Just War: Critical Discourse Analysis of US Presidential Speeches

DOI: https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes.v25i1.604

Solopova Olga Alexandrovna
Naumova Ksenia Andreevna
South Ural State University (national research university), Russia

Received: 22.11.2023 Accepted: 15.6.2024 Published Online: 20.6.2024

Abstract: War discourse plays an important role in the current political and media agenda. This CDA-based study aimed at identifying how the nature of conflict affects the discursive practices used for conflict representation. The concept of war discourse was thoroughly described in view of a just war tradition. Two contexts of extensively covered conflicts were chosen for investigation, namely the American-led intervention in the Syrian civil war and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. These military conflicts that seem different at first sight were mediated by direct and indirect US involvement. The research data were drawn from two US Presidents' speeches and examined through CDA (van Dijk 1993, 2005), relating language use to its social, political and historical context. The analysis revealed a number of identical war discourse elements, their linguistic and extralinguistic (historical and cultural) peculiarities. These elements include a) the US conflict management strategies, b) negative other-presentation, c) positive self-presentation, d) a historical context of the US participation in similar conflicts, and e) a call to action. Combined together, these elements form a typical pattern, which can be used for both text analysis and text production.

Keywords: conflict representation, critical discourse analysis, discourse pattern, just war discourse, war coverage

1. Introduction

Though the notion of "just war" traces to St. Augustine's just war theory (Langan 1984), its main principles such as discrimination, proportionality, right intention, just cause, and proper authority (O'Driscoll 2015) remained almost the same when it comes to modern military conflicts. The main controversy of the just war idea lies in the fact that it describes power abuse as a moral necessity for those who can prevent violence by waging wars (if properly legitimized).

Following van Dijk (2005), justifying wars is typically examined within the context of critical discourse analysis (CDA) studies. The choice of CDA as a primary approach is attributed to its ability to 'triangulate social issues in terms of a combined study of discursive, cognitive and social dimensions of a problem' (van Dijk 2005). Though van Dijk primarily focused on the issues of political discourse, his idea to analyze the functions of language and meanings constructed in different contexts was a precondition for establishing discursive patterns and their attributes.

Lakoff (2012:8) included "the fairy tale of the just war" in his system of metaphors used to justify the Gulf War. Lakoff proposed at least two scenarios, namely, the self-defence scenario and the rescue scenario that are typical for justifying military interventions. Understanding just war discourse as a set of

patterns is not new; however, limited attention is paid to describing its elements. For instance, Kempf (2003) in his study on constructive conflict coverage represented war reporting as a set of components contingent upon pro-war or anti-war narratives within the mass media. Hodges (2013) attempted to provide the so-called generic template for justifying wars in presidential war narratives concerning just war principles, yet his main attention was focused on extralinguistic features of war discourse.

Just war discourse and the just war tradition have been thoroughly studied in recent years. The significant influence of both van Dijk and Lakoff has led scholars to generally adopt one of the following paradigms: studying metaphor systems in discourse (Zibin 2020; Solopova, D. Nilsen and A. Nilsen 2023), identifying the so-called implicatures and related strategies (Reyes 2011; Hodges 2013), or combining both metaphor systems and strategies associated with their use (Solopova and Kushneruk 2021). Ferrari (2007) considered metaphors to be the main element that shapes a conflict frame and an integral part of the 'strategy of fear' used for justifying military interventions. Oddo (2011) addressed the us/them polarization as the main strategy in legitimizing wars and investigated it in relation to other legitimation techniques: values, temporality, and membership demarcation. Simonsen (2019) established legitimation strategies aimed at waging wars and related lexical choices. However, none of these studies focused on a just war pattern and its elements. Therefore, the analysis of just war discourse and related elements from the CDA perspective seems promising as a research concept.

Within the framework of this study, just war discourse has the same meaning as the so-called "warist discourse"; it is interpreted as "language that takes for granted that wars are inevitable, justifiable, and winnable" (Gay 2008:304). Hence, following Bayley and Bevitori's (2009) definition, just war discourse presumes that actors, explicitly or implicitly, construe their actions as confirming just war principles (discrimination, proportionality, right intention, just cause, last resort, and proper authority) as opposed to 'just a war' rhetoric, which is aimed at testing new frontiers in international law (p. 76).

