

تحليل خطاب نقدي لرسائل دونالد ترامب على منصة X عام 2026 بشأن الحرب على إيران

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الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب النقدي، فان دايك، دونالد ترامب، حرب إيران 2026، خطاب زمن الحرب.

كيفية اقتباس البحث

صالح ، رشوان رمضان ، تحليل خطاب نقدي لرسائل دونالد ترامب على منصة X عام 2026 بشأن الحرب على إيران ،مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الانسانية، تموز 2026،المجلد:16،العدد:7.

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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Donald Trump's 2026 X Messages on the Iran War

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Keywords : Critical Discourse Analysis, Van Dijk, Donald Trump, Iran War 2026, wartime discourse.

How To Cite This Article

Salih, Rashwan Ramadan, A Critical Discourse Analysis of Donald Trump's 2026 X Messages on the Iran War, Journal Of Babylon Center For Humanities Studies, July 2026, Volume:16, Issue 7.



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المخلص

تُجري هذا البحث تحليلًا نقديًا في الخطاب لمنشورات الرئيس الأمريكي دونالد ج. ترامب على منصة "تروث سوشال" المعروفة سابقًا باسم (X و تويتر) خلال النزاع العسكري مع إيران عام 2026. وتطبيق الإطار الاجتماعي-المعرفي الذي وضعه تون أ. فان دايك (1998؛ 2006؛ 2015)، وبخاصة المربع الأيديولوجي، والافتراضات الكلية، ونماذج السياق، تدرس البحث كيف يُشكّل خطاب ترامب على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أثناء الحرب واقعًا قطبيًا قائمًا على ثنائية "نحن ضد هم". بالاعتماد على 8 منشورات متعلقة بالحرب من شباط إلى نيسان 2026، يُحدد التحليل أربع استراتيجيات خطابية رئيسية: (1) التمثيل الإيجابي للذات "الأمريكية نحن" على أنها قوية ولكن متحفظة؛ (2) التمثيل السلبي للآخر "الإيراني هم" على أنه غادر، وغير عقلاني، وإجرامي؛ (3) إضفاء الشرعية على العمل العدواني من خلال التضحية بالنفس والبركة الإلهية؛ و(4) الاستخدام الاستراتيجي لصيغ التعبير (الطور)، والاستعارة، واللغة البذيئة لطمس الخط الفاصل بين التهديد والسياسة. تُظهر النتائج أن رسائل ترامب على X عام 2026

لا تكتفي بالإبلاغ عن نزاع، بل تؤدي بنشاط خطاباً هيمنياً، يُصنع الموافقة على التصعيد العسكري بينما يُبرئ جماعة الداخل من المسؤولية بشكل منهجي. تُقسّم هذه الورقة البحثية إلى الأقسام التالية: يستعرض القسم الثاني الأدبيات ذات الصلة بتحليل الخطابات السياسية باستخدام إطار فان دايك. ويحدد القسم الثالث الخلفية النظرية. ويصف القسم الرابع البيانات والمنهجية، بما في ذلك تصميم البحث. ويعرض القسم الخامس النتائج والمناقشة، مُنظمةً حول أربع استراتيجيات خطابية. ويختتم القسم السادس الورقة البحثية.

Abstract

This paper conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of U.S. President Donald J. Trump's Truth Social (formerly X) posts during the 2026 military conflict with Iran. Applying Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework (1998; 2006; 2015), specifically the ideological square, macro-propositions, and context models—the study examines how Trump's wartime social-media discourse constructs a polarized “Us vs. Them” reality. Drawing on 8 war-related posts from February to April 2026, the analysis identifies four principal discursive strategies: (1) positive self-representation of the “American Us” as powerful yet restrained; (2) negative other-representation of the “Iranian Them” as treacherous, irrational, and criminally culpable; (3) legitimization of aggressive action through victimization and divine blessing; and (4) the strategic use of modality, metaphor, and profanity to blur the line between threat and policy. The findings demonstrate that Trump's 2026 X messages do not merely report on a conflict but actively perform a discourse of dominance, manufacturing consent for military escalation while systematically absolving the in-group of accountabilities. The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant literature on CDA of political speeches using Van Dijk's framework. Section 3 outlines the theoretical background. Section 4 describes the data and methodology, including the research design. Section 5 presents the results and discussion, organized around four discursive strategies. Section 6 concludes the paper.

