ordered, rational and corrective, and "work with our allies" gives the United States a role of leadership in an international security coalition. The description of Iran's behavior as "destructive" and "destabilizing" also sets up a moral contrast between American protection and

Iranian disorder. From a CDA point of view, this contrast is an example of positive self-presentation and negative other presentation, where the in-group is depicted as responsible and protective, and the out-group as harmful and threatening (van Dijk, 2018; Wodak, 2021).

The myth of American protection also received a boost in Trump's May 8, 2018, speech on the JCPOA. When announcing the U.S. withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, Trump said, "We will be instituting the highest level of economic sanction," and warned that "any nation that helps Iran in its quest for nuclear weapons could also be strongly sanctioned by the United States" (Trump, 2018). Such claims place the USA as the only powerful player capable of punishing both Iran and any other countries that collaborate with Iran. The "highest level" and "strongly sanctioned" statements work to strengthen the position of the USA, framing the economic sanctions as a defensive tool. In the context of these discourses, sanctions are not merely a form of political blackmail, but an essential defensive strategy required to defend the world from the threatening ambitions of Iran regarding nuclear technology. Such an approach is common for all instances of the broader process of legitimising coercive policies through protection, security and morality narratives (Fairclough, 2015; Chilton, 2017; Musolff, 2016).

The other significant element of this myth is the personalized national security through the personification of Trump. On January 8, 2020, in his reaction to the attacks by Iranian missiles on the American facilities in Iraq, Trump said, "Our great American forces are ready for anything" and emphasized "the incredible skill and courage of America's men and women in uniform" (Trump, 2020). In these two expressions, the military power of America becomes associated with morality. The use of the adjective "great" gives the American military forces exceptional status, and "ready for anything" demonstrates preparedness and superiority over the situation. In addition, mentioning "skill and courage" means elevating the military force to the moral value. Here, we see how Trump uses his words to combine the notion of national security and heroism of the American servicemen, which he presides over. The myth of protection gets both the national and personal aspects: America is great and powerful, and Trump is its leader who makes sure this strength is going against threats.

The myth of American exceptionalism and protection has always been stable through time, but it changed its emphasis in certain periods. The main part of the myth related to criticism of the leadership of America in the previous periods and the fact that America became vulnerable due to unfavorable agreements, especially regarding the Iranian nuclear deal in the campaign period of 2015-2016. As a president, Trump continued his work with the same myths, which were connected not only with the rhetoric, but also with practical policies, such as speeches regarding sanctions, military readiness and withdrawal from the JCPOA agreement. After 2020, the myth has continued with the explanation that the reason why Iran was controlled was due to the leadership of Trump, and the country has become safe. This type of repetition is key to political mythmaking because it stabilizes a preferred reading of political reality over time (Bottici, 2007; Flood, 1996; Welker, 2025).

Moral Polarization and Enemy Construction

The third major pattern discovered in the corpus was that of moral polarization and the creation of enemies. In the speech of Trump regarding Iran, the connection between the United States and Iran was rarely described in terms of complex political rivalry due to conflicting interests, history, or diplomacy. On the contrary, it was usually framed in terms of a moral opposition of 'us' versus 'them'. The US was depicted as rational, responsible, civilized and caring, while Iran was viewed as violent, dangerous, deceiving and morally wrong. This is an important pattern for ideological discourse, because political actors tend to justify their actions through stressing the virtue of their side and the danger of the other one (van Dijk, 2018; Fairclough, 2015; Wodak, 2021).

The polarized morality was also present in Trump's statements on the matter of Iranian strategy from October 13, 2017, where he referred to "the growing threat posed by Iran" and stated his intention to confront "the full spectrum of Iran's destructive actions" (Trump, 2017). The use of words "menace" and "destructive" carries strong evaluative implications that extend beyond mere description of political actions and go further into ascribing moral negativity to Iran as a political entity. Through the usage of these words, Iran is being characterized as a menacing force, which is essentially threatening others. Moreover, Trump declared that the United States would cooperate with their allies to confront "Iran's destabilizing activity and support for terrorist proxies" (Trump, 2017). In this way, another set of negatively connoted associations is formed between Iran, its

alleged instability and support for terrorist activities. According to Critical Discourse Analysis theory, this type of linguistic choices can be viewed as negative naming and thus contribute to construction of enemy identity through discourse (Chilton, 2017; Musolff, 2016). Iran is not only criticized for specific policies but also positioned as dangerous and disruptive entity.