War coverage is becoming extremely popular due to the growing number of international conflicts and the increasing role of journalism in their mediation (Esser 2009). Despite all peacekeeping efforts of the United Nations and human rights organizations, the 20th century was considered "the most murderous in recorded history" (Hobsbawm 2003:25). In the 21st century, this worrying trend remains unchanged with local military conflicts, which replaced worldwide wars. The only exception was the so-called "Global War on Terrorism" which underlies a series of military operations in different countries of the world, including Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria (Khalid 2017).

In 2022, the global political situation drastically changed with Russian-Ukrainian tensions, which escalated into an open conflict. This conflict was immediately labelled a "special military operation" in Russia or the "Russian invasion of Ukraine"/the "war in Ukraine" outside Russia (Gill 2022). While being different in terms of geography, historical and political contexts, the "Global War on Terrorism" and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have something in common: the

widespread use of just war narratives and the active involvement of the third parties located far from the battlefields (the US and allies).

The research questions in this study seek to determine structural elements of a just war pattern and explore whether the nature of the two conflicts significantly affects the discursive practices used for conflict representation and how similar storylines are adopted for different purposes.

2. Just war discourse in the US public diplomacy

Johnson (2016) stated that the idea of just war has moved into the mainstream of American public discussion about the use of military force and the limits to be observed in using such force (p. 1). According to official statistics, the United States launched at least 251 military interventions between 1991 and 2022 (Norton 2022). The problem is that each new episode of these just war series requires new reasons and expanded limits different from those mentioned in the past. Similar views are expressed by Winter (2011) who pointed out that "the idea that contemporary warfare is new and unprecedented predates 11 September 2001" (p. 491). Therefore, the concept of brand-new just wars itself is considered a vicious circle that has characterized US foreign policy for more than 30 years.

Fiala (2008) in his book dedicated to a just war myth in US foreign policy stated that "in the United States, this myth is connected to a way of understanding the United States as a moral power, a city on a hill" (p. 59). Thus, to some extent, just war discourse is the product of American exceptionalism adopted as a way of thinking among certain officials and population strata.

Similarly, Sachs (2018) bridged US foreign policy and the number of US-led military conflicts with exceptionalist identity, which laid the basis for military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. Extensive political and media coverage of these conflicts made just war narratives an integral part of the US agenda since the early 90s. Traditionally, the most prominent examples of just war discourse are those delivered by the head of state and conveyed in planned or emergency speeches in the form of statements or addresses to the nation.

The importance of just war discourse in the US foreign policy is becoming obvious when exemplified by a number of ideas provided by US presidents at different periods of the US history:

- President Bush Sr. addresses the nation on the Invasion of Iraq (January 16, 1991): *"Our goal is not the conquest of Iraq. It is the liberation of Kuwait." "Some may ask: Why act now? Why not wait? The answer is clear: The world could wait no longer"* (Bush 1991).
- President Clinton addresses Joint Chiefs of Staff and Pentagon staff on Iraq (February 17, 1998): *"We have to defend our future from these predators of the 21st century." "If we fail to respond today, Saddam and all those who would follow in his footsteps will be emboldened tomorrow by the knowledge that they can act with impunity, even in the face of a clear message from the United Nations Security Council and clear evidence of a weapons of mass destruction program"* (Clinton 1996).

- President Clinton addresses the nation on the Yugoslavia strike (March 24, 1999): *"We act to protect thousands of innocent people in Kosovo from a mounting military offensive. We act to prevent a wider war, to defuse a powder keg at the heart of Europe, that has exploded twice before in this century with catastrophic results. We act to stand united with our allies for peace. By acting now, we are upholding our values, protecting our interests, and advancing the cause of peace." "I am convinced that the dangers of acting are far outweighed by the dangers of not acting – dangerous to defenseless people and to our national interests"* (Clinton 1999).
- President Bush Jr. addresses the nation on Afghanistan (October 7, 2001): *"I'm speaking to you today from the Treaty Room of the White House, a place where American Presidents have worked for peace. We're a peaceful nation. Yet, as we have learned, so suddenly and so tragically, there can be no peace in a world of sudden terror. In the face of today's new threat, the only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it"* (Bush 2001).