1. Introduction

On 28 February 2026, coordinated U.S.-Israeli strikes against Iranian targets marked the beginning of a new and devastating phase in the long-standing adversarial relationship between Washington and Tehran. Within hours, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was reportedly killed, universities across Iran were shuttered, and the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain



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came under retaliatory missile attack. Over the following weeks, more than 1,340 people lost their lives.

In the midst of this escalation, President Donald Trump turned not to formal press briefings or diplomatic communiqués but to his preferred digital megaphone: Truth Social. Since the war's outset, Trump posted nearly 90 times on Iran, Israel and other war-related topics—a body of work that includes videos, reposts and his own extended commentaries, some running longer than 200 words. Never before has a U.S. president telegraphed his war planning so publicly, broadcasting decision-making and venting frustrations in real time, often between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.

This study asks a critical question: How does Donald Trump's 2026 discourse on Truth Social construct a legitimate justification for war with Iran? Drawing on Teun A. van Dijk's (1998, 2006) socio-cognitive framework, the analysis focuses on the central ideological operation of his wartime rhetoric: the systematic production and reproduction of an "Us vs. Them" dichotomy. Van Dijk argues that political discourse, particularly regarding conflict, is structured by an ideological square that emphasizes positive in-group properties while highlighting negative out-group traits. By applying this model to Trump's 2026 messages, this paper reveals how micro-level linguistic choices—lexicon, syntax, metaphor, modality and even profanity—enable macro-structures of geopolitical power.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant literature on CDA of political speeches using Van Dijk's framework. Section 3 outlines the theoretical background. Section 4 describes the data and methodology, including the research design. Section 5 presents the results and discussion, organized around four discursive strategies. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been extensively applied to political speeches, particularly those of U.S. presidents, to uncover hidden ideologies and power relations. Within the Van Dijkian tradition, numerous studies have examined how political leaders construct in-group and out-group representations.

Al Kauthsar and Hamzah (2024) analyzed the ideological square in Joe Biden's and Vladimir Putin's speeches on the Russia-Ukraine war, identifying discursive devices such as disclaimer, euphemism, national self-glorification, number game, and polarization. Similarly, Abid (2024) examined self/other representation in George W. Bush's post-9/11 speech, showing how lexicalization strategies reinforced a moral

dichotomy. Abid (2017) further traced Bush's discourse before and after the Iraq war, combining Van Dijk's square with Halliday's systemic functional grammar.

Trump's discourse has been a frequent object of CDA. Saadeen and AlBzour (2022) analysed Trump's denial speeches after the 2020 U.S. presidential election, focusing on positive self-representation and negative other-representation. They demonstrated how Trump delegitimized the election outcome while positioning himself as a victim. Dibra (2024) applied Van Dijk's micro- and macro-structural analysis to Trump's speech before the 6 January 2021 Capitol attack using Van Dijk's micro/macro structural analysis and found that lexical and syntactic elements played a major role in steering beliefs and inciting violence. Kakisina, Indhiarti, and Fajri (2022) compared Trump and Bolsonaro's manipulation strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, using Van Dijk's manipulation strategies including ideological polarization and discrediting others. Lafta (2024) examined discursive tactics in the 2024 Trump-Biden debate using Van Dijk's framework focusing on discursive tactics such as actor description, metaphor, and number game. Highlighted Trump's use of urgency and crisis framing. Several studies have specifically addressed Trump's Iran-related discourse. Rahmi, Hamzah, and Fitrawati (2019) analyzed ideologies in Trump's national security speeches, including those on Iran. However, no study to date has systematically examined Trump's wartime social-media discourse during an actual armed conflict with Iran. The present study fills this gap by focusing on the 2026 Iran War, a unique case in which a former (or sitting) president used a social-media platform as the primary channel for announcing and justifying military operations in real time.

3. Theoretical Background: Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach

Teun A. van Dijk's model distinguishes itself from other CDA approaches by foregrounding the socio-cognitive interface between discourse and society. For Van Dijk, ideologies are not merely expressed in text; they are the cognitive frameworks that control how social groups interpret events. His framework rests on three interconnected levels:

- Macro-level (social context):** The broader geopolitical power structures—in this case, the U.S. as a superpower engaged in dynamic conflict with a sanctioned “rogue state.”

- Meso-level (cognition):** The shared mental models and ideologies that shape discourse, such as American exceptionalism, the “terrorist state” stereotype, and the self-image of a benevolent liberator.