Trump was clearer about constructing the enemy in his speech on the JCPOA, dated May 8, 2018. According to Trump, Iran is "the world's leading state sponsor of terror" and poses the threat of getting "the world's most dangerous weapons" (Trump, 2018). This is a key quote because, first of all, it links the moral denouncement with the security fear. Calling Iran "leading state sponsor of terror" places the country above all others in the hierarchy of danger and "most dangerous weapons" refers to the maximum threat level. Repeatedly using superlatives ("leading", "most dangerous") is a way of negatively framing Iran and preventing its normalization as a diplomatic subject. From the perspective of discourse analysis, it is an example of negative other presentation where the opponent is framed in the extreme and morally charged categories (van Dijk, 2018; Wodak, 2021).

Another example was Donald Trump's statement on January 8, 2020, about Iranian missiles hitting U.S. bases in Iraq. According to Donald Trump, concerning Qasem Soleimani, the United States military has "taken down the top terrorist in the world," and Qasem Soleimani himself is "personally responsible for some of the absolutely worst atrocities" (Trump, 2020). This excerpt reflects the phenomenon of personalization in the enemy creation process. Instead of focusing on state-level conflict between Iran and the U.S., Donald Trump moralizes the situation putting the blame on Qasem Soleimani as a person. Calling him "world's top terrorist" gives him an extraordinary international persona, and "absolutely worst atrocities" justify the U.S. military action in response to this great evil. Personalizing enemy helps to simplify geopolitical conflict, making it understandable through the image of enemy. Moreover, personalization legitimizes the violence through presenting it as an elimination of an unacceptable person (Fairclough, 2015; Chilton, 2017).

The similar speech expanded the moral frame to include "civilized world" as well as the United States. "The civilized world must send a clear and unified message to the Iranian regime: Your campaign of terror, murder, mayhem will not be tolerated any longer," Trump said (Trump, 2020). This statement is also important because it defines the conflict as a moral battle between civilization and violence. The phrase "civilized world" places the United States and its allies within a collective moral identity of superiority, while "terror, murder, mayhem" creates Iran as the antithesis of civilization. The rhythm of this three-part list contributes to the emotional force of the accusation and gives the sentence a strong moral tone. This is not a neutral description of foreign policy but a form of moral boundary-making in discursive terms in the CDA. Iran is outside the acceptable international community. The United States is positioned as a representative of order, civilization and justice (Wodak, 2021; Musolff, 2016).

Diachronically, the pattern of moral polarization was stable, but its form varied in political contexts. Throughout the 2015–2016 campaign period, Iran was often portrayed as an enemy, with Trump's criticisms of the nuclear deal and his claim that previous American leaders had empowered a dangerous regime. The moral polarization became more policy-oriented and was used to justify sanctions, withdrawal from the JCPOA, and military action, especially between 2017 and 2020 during the presidency. In subsequent discourse, the same moral division continued, with Iran depicted as a continuing source of terror, instability and danger. This consistency indicates that enemy-making was not an occasional rhetorical strategy but a stable feature of Trump's discourse on Iran. This served to keep a simple moral narrative going in which the United States was cast as the defender of peace and Iran was cast as the source of threat.

DISCUSSION

The study's findings indicate that threat representation and political mythmaking were closely intertwined and that Trump's discourse on Iran reflected this relationship. Iran was not only used as a foreign policy problem but was also portrayed in terms of symbolic threat through which broader political implications could be created. In the analysis conducted, the Iran issue had been tied to the risk of nuclear proliferation, terrorism, instability in the region, violence and moral disorder. Through such representations, Iran was made to appear as another threatening entity, and the US had to step in as the protector of peace and order. This study agrees with CDA in

that political discourses can be seen as a site of power, ideology, and identity formation through language (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2018; Wodak, 2021).

One of the major implications of this research is that Trump's discourse is highly securitized. The Iran threat was associated with the risk of nuclear weapons, terrorism, violence and regional instability. Hence, Iran went from being just a diplomatic entity to being a serious security concern. Such a discursive pattern justified the use of sanctions, the withdrawal of JCPOA and military readiness. Thus, language was a tool of political legitimization. The image of Iran as a threat was not only a description of a geopolitical reality, but also a way to legitimize a specific foreign policy based on pressure and confrontation. This supports Chilton's (2017) claim that political discourse often structures complex international issues in terms of fear, protection and national security.

Results also indicate that Trump's discourse established a myth of American exceptionalism and national protection. The United States was depicted as strong, moral, responsible and able to defend itself, its allies and the broader international order. This myth was based on the negative image of Iran. Put differently, Iran needed to be built as a threat so that American power could be portrayed as protective and necessary. Danger and protection are one of the central elements of political mythmaking. Political myths simplify political realities, and assign clear roles of enemy, victim, protector and heroic leader (Bottici, 2007; Flood, 1996; Welker, 2025). The enemy was Iran and the protector was the United States and Trump's leadership in Trump's discourse.