These war narratives illustrate the phenomenon, which Hodges (2013) characterized as follows: "In previous times of war, former presidents similarly addressed the nation in similar settings marked by similar seals of presidential authority" (p. 51). The main idea of each passage was to convince the audience to adopt either a self-defence strategy or a policy of protecting another nation, suffering from aggression, oppression, or genocide, and worthy of protection by the American military. Another principal idea was to draw a timeline between the pre-war events and the current situation, which could dramatically change in case of showing the inability to respond. Thus, all the speeches exemplify at least the following principles of just war theory: 1. just cause or right intentions (*we have to defend, we act to protect*); 2. a last resort when war is considered the only means for preventing violence escalation (*the only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it*); and 3. proper authority when war is initiated by a legitimate person who possesses the corresponding power (*I'm speaking to you today from the Treaty Room of the White House, a place where American Presidents have worked for peace*). Therefore, address to the nation is regarded as the most suitable genre for analyzing mechanisms of providing consent for war through discourse.

3. Methodology

The work is mainly based on the principles of CDA as formulated by van Dijk (1993) and explains the reproduction of dominance and power relations through both social structures and extralinguistic (historical and cultural) contexts. The American-led intervention in the Syrian war (as part of the "Global War on Terrorism") and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict were chosen as a source of the so-called just war discourse. The rationale behind concentrating on the two conflicts that seem too different from each other is the following:

- These are modern conflicts, extensively covered by both politicians and mass media;

- the USA is a participant in both conflicts while playing a completely different role in each of them (as a direct participant and an indirect participant);
- both conflicts were followed by the US President's addresses to the nation which can be used as a source of just war discourse;
- the extensive use of just war discourse allows for analyzing its nature with respect to a particular military conflict.

Thus, we will concentrate on two US Presidents' speeches, namely President B. Obama's "address to the nation on Syria" on September 10, 2013, and remarks by President J. Biden on "Russia's unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine" on February 24, 2022.

The former can be considered a classic example of the US just war rhetoric and an illustration of one of the tensest moments in US-Syria relations when the USA established the so-called "red lines" and the consequences of their violation. The American-led intervention in the Syrian civil war became an integral part of the Global War on Terrorism, which dominated the US public diplomacy after 9/11 (Belasco 2009). For US authorities, another military intervention was a slippery slope with both legal and moral consequences, which required a deliberate use of discourse for justifying a new military campaign and resisting the so-called compassion fatigue (Moeller 1999) when the extensive coverage of tragic events made people indifferent to manipulation through horrifying images and narratives. Although US credibility was previously undermined in 2003 by Colin Powell's UN speech about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (Zarefsky 2007), the same pattern was used in Syria. The USA is considered a direct participant in this conflict as it officially deployed its forces on the territory of the state.

President J. Biden's speech was a verbal response to an address to the nation made by the President of Russia V. Putin on the day when the special military operation in Ukraine was launched. Without reaching too far into history, it is relevant to mention the following reasons for Russian-Ukrainian tensions: territorial disputes as a result of the transfer of the Crimean Oblast from the Russian SFSR to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954 (Moniz Bandeira 2019); cross-cultural disputes with a Russophone population of the country; security issues in the Russophone areas of Ukraine. As this conflict is ongoing and the authors strive to remain objective in their analysis of the most recent discursive practices, the discourse of an indirect war participant (US) is used as a source of data. Therefore, President J. Biden's remarks represent an outstanding illustration of just war narratives, though the US role in this military conflict is completely different.

Our choice of linguistic data is justified by exemplary CDA studies that adopted similar approaches (Mazid 2004; Oddo 2011; Reyes 2011; Sowińska 2013; Solopova and Naumova 2021; Amaireh 2024). The results of the study are presented as a descriptive comparison of the discursive structures used in the speeches. Regarding CDA principles (Ramanathan and Hoon 2015), this comparison accounts for both linguistic and extralinguistic (both historical and cultural) peculiarities. Following van Dijk (2005), the results are provided not

descriptively but explanatorily through relating the features of just war rhetoric to such sociocognitive representations as attitudes, norms, values, and ideologies. Sociocognitive representations and related features, combined together, form a discourse pattern. The structural components of any pattern are identified relying on the following criteria: vocabulary (a frequently used set of words grouped semantically), grammar (a choice of parts of speech, morphological categories, syntactic structures, etc.), and a topic or theme constituting a similar plot between the addresses to the nation regardless of a conflict.

Each element of this pattern perfectly falls in the so-called "ideological square" (van Dijk 2000) and corresponds to either positive self-presentation (emphasizing positive things about Us, de-emphasizing negative things about Us) or negative other-presentation (emphasizing negative things about Them, de-emphasizing positive things about Them).