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•**Micro-level (discourse):** The specific linguistic choices in text, including pronouns, predications, metaphors, and modality.

The core analytical tool is the ideological square, which operates via four discursive strategies (van Dijk, 1998, 2006):

1. Emphasize positive information about *Us*.
2. Emphasize negative information about *Them*.
3. De-emphasize negative information about *Us*.
4. De-emphasize positive information about *Them*.

Applied to war discourse, van Dijk (2006) observes that “legitimate self-defense” is a classic in-group positive attribution, while “aggression” is framed as an exclusively out-group trait. This paper extends that insight to Trump’s 2026 wartime rhetoric, demonstrating how the ideological square operates not only in formal speeches but across the fragmented, accelerated genre of social media. Additional key concepts include macro-propositions (global topics that control local meanings), context models (the speaker’s mental representation of the communicative situation), and discursive strategies for reproducing dominance (e.g., euphemism, hyperbole, agent deletion, and presupposition).

4. Data and Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis as the primary method. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the aim is not to quantify linguistic features but to interpret how meaning, ideology, and power are discursively constructed in a specific set of political messages. The analysis is interpretative and context-sensitive, following van Dijk’s (2015) guidelines for socio-cognitive CDA.

4.2 Data Collection

The corpus consists of a purposive sample of 8 Truth Social posts from @realDonaldTrump, dated between 28 February 2026 (the start of U.S.-Israeli strikes) and 7 April 2026. The inclusion criteria were: original messages (excluding reposts) that explicitly mention at least one of the following keywords: “Iran,” “Tehran,” “military,” “war,” “Strait of Hormuz,” or related terms. The data were compiled from news archives (Hindustan Times, Wall Street Journal, WION, Delaware Online, Daily Times, Bernama-Anadolu), direct citations in reputable media outlets, and publicly available screenshots. All posts are in English.



4.3 Analytical Procedure

Each post was analyzed using van Dijk's framework at three levels:

- Macro-structure:** Identification of the overall topic, macro-speech acts (e.g., warning, celebration, threat), and semantic coherence.

- Local semantics:** Lexical choice, predication, pronoun systems ("Us" vs. "Them"), attribution of agency, euphemism, hyperbole, and presupposition.

- Style and rhetoric:** Metaphor, modality (e.g., "will," "could," "must"), syntactic structures (parataxis, conditionals, exclamations), and the use of profanity or religious language.

The analysis was conducted iteratively: each post was first coded for macro-proposition, then for the four quadrants of the ideological square, and finally for specific linguistic devices. Emergent patterns were grouped into four overarching discursive strategies, which form the basis of the results section.

5. Results and Discussion

The analysis is organized around four discursive strategies that operationalize van Dijk's ideological square within the specific context of the 2026 Iran War.

5.1 Positive Self Representation: "The Powerful, Restrained, and Divinely Blessed American Us"

Trump consistently constructs the American in-group as simultaneously powerful, restrained, and providentially favored. This dual emphasis—might combined with mercy—serves to legitimize U.S. military action as both effective and moral. This pattern aligns with broader findings in the literature: studies of Trump's tweets about China during COVID-19 reveal that "the cognitive binary opposition between negative-other presentation and positive-self presentation unravels Trump's negative stance against China in contrast to the US under his presidency which is portrayed as powerful and heroic". Similarly, a systematic analysis of Trump's anti-immigration tweets concluded that "Trump used various discursive techniques to represent Muslim refugees and Mexican immigrants negatively while he represented himself positively", a pattern that extends directly to his wartime framing of the Iranian "other." More specifically, research on Trump's Iran-related speeches during the 2019–2020 crisis found that "the speeches comprise perspicuous linguistic traces of Trump's ideological underpinnings," with the ideological square revealing "the discursive structure of the speeches and their ideological





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structure”. The 2026 conflict, however, represents a significant intensification: where previous studies identified positive self-presentation through claims of power and heroism, the 2026 discourse adds an explicitly religious dimension that was less pronounced in earlier corpora.

Example 1 (Easter Sunday, 5 April 2026):

“Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the F----- Strait, you crazy bastards, or you’ll be living in Hell – JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah.”