Another important finding relates to moral polarization. In discourse, Trump repeatedly framed U.S.–Iran relations in terms of a binary opposition between good and evil, order and chaos, civilization and violence. Iran was described in moral language that linked it to terror, destruction, destabilization and aggression. The United States was portrayed as rational, disciplined and protective. This finding is consistent with van Dijk's (2018) positive self-presentation and negative other presentation, as the political actors stress the virtue of the in-group and the danger of the out-group. This polarization reduces the complexity of international relations and hides alternative interpretations. Thus, diplomatic disagreement is transformed into moral struggle and political opposition into enemy confrontation.

The findings further reveal that mythmaking and threat representations went together instead of working independently. The idea of American prowess was convincing because it was built against the backdrop of the perceived threat by Iranians. Similarly, the representation of Iran as a threat became popular as it was part of a bigger narrative about America providing protection, leadership, and renewal. This transaction helps understand why the rhetoric about Iran by Trump is not only about Iran. The main reason behind this is that he wanted to construct an image of America and his own self as president of America. Iran served as a very good target for Trump to construct his leadership image.

The diachronicity of the results demonstrates that Trump's discourse maintained an invariant mythic structure despite changing political context which shifted from campaign rhetoric to presidential addresses and back to campaign statements. While the basic portrayal of Iran did not change — Iran was still portrayed as a threat, an illegal and disruptive force, while the US was still portrayed as an exceptional and protective power — the key difference lied in the focus. Iran was often mentioned in campaign rhetoric to criticize former U.S. administration and the Iran's nuclear deal. And again, the same portrayal was used in presidential discourse for justification of sanctions, JCPOA withdrawal, and military action, becoming increasingly policy oriented. In other words, Trump's discourse was diachronic not in its complete alteration, but rather in decontextualization of the same mythic structure.

CONCLUSION

The present research examines Trump's discourse about Iran with regards to diachronic CDA regarding political myth making and threat representation. The findings revealed that Iran was consistently portrayed not just as an opponent in the field of politics, but also as a danger which is associated with the nuclear threat, terrorism, regional instabilities, violence, and immorality. At the same time, Trump's discourse constructed the image of the US as a strong entity responsible for the security of the country and the whole world. This demonstrates the

mechanisms of threat representation and political myth making because Iran was portrayed as a dangerous “other”, while the US and the leadership of Trump were portrayed as strong and protective entities.

Moreover, the research revealed that the discourse of Trump contained many elements of morality and the creation of enemies. Iran kept being described using negative moral rhetoric whereas the US was presented as rational and reasonable in its actions. Thus, a simplified picture of the relationship of both nations emerged, and the political disagreement became a confrontation of morality between order and chaos, civilization and barbarity, safety and threat. As for the diachronic aspect, it revealed that although the political environment during campaign speeches and later presidential messages varied greatly, the essential representation of Iran remained almost unchanged. Using Iran as an example of the enemy, Trump tried to implement his bigger ideas of American exceptionalism and nationhood.

The study has theoretical and analytical implications. This study suggests the idea that political discourse not only reflects political reality but also produces social and ideological meanings in theory. It argues that the discourse of foreign policy can be used to construct political myths linking national identity, leadership and security. The study analytically shows how CDA can be used to explore the role of lexical choices, evaluative language, binary oppositions and recurrent security frames in the construction of political enemies. In doing so, the present study contributes to the body of research on political discourse by illustrating how Trump’s discourse concerning Iran employed fear, morality, and national identity to justify particular political positions.

The study contributes, but it has some limitations. First, it limited its scope to Trump's discourse on Iran and did not compare his discourse to other US Presidents or political actors. Second, the study was qualitative, thus providing depth of interpretation rather than statistical generalizability. Third, even though the corpus spanned different political periods, the analysis was confined to selected speeches, statements, interviews and social media posts in which Iran was directly or meaningfully discussed. Thus, the findings should be seen as a record of patterns in the selected corpus rather than a full representation of all U.S. political discourse on Iran.

There are many potential directions for further research. First, it could be interesting to conduct comparative studies of how Iran is presented in the discourse of different U.S. presidents like Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Donald Trump in order to reveal any similarities and distinctions in threat construction. Secondly, the discourse of President Trump about Iran may be compared to his discourse about other countries such as China, Russia, or North Korea in order to find out if the same mythmaking tactics are applied in all geopolitical contexts. Moreover, it is possible to combine CDA with corpus-assisted approaches to conduct analyses of large data sets and find any consistent lexical patterns. Lastly, future research may study audience reception of such political representations.

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