4. Results

As a result of the analysis, it was found that, regardless of a conflict, the US just war narratives are structured identically. The basic elements invariably include the following:

- The US conflict management strategies: the main idea of this element is to draw a border between Us and Them to focus on the asymmetrical nature of a conflict, which is a win-win for Us and Our "friends" and a lose-lose for Them for cultural, historical, and, what is more important, ethical reasons, and to describe Our actions as the only possible way to prevent violence in the future.
- Negative other-presentation: this element constitutes a dichotomy with the previous one to provide discursive integrity. It is focused on the essence of contradictions between parties and is mainly about representing the opponent as brutal and having no mercy.
- Positive self-presentation: in contrast to the first element, which is based on particular US peacekeeping efforts to resolve a conflict, this kind of description is associated with well-known stereotypes about American exceptionalism and the US status as the global anchor of security.
- A historical context of the US participation in similar conflicts, which led either to conflict resolution or to a change of the world for the better: this element can be considered to be a retrospective description of violence and reminds of the second one. The main idea is to interpret historical facts of Our right doings, which legitimizes Our current policy.
- A call to action: this element requires other participants or spectators to join the right side or to be isolated from the rest of the world. This means that choosing parties is inevitable and one will be publicly punished in case of being on the wrong side.

  More elaborate commentary on each structural element is given below.

4.1 The US conflict management strategies

President Obama: *"Over the last two years, my administration has tried **diplomacy** and **sanctions**, **warning** and **negotiations** – but chemical weapons were still used by the Assad regime."*

President Biden: *"Today, I'm authorizing additional strong **sanctions** and new **limitations** on what can be exported to Russia."*

Sanctions have been viewed as a typical feature of recent military conflicts, particularly in US diplomacy. Their use is thoroughly described and substantiated to emphasize the peaceful nature of the US actions. Both presidents focused their attention on non-armed means of conflict resolution, including *diplomacy*, *sanctions*, *warning*, *negotiations*, and *limitations* to prove that every effort has been made to prevent the conflict from escalation. Therefore, this element corresponds to the last resort principle stating that all non-violent options must be exhausted before the use of force can be justified. Special attention should be paid to the use of the first-person singular pronoun, which allows the speaker to demonstrate authority, personal responsibility, commitment, and involvement.

President Obama: *"In that time, America has worked with allies **to provide** humanitarian support, **to help** the moderate opposition, and **to shape** a political settlement."*

President Biden: *"And we're preparing to do more. In addition to the economic penalties we're imposing, we're also taking steps **to defend** our NATO Allies, particularly in the east."*

The positive impact of the USA is conveyed through the choice of verbs associated with "effort-making" such as *to provide*, *to help*, *to shape*, *to do*, *to defend*, and *to impose* which are usually followed by word groups denoting either non-armed means of conflict resolution (*humanitarian support, political settlement, economic penalties*), or the references to the parties on the right side (*moderate opposition, NATO Allies*). As with the previous example, a different time perspective can be seen with respect to the actions taken: President Obama focuses on the long-lasting character of the conflict (*over the last two years, in that time*) to justify a potential use of tougher measures. The use of the Present Perfect in this context emphasizes that a present historical state is a result of a past situation and the absence of positive political changes with time despite the all measures taken. President Biden is concentrated on the current situation and urgent actions (*today* plus the use of the Present Continuous) with no intention to be involved in an open conflict. The triple repetition of the verb in the Present Continuous stresses the emphasis on the plural first-person pronoun, which is used for both sharing the responsibility for the political steps taken for conflict resolution and audience involvement.

President Obama: *"I will not put American boots on the ground in Syria."*

President Biden: *"Our forces are not and will not be engaged in the conflict with Russia in Ukraine. Our forces are not going to Europe **to fight** in Ukraine but **to defend** our NATO Allies and reassure those Allies in the east."*

These are traditional examples of "no boot on the ground" promises, which have become an integral part of the US public rhetoric of the last decade. Particular

attention should be paid to the structure of President Biden's statement, which involves anaphora (*our forces are not*) as one of the most commonly used literary devices in just war narratives. Anaphora facilitates memorizing the most important ideas and stresses the key elements of the speech. Moreover, replacing the idea of "fighting" with that of "defending" makes the speech sound more responsible and respectable; this traces to a just war principle of a just cause when self-defence against an armed attack is considered permissible by international laws.