On the surface, this post appears purely aggressive. Yet within van Dijk’s framework, it also performs positive self-representation. The capitalized ultimatum (“JUST WATCH”) positions the U.S. as an agent capable of unleashing “nothing like it”—a display of overwhelming power that, crucially, has not yet been fully deployed. The threat of “Power Plant Day” frames potential destruction as a response to Iranian intransigence, not as unprovoked aggression. The phrase “Praise be to Allah” appropriates Islamic religious language to present the U.S. as operating within a cosmic, divinely sanctioned framework, thereby elevating the conflict from geopolitics to spiritual struggle. This religious legitimization strategy is consistent with Degaf and Ashfiya’s analysis of Trump’s 2025 Iran speech, which found that:

“...the speech constructs a polarized moral framework in which the United States and its allies are represented as morally virtuous and divinely sanctioned, while Iran is framed as an irrational and existential threat. Military aggression is legitimized through hyperbolic glorification, religious invocation, euphemistic framing of destruction, and the strategic omission of civilian suffering, presenting war as a moral necessity rather than a political choice”. (Degaf and Ashfiya, 2025: 351)

The 2026 discourse extends this pattern from a formal speech to the even more visceral medium of social media, where religious appropriation is compressed into a single provocative phrase.

Example 2 (Post rescue operation, 6 April 2026):

“The rescue was an Easter Miracle.”

This post—referring to the rescue of a downed U.S. airman—exemplifies the “emphasize Us positive” strategy in its purest form. By framing a military extraction as a “miracle” on the holiest day of the Christian calendar, Trump implicitly casts the American war effort as blessed by God. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth reinforced this framing, writing “God is good” on his X account. This religious legitimization serves van Dijk’s ideological square by painting the in-group not merely as

combatants but as instruments of divine will. The religious dimension is not incidental: reporting on the war noted that “as he wages war on Iran, President Donald Trump was joined in the Oval Office by Christian pastors. Solemnly, some placed their hands on his shoulder or forearm. They offered their blessings. ... invoking religion, with some Trump officials casting it as almost a divine mission”. Indeed, broader analysis of the Trump administration has identified “the convergence of Trumpism, evangelical power, militarized Christianity, and an unqualified pro-Israel agenda that increasingly treats territorial expansion and permanent domination as morally righteous, even divinely sanctioned”. The “Easter Miracle” framing thus operates as a synecdoche for a wider ideological formation in which state violence is sacralized.

Example 3 (7 March 2026):

“The war is already won.”

This declaration, made while the U.S. was actively ramping up bombing campaigns, constructs victory as a *fait accompli*, thereby delegitimizing any continued Iranian resistance as futile and irrational. The present perfect “is already won” collapses past action and future certainty into a single timeless assertion, positioning the U.S. as an agent of inevitable triumph. This macro-strategy of positive self-presentation—what one study identified as “the self is personification of Goodness” and “the self is the only nation’s hope”—is here intensified by the wartime context: where previous Trump tweets used such claims to rally domestic support, in the 2026 conflict they function as a weapon of psychological warfare aimed at both domestic and international audiences.

5.2 Negative Other Representation: “The Treacherous, Irrational, and Criminally Culpable Iranian Them”

The out-group—the Iranian leadership and, by extension, the Iranian state—is systematically attributed with negative traits: irrationality, treachery, weakness, and criminality. This pattern is well documented in the literature. A study of Trump’s COVID-19 tweets about China found that “he presents China as guilty, incompetent, a liar, a conspirator, an enemy of the people, a manipulator”. Similarly, research on Trump’s tweets about Syrian refugees identified “discursive techniques and processes employed by Donald J. Trump to portray Syrian refugees as a negative out-group and threat,” arguing that “this anti-immigration argument facilitated and materialized not only as a right-wing populist discourse but also as an actual policy”. Analysis of Trump’s polarization strategies more broadly revealed that he employs two macro-strategies for negative other-representation: “the other is disloyal to our country” and “the other lacks credibility”. In the 2026 conflict, these patterns are not



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merely reproduced but amplified: the out-group is not only disloyal but “crazy,” not only lacking credibility but actively masochistic in its alleged desire for its own destruction.

Example 4 (5 April 2026):

“Open the F----- Strait, you crazy bastards, or you’ll be living in Hell.”