4.2 Negative other-presentation

President Obama: *"The images from this massacre are sickening: Men, women, children lying in rows, killed by poison gas. Others foaming at the mouth, gasping for breath. A father clutching his dead children, imploring them to get up and walk. On that terrible night, the world saw in gruesome detail the terrible nature of chemical weapons, and why the overwhelming majority of humanity has declared them off-limits – a crime against humanity, and a violation of the laws of war."*

President Biden: *"The Russian military has begun a brutal assault on the people of Ukraine without provocation, without justification, without necessity. This is a premeditated attack. Vladimir Putin has been planning this for months, as I've been – as we've been saying all along. He moved more than 175,000 troops, military equipment into positions along the Ukrainian border. He moved blood supplies into position and built a field hospital, which tells you all you need to know about his intentions all along."*

Although the given examples describe completely different situations, the general idea of blaming the opponent is well-preserved in both of them. Being quite metaphorical, these descriptions contain a negative assessment of the so-called wrong side and the consequences of its action (*this massacre, that terrible night, a crime, a violation, a brutal assault, a premeditated attack*), as well as some details that aim to prove the reliability of these data (*children lying in rows, others foaming at the mouth, a father clutching his dead children, 175 000 troops, he moved blood supplies into position*). For instance, precise information or statistics, used in such texts, were characterized by van Dijk (2005) as the number game, while a general notion for overdetailed descriptions aimed at providing credibility is 'facticity'. Following van Dijk (2005), 'the facts as such matter little, the political point is to appear credible' (p. 87).

The main difference is that President Biden's speech was given on the same day the open conflict had begun. Therefore, there was no field for detailed descriptions. However, some data were available to form public opinion on the latest political events. In President Biden's speech, just war narratives were incorporated from the very beginning, starting with a hidden mention of violating the basic principles of just war: discrimination, proportionality, right intention, just cause, and proper authority (*without provocation, without justification, without necessity*).

Both presidents in their speeches provide a clear opinion about the events described and leave no room for further debates. The main idea of declaring something "off-limits" (*a crime, a violation, a brutal assault, without*

provocation/justification/necessity) is to make the audience choose sides. Therefore, the official opinion is thought to be that of *the overwhelming majority of humanity*, while unjustifiable conduct is considered a personal responsibility of an alleged tyrant and his associates (*the Russian military, Vladimir Putin/he*).

4.3 Positive self-presentation

President Obama: *"My fellow Americans, for nearly seven decades, the United States has been the anchor of global security." "But I'm also the President of the world's oldest constitutional democracy." "The burdens of leadership are often heavy, but the world is a better place because we have borne them."*

President Biden: *"But this aggression cannot go unanswered. If it did, the consequences for America would be much worse. America stands up to bullies. We stand up for freedom. This is who we are."*

Describing the US role in the world requires a number of clichés that are closely associated with American exceptionalism. This doctrine presumes a list of inborne state values and justifies their protection around the world (democracy, freedom, etc.). The concept of leadership is clearly expressed in both examples either metaphorically or directly (*the anchor of global security, the burdens of leadership, America stands up to bullies*), as well as the idea of making the world "a better place" (*we stand up for freedom*).

This element extends a series of descriptions that aim at making people choose sides. However, if the first two elements (the US conflict management strategies and negative other-presentation) describe a black-and-white vision of the world, this element outlines the "shades" of white that make the USA different from both Us and Them. The arguments for US superiority over both enemies and friends are supported by the use of superlative adjectives (*the world's oldest constitutional democracy*) and creating artificial contextual dichotomy 'the United States – the world' (*the United States – global security, the world's oldest constitutional democracy, the world – we*), which also traces to American exceptionalism. Following Gilmore (2018), the idea of American exceptionalism is conveyed differently depending on the audience (explicit, implicit, or mutual). Considering the extralinguistic context of the speeches, both presidents address domestic audience, which allows them to use the so-called explicit exceptionalism, associated with overtly positioning the United States above other countries.