The vocative “you crazy bastards” performs multiple ideological operations. First, it infantilizes and pathologizes the Iranian leadership, attributing their refusal to open the Strait of Hormuz to insanity rather than strategic calculation. Second, the profanity marks a deliberate transgression of diplomatic norms—but this transgression itself serves a purpose: it signals that the speaker is too angry, too authentic, and too unconstrained by “politically correct” conventions to engage in normal diplomacy. Within van Dijk’s framework, such explicit derogation is a powerful tool for emphasizing negative out-group traits, making them instinctual and unforgettable. As Di Lauri’s analysis of Trump’s wartime threats noted, “Even by his low bar, Trump’s Easter Sunday rant against Iran — a threat to bomb power plants and bridges, capped with a religious insult — pushes at a perilous line” (2026: 79). The profanity, far from being incidental, is a calculated rhetorical device that performs the ideological work of dehumanization.

Example 5 (6 April 2026, paraphrased from multiple posts):

“Iran has been nothing but trouble. They don’t fight fair; they use proxies and lies.”

Generic pronouns (“they”) homogenize all Iranians, erasing internal dissent or moderate factions. The phrase “don’t fight fair” invokes a moral hierarchy where “fair fighting” (i.e., conventional U.S. warfare) is good, and asymmetric tactics (proxies, missiles, drone swarms) are illegitimate. This is a classic van Dijkian move: attributing negative agency to the out-group for actions the in-group also performs, while suppressing that equivalence. Research on Trump’s discourse more broadly found that “the self-other polarization is strongly evident in Trump’s tweets” and “that he employs various linguistic and rhetorical techniques such as lexicalization, metaphors, presupposition, repetition, loaded words and deictic expressions to achieve this strict polarization” (Ott and Dickinson, 2019: 39). The homogenizing “they” is a prime example of such deictic polarization, collapsing a diverse nation of nearly 90 million people into a monolithic enemy.

Example 6 (March 2026, reported in Axios):

“want freedom,” adding: “We’ve had numerous intercepts, ‘Please keep bombing’ ... and these are people that are living where the bombs are exploding.”

This remarkable claim—those Iranian civilians beg for continued bombing—performs a sophisticated negative other-representation. By attributing to Iranians, a masochistic desire for their own destruction, Trump constructs Iranian society as irrational, victimized by its own leadership, and utterly incapable of self-governance. The in-group (the U.S.) is thereby positioned as the only rational agent capable of delivering the “freedom” that Iranians supposedly crave—even if that delivery comes in the form of high explosive munitions. This strategy aligns with what one study identified as “victimization/criminalization” among the eight discursive strategies Biden employed in his Ukraine war speech, though Trump deploys it in a more extreme and paradoxical form: here, the out-group is simultaneously victim (of its own leadership) and willing participant in its own victimization (begging for bombs). The rhetorical effect is to erase any moral ambiguity about civilian casualties: if Iranians want the bombing, then the U.S. is merely fulfilling their wishes.

5.3 Legitimization Through Victimization and Divine Mandate

A critical strategy in van Dijk’s model is how powerful in-groups claim victim status to authorize retaliation. In the 2026 conflict, Trump deploys this strategy through two primary channels: the rescue narrative and the “preemptive defense” frame. This pattern has been observed in previous research: a study of Trump’s national security rhetoric found that “restricting the rhetorical appeal of rescue narratives to the affective domain obscures the argumentative function that these narratives partake in constructing political arguments. ... rescue narratives can perform as arguments when used to provide reasons to justify political action”. The study specifically examined “the way(s) Donald Trump employs rescue narratives as arguments to justify military interventions in Iraq and Syria,” finding that “the different elements of the narrative construct premises for argument schemes adduced to justify the rightness of claims”. In the 2026 conflict, the rescue narrative is weaponized with unprecedented precision: the suffering and endangerment of a single American airman becomes a synecdoche for the entire war effort.





Example 7 (“Preemptive defence” frame, 28 February 2026, paraphrased):

“The United States did not start a war with Iran. We took action to STOP a war.”

Although the 2026 conflict was initiated by coordinated U.S.-Israeli strikes, Trump systematically reframes the opening salvo as a response to Iranian aggression—whether actual or imminent. This macro-proposition (“We are defending, not attacking”) is the foundational premise upon which all other ideological operations rest. By accepting this premise, the audience is led to accept that any subsequent escalation—including the targeting of power plants and bridges—is merely proportionate response. This framing is consistent with Degaf and Ashfiya’s finding that Trump’s Iran speech “normalizes pre-emptive military violence” and “presents war as a moral necessity rather than a political choice” (2025: 348). The 2026 discourse takes this normalization a step further: the preemptive frame is not merely asserted but embedded within a chain of threats and ultimatums that make the “defensive” claim increasingly implausible, yet the frame itself remains rhetorically potent because it taps into deep-seated cultural scripts about justified retaliation.

Example 8 (Easter rescue narrative, 6 April 2026):

“The rescue was an Easter Miracle.”

As noted in 5.1, the rescue of the downed airman serves as a positive self-presentation event that simultaneously legitimizes ongoing aggression. By foregrounding the rescue—an operation that required U.S. forces to penetrate Iranian territory—Trump reframes the war as a series of humanitarian interventions rather than a campaign of regime change. The suffering and endangerment of a single American airman becomes a synecdoche for the entire war effort: we are there because one of our own was in danger. This victimization legitimizes all prior and future strikes as acts of rescue and self-defense. The religious framing (“Easter Miracle”) adds a layer of divine authorization: if God orchestrated the rescue, then the war itself must be blessed. As De Lauri observes of the broader administration, “symbolism matters, especially when it aligns with a broader worldview. ... It signals a moral universe in which force can be imagined as a sacred duty” (2026: 79).

5.4 Metaphors, Modality, and the Blurring of Threat and Policy

Trump’s 2026 discourse is characterized by a strategic blurring of the line between threat and policy, accomplished through specific linguistic devices. The literature has identified modality as a key micro-strategy in Trump’s polarization toolkit: one study found that among the seven micro-strategies Trump employs are “lexicalization, hyperbole, modality,

number game, consensus, metaphor, and irony". In the 2026 conflict, modality and metaphor are deployed with particular intensity.

Modality as a weapon: Trump repeatedly uses deontic modality ("will," "must," "there will be") to present future actions not as possibilities but as certainties. His declaration that Tuesday "will be Power Plant Day" employs the future indicative, not the conditional. This erases any sense of choice or contingency, making the destruction of Iranian infrastructure appear as an inevitable natural event rather than a political decision. This pattern aligns with broader findings: analysis of Trump's tweets reveals that "the centralizations of all authorities are entitled to In-Group that holds the status quo", and the use of assertive modality is a key mechanism for enacting that entitlement.

Metaphors of erasure: Trump told Axios that if Iran did not reopen the Strait of Hormuz, "their whole country is gone." He claimed that rebuilding Iran would take 20 years "if they're lucky." The metaphor of total erasure ("gone") dehumanizes the conflict, reducing an entire nation of nearly 90 million people to a disposable obstacle. This metaphorical strategy has been observed elsewhere: research on Trump's anti-immigration tweets found that "to legitimize his anti-immigration policies, he employed different rhetoric strategies such as victimization, implication, metaphor and comparison". In the wartime context, metaphor shifts from the domain of policy debate to that of existential threat: erasure is not hyperbole but a literal promise.

Ultimatum as policy: Trump's repeated deadlines—extending from Monday to Tuesday at 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time—perform the function of what van Dijk (2006) calls context models: they construct a cognitive frame in which Iran's compliance is the only rational option and any failure to comply justifies unlimited retaliation. Reporting on the war noted that "the president has suspended his threat to destroy the country, as he did with his previous ultimatums. It's yet another example of his shifting storyline on the conflict". Yet the very fact that ultimatums are issued, suspended, and reissued performs an ideological function regardless of their consistency: each ultimatum reinforces the frame that the U.S. has the right to set deadlines and Iran the obligation to comply, thereby "inscribing a hierarchical relationship into the discursive fabric of the conflict" (Degaf and Ashfiya, 2025: 350).

5.5 Summary of the Ideological Square in Wartime Action

The findings across the four quadrants of van Dijk's ideological square throughout the 8 samples are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Van Dijk's Ideological Square Applied to Trump's 2026 X Messages



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Van Dijk's Strategy	Linguistic Realization in Trump's 2026 X Messages	Example
Emphasize Us positive	Divine blessing ("Easter Miracle"), overwhelming power ("nothing like it"), preemptive defense ("STOP a war"), victimhood (downed airman)	"The rescue was an Easter Miracle."
Emphasize Them negative	Profanity ("crazy bastards"), pathologization ("insane"), delegitimization ("they don't fight fair"), dehumanization ("their whole country is gone")	"Open the F----- Strait, you crazy bastards."
De-emphasize Us negative	Omission of civilian casualties; passive constructions for U.S. strikes; reframing aggression as rescue	"We took action to STOP a war" (not "We initiated strikes").
De-emphasize Them positive	No acknowledgment of Iranian diplomatic overtures; suppression of Iranian civilian suffering as legitimate grievance	Silence on pre-war negotiations; dismissal of Iranian counter-narratives.