4.4 Providing a historical context of the US participation in similar conflicts

President Obama: *"I will not pursue an open-ended action like Iraq or Afghanistan. I will not pursue a prolonged air campaign like Libya or Kosovo."*

President Biden: *"There is no doubt – no doubt that the United States and every NATO Ally will meet our Article 5 commitments, which says that an attack on one is an attack on all."*

In general, historical contexts can be subjectively divided into "good" and "bad" experiences. Therefore, current circumstances should be described as having nothing in common with "bad" ones. A list of the so-called American historical failures includes, among others, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Vietnam campaigns, which

are typically described as long-lasting and tragic in terms of death tolls. At the same time, good experiences are those that comply with declared just war principles and are traditionally accepted as beneficial for the USA and its political image (for instance, the Gulf War).

In the first example, "bad" experiences are seen as something different from the new circumstances that require actions on the USA's part. Lienens and Cohrs (2021) provided an algorithm for legitimizing the so-called negative history through a 5-step procedure that includes acknowledging the past, positioning the present national identity, anchoring the present in the past, defining a new role, and legitimizing it. Evoking negative historical experiences in President Obama's speech perfectly correlates with this scheme starting from acknowledging the mistakes of previous military involvements to defining a sense of a brand-new military campaign. The use of anaphora along with negation and orientation towards the future (the use of the Future Simple) stresses the impossibility of repeating negative war experiences (*I will not pursue*). Therefore, applying negative historical contexts seems to be almost obligatory when it comes to the limited use of US weapons and troops. However, President Biden's speech does not contain any references of this type, which can be probably connected with negative associations provoked by them and with the so-called "social fatigue" experiences. In the second example, President Biden mentions Article 5 of the NATO treaty, which was used as a prerequisite for several just wars in the past. Nevertheless, the general idea of the element is still preserved by referring only to those historical contexts that could be beneficial for Us.

4.5 A call to action

President Obama: *"America is not the world's policeman. Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong. But when, with modest effort and risk, we can stop children from being gassed to death, and thereby make our own children safer over the long run, I believe we should act. That's what makes America different. That's what makes us exceptional. With humility, but with resolve, let us never lose sight of that essential truth."*

President Biden: *"Liberty, democracy, human dignity – these are the forces far more powerful than fear and oppression. They cannot be extinguished by tyrants like Putin and his armies. They cannot be erased by people – from people's hearts and hopes by any amount of violence and intimidation. They endure. And in the contest between democracy and autocracy, between sovereignty and subjugation, make no mistake: Freedom will prevail."*

Calls to action are summaries of the main ideas that urge the audience to make a choice. This is the only element of just war patterns that has its permanent place at the end of the speech, while the other elements change their position in the structure.

In the examples provided above, both presidents describe an advantageous position of potential winners (*with modest effort and risk, these are the forces far more powerful*) and their outstanding values and qualities (*humility, resolve, liberty, democracy, human dignity*). A unique, exceptional place of the USA that the

country, being a holder of moral values accepted worldwide, occupies in the coalition of winners is emphasized throughout these appeals (*that's what makes America different, that's what makes us exceptional, the contest between democracy and autocracy*). No space is left for those who prefer to stay aside from the conflict (*let us never lose sight of that essential truth, make no mistake, freedom will prevail*). The anaphora and parallel structures, found in both cases, are the most typical tools for expressing and accentuating the key ideas. They are used to support the concept of American exceptionalism (which prevails over isolationist provisions of impossibility '*to right every wrong*' in the first example) through either shifting attention to the country's positioning in the world arena or the significance of the country's core values and beliefs. Both examples are interrelated with the elements of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation and used as arguments for the last thought-provoking statement, aimed at making the audience choose sides.

5. Conclusion

There is almost no chance that in the current situation and rising geopolitical risks, war narratives, as well as their research, will become less relevant. Despite many advances in the field of war discourse studies, little progress has been made in outlining a pattern of just war discourse. This study has provided fruitful insights into how it is structured in the US addresses to the nation. The most obvious finding to emerge from the study is that the US just war discourse, irrespectively of a conflict the country is involved in (either directly or indirectly), follows a fairly systematic pattern. The key elements of the pattern invariably include the following: a) describing the US peacekeeping assistance, aimed to prevent or resolve a conflict; b) dividing the world into "us" and "them", vilifying and blaming the latter for "their" unjustifiable conduct; c) stressing America's mission in international affairs, its special role, grounded in the principles of democracy and human liberty, and sense of justice; d) interpreting the past to legitimize the present: cherry-picking historical facts of America's pursuing conflict resolution in global disputes; e) call-to-action rhetoric with special emphasis on choosing sides: either joining the right party (Us) or becoming a geopolitical outcast (Them).