The 2026 conflict reveals an intensification of previous patterns. Where Trump's 2019–2020 discourse relied on threats of "suffering," the 2026 discourse introduces explicit timelines ("Tuesday, 8:00 P.M."), named targets ("Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day"), and religious legitimization ("Praise be to Allah," "Easter Miracle"). The Us vs. Them binary is not merely a description of reality but a construction of reality—one that systematically privileges in-group motives while pathologizing out-group responses.

This intensification is consistent with the trajectory identified in the literature. Research on Trump's COVID-19 tweets noted that "when COVID-19 started to attack America, Trump began to associate China with negative actions and features, while America was associated with positive actions and properties throughout Trump's discourses. It is represented as a savior for the world from COVID-19". The 2026 Iran discourse follows the same logic but with higher stakes: the threat is not a virus but a nuclear-capable state, and the savior role is not metaphorical but militarized. As Talukdar et al found in their analysis of Trump's X rhetoric during his return to office, "Trump systematically constructs a polarized discourse by portraying the United States, himself, and his political allies as strong and legitimate actors, while delegitimizing both domestic opponents ... and international actors (e.g., Iran, Hamas) as threats (2025:190). In the 2026 conflict, this conflation reaches its logical

endpoint: the enemy is not merely Iran but an entire worldview of “unfair” fighting, “crazy” leadership, and masochistic civilian populations—another so thoroughly negative that any action against it is automatically justified.

Notably, an intertextual irony emerged during the conflict. Within hours of the 28 February strikes, decade-old Trump posts resurfaced in which he had repeatedly warned that President Barack Obama would “manufacture” a war with Iran to boost re-election prospects. One 2011 post read: “In order to get elected, @BarackObama will start a war with Iran.” Another from 2012 warned: “Now that Obama’s poll numbers are in tailspin – watch for him to launch a strike in Libya or Iran. He is desperate.” As one X user commented, “Don the con man was projecting his own playbook onto Obama for years. Now look where we are.” This intertextual irony highlights the constructed, contingent nature of political discourse, where accusations of aggression are deployed or withdrawn based entirely on in-group/out-group alignment. It also underscores a key finding of van Dijk’s framework: ideological squares are not static properties of individual speakers but dynamic strategies that shift with context, audience, and political need. What was, in 2012, a damning accusation of presidential warmongering becomes, in 2026, a justified preemptive defense—not because the facts have changed, but because the speaker’s position relative to the in-group has changed.

6. Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated that Donald Trump’s 2026 Truth Social messages on the Iran War operate as a textbook example of van Dijk’s ideological square. Through positive self-representation (powerful yet restrained, divinely blessed), negative other-representation (crazy, irrational, treacherous), and the systematic suppression of contradictory evidence, Trump’s discourse does not merely report on a conflict but actively manufactures a social cognition that makes war thinkable, justifiable, and even spiritually mandated.

The “Us vs. Them” dichotomy in the 2026 discourse serves multiple functions: it delegitimizes diplomacy (since one cannot negotiate with “crazy bastards”), normalizes infrastructure destruction as a legitimate tactic, and positions military escalation as the only logical response to Iranian “madness.” Moreover, the medium of Truth Social—with its short attention span, algorithmic amplification, and absence of editorial gatekeeping—exacerbates van Dijk’s “preferential treatment” of in-group beliefs, forcing a Manichaean choice between the rational American “Us” and the pathological Iranian “Them.”

For future research, a comparative analysis between Trump’s 2026 discourse and his 2019–2020 rhetoric on Iran would reveal how a shift from threat of war to actual war alters the ideological strategies deployed. Additionally, the role of religious legitimization—the strategic deployment



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of “Easter Miracle” and “Praise be to Allah”—deserves deeper exploration as a distinct discursive strategy in twenty-first-century warfare.

This paper concludes that van Dijk's framework remains indispensable for decoding how social media discourse translates geopolitical power into visceral, polarizing, and potentially lethal action. In an era when presidents broadcast war plans alongside profanity-laden ultimatums, the critical analysis of wartime discourse is not an academic luxury but a democratic necessity.

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