Using CDA tools to analyze two addresses to the nation made by B. Obama and J. Biden on Syria and Russian-Ukrainian conflict, this study has been an effort to uncover both the specific role each key element plays in US just war discourse and legitimating structures in language they are manifested by. The findings convincingly show that they are deliberately used to make these conflicts appear appropriate, reasonable, and justifiable. The two examples employed to illustrate these elements are not exhaustive, for this reason, more research is needed to get conclusive proof. Future research should, therefore, concentrate on the investigation of other examples of just war discourse in the US public diplomacy over a certain time span or through ages; a cross-national study involving just war discourse adopted in other countries would be of great interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The research is financially supported by Russian Science Foundation, project 24-18-00049, https://rscf.ru/project/24-18-00049/

Solopova Olga Alexandrovna
Professor of Philology
South Ural State University (National Research University), Chelyabinsk, Russia
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4170-7267
Email: solopovaoa@susu.ru

Naumova Ksenia Andreevna – Corresponding author
Junior Researcher
South Ural State University (National Research University), Chelyabinsk, Russia
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1729-395X
Email: naumovaka@susu.ru

Data

Biden, Joseph Robinette. (2022). Remarks by President Biden on Russia's unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine. The White House. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/02/24/remarks-by-president-biden-on-russias-unprovoked-and-unjustified-attack-on-ukraine/ (Retrieved on 20 August, 2023).

Bush, George Walker. (2001). Presidential address to the nation. The White House.https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011007-8.html (Retrieved on 20 August, 2023).

Bush, George Walker Herbert. (1991). Address to the nation announcing operation Desert Storm. The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/address-nation-announcing-operation-desert-storm-1991 (Retrieved on 20 August, 2023).

Clinton, Bill. (1996). President Clinton's address to Joint Chiefs of Staff and Pentagon staff. All politics CNN. https://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1998/02/17/transcripts/clinton.iraq/ (Retrieved on 20 August, 2023).

Clinton, Bill. (1999). Clinton addresses nation on Yugoslavia strike. CNN. https://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/03/25/clinton.transcript/ (Retrieved on 20 August, 2023).

Obama, Barack. (2013). Remarks by the President in address to the nation on Syria. The White House. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria (Retrieved on 20 August, 2023).

References

Amaireh, Hanan Ali. (2024). 'A critical discourse analysis of Al Jazeera's reporting of the 2021 Israel-Palestine crisis'. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies (IJAES)*, 24 (1): 21–40. https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes.v24i1.559.

Bayley, Paul and Cinzia Bevitori. (2009). '"Just war", or just "war"'. In John Morley and Paul Bayley (eds.), *Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies on the Iraq Conflict: Wording the War*, 74-108. London: Routledge.

Belasco, Amy. (2009). *Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11*. Washington DC: Diane Publishing.

Esser, Frank. (2009). 'Metacoverage of mediated wars: How the press framed the role of the news media and of military news management in the Iraq wars of 1991 and 2003'. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52 (5):709-734. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764208326519.

Ferrari, Federica. (2007). 'Metaphor at work in the analysis of political discourse: Investigating a 'preventive war' persuasion strategy'. *Discourse and Society*, 18 (5):603-625. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926507079737.

Fiala, Andrew. (2008). *The Just War Myth: The Moral Illusions of War*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Gay, William C. (2008). 'The language of war and peace'. In Lester Kurtz (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict (Second Edition)*, 1115-1127. San Diego: Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012373985-8.00093-3.

Gill, Terry D. (2022). 'The jus ad bellum and Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine'. *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 25 (2):121-127. https://doi.org/10.1163/18754112-25020002.

Gilmore, Jason and Charles M. Rowing. (2018). 'Lighting the beacon: Presidential discourse, American exceptionalism, and public diplomacy in global contexts'. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 48 (2): 271-291.

Hobsbawm, Eric. (2003). 'War and peace in the 20th century'. In Geir Lundestag and Olav Njølstad (eds.), *War and Peace in the 20th Century and Beyond*, 25-40. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1142/5130.

Hodges, Adam. (2013). 'War, discourse, and peace'. In Adam Hodges (ed.), *Discourses of War and Peace*, 3–20. New York: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199937271.003.0001.

Johnson, James Turner. (2016). *Ethics and the Use of Force: Just War in Historical Perspective*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315580388.

Kempf, Wihelm. (2003). 'Constructive conflict coverage: A social-psychological research and development program'. *Conflict and Communication*, 2(2): 1-13.

Khalid, Maryam. (2017). *Gender, Orientalism, and the 'War on Terror': Representation, Discourse, and Intervention in Global Politics*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315514055.

Lakoff, George. (2012). 'Metaphor and war: The metaphor system used to justify war in the gulf'. *Cognitive Semiotics*, 4 (2):5-19. https://doi.org/10.1515/cogsem.2012.4.2.5.

Langan, John. (1984). 'The elements of St. Augustine's just war theory'. *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 12 (1):19-38.

Lienen, Carmen S. and Christopher J. Cohrs. (2021). 'Redefining the meaning of negative history in times of sociopolitical change: A social creativity approach'. *Political psychology*, 42 (6):941-956. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12725.

Mazid, Bahaa-Eddin. (2004). 'Euphemism and dysphemism in the war-on-Iraq discourse'. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 5 (1):171-188. https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes2000.5.1.10.

Moeller, Susan D. (1999). *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death.* New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203900352.

Moniz Bandeira, Luiz Alberto. (2019). *The World Disorder*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03204-3.

Norton, Ben. (2022). U.S. launched 251 military interventions since 1991, and 469 since 1798. MRonline. Retrieved on 20 August, 2023, from https://mronline.org/2022/09/16/u-s-launched-251-military-interventions-since-1991-and-469-since-1798/.

O'Driscoll, Cian. (2015). 'Rewriting the just war tradition: Just war in classical Greek political thought and practice'. *International Studies Quarterly*, 59 (1):1-10. https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12187.

Oddo, John. (2011). 'War legitimation discourse: Representing "Us" and "Them" in four US presidential addresses'. *Discourse and Society*, 22 (3):287-314. doi:10.1177/0957926510395442.

Ramanathan, Renugah and Tan Bee Hoon. (2015). 'Application of critical discourse analysis in media discourse studies'. *3L: Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 21 (2):57-68.

Reyes, Antonio. (2011). 'Strategies of legitimization in political discourse: From words to actions'. *Discourse and Society*, 22 (6):781-807. doi:10.1177/0957926511419927.

Sachs, Jeffrey D. (2018). *A New Foreign Policy: Beyond American Exceptionalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Simonsen, Sandra. (2019). 'Discursive legitimation strategies: The evolving legitimation of war in Israeli public diplomacy'. *Discourse and Society*, 30 (5): 503- 520. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926519855786

Solopova, Olga A. and Svetlana L. Kushneruk. (2021). 'War yesterday and today: The image of Russia in British media discourse'. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25 (3):723-745. https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-2021-25-3-723-745.

Solopova, Olga and Ksenia Naumova. (2021). 'Address to the nation as a genre of military-political discourse'. *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, 12 (4):945-968. https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2299-2021-12-4-945-968.

Solopova Olga A., Nilsen Don and Alleen Nilsen. (2023). 'The image of Russia through animal metaphors: A diachronic case study of American media discourse'. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 27 (3):521-542. https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-35048.

Sowińska, Agnieszka. (2013). 'A critical discourse approach to the analysis of values in political discourse: The example of freedom in President Bush's State of the Union addresses (2001–2008)'. *Discourse and Society*, 24 (6):792-809. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513486214.

Van Dijk, Teun A. (1993). 'Principles of critical discourse analysis'. *Discourse and Society*, 4 (2):249-283. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002006.

Van Dijk, Teun A. (2000). *Ideology and Discourse: A Multidisciplinary Introduction.* Barcelona: Pompeu Fabra University.

Van Dijk, Teun A. (2005). 'War rhetoric of a little ally: Political implicatures and Aznar's legitimatization of the war in Iraq'. *Journal of language and politics*, 4 (1):65-91. https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.4.1.04dij.

Winter, Yves. (2011). 'The asymmetric war discourse and its moral economies: A critique'. *International Theory*, 3 (03):488-514. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971911000145.

Zarefsky, David. (2007). 'Making the case for war: Colin Powell at the United Nations'. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 10 (2):275-302. https://doi.org/10.1353/rap.2007.0043.

Zibin, Aseel. (2020). 'A corpus-based study of metaphors used to describe Syrian refugees in Jordanian politico-economic discourse: A critical metaphor analysis approach'. *Pragmatics and Society*, 11 (4):640-663. https://doi.org/10.1075/ps.17037.zib.