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"But as I said, we don't do easy."

**The CIA and the construction of terrorism: A study in
discursive psychology**

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Abstract

This paper aimed to identify discourses and interpretative repertoires, used by the CIA to construct a narrative regarding terrorism when communicating with the public. This was done by analysing texts found on the official CIA website with discursive psychology methodology. Three main themes were identified, with thirteen subthemes. These related to how the CIA presented terrorists, terrorism, and themselves in relation to it. The discourse of the themes was analysed and discussed. Thereafter, the discovered discursive content was used to formulate four interpretative repertoires commonly used by the CIA in the studied texts. The results of this paper provide an insight into the discursive and linguistic content used by the CIA to construct itself and terrorism, allows for future application of the discursive psychology framework for the study of intelligence agencies, and explains the value of such research.

Keywords: Discursive psychology, discourse, terrorism, CIA, interpretative repertoires

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Introduction

With the attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001, terrorism entered the main stage for international security and intelligence operations. This has had consequences on how both intelligence organisations and the public understand the world and their role in it. The *9/11 commission report* reshaped US intelligence in its entirety as well as how they viewed their role in an international context (Hunter & McDonald, 2017, p. 206-207). The effects were evident in increased cooperation between US agencies and with the establishment of closer ties to US allies abroad (Ibid., p. 207). Furthermore, the international community responded by adopting a considerable amount of laws, as well as regional and international agreements, pertaining to global terrorism (Barker, 2007, p. 5). Hunter and MacDonald (p. 209) states that considerable amounts of research have been done on the reconstruction of US security services, but mainly from a realist perspective. According to them, only two papers, in the field of geography, has taken a discourse approach to studying the performative changes after the 9/11 commission report. Svendsen (2008) identifies a trend of globalization and homogenization of intelligence, security, and law enforcement as a result of 9/11.

Thus, terror has had an impact on the very structure of the global intelligence community. The changes enacted as a result of the 9/11-attacks have had international consequences in how intelligence is performed and understood. Many of these effects originated, not surprisingly given the location of 9/11, in the US. Therefore, understanding the discourse of the US intelligence community, in particular the CIA, could garner valuable insights into the workings of other intelligence agencies. Furthermore, discerning the discourse of terror in western intelligence communities have the potential of unearthing existing bias that limit their effectiveness in dealing with current threats and foreseeing future ones.

Hence, the study of discourse is suitable for the purpose of attempting to establish the 'hows' and 'whys' of CIA usage of terms such as terrorism and terrorist. In other words, through the analysis of language it is possible to draw conclusions about the intentions and frame of mind of an intelligence community, thus allowing insight into what the definitions allow, but also what possible cognitive biases they might construct. The claims in this paper are based on epistemological assumptions in constructivism, that the world exists independently of us but that knowledge about the world is by necessity subjected to human and social construction. Therefore, the conclusions will reflect this stance rather than aim for the objective or positivistic approach found in other scientific methods.

Definitions

The constructivist frame of mind allows for a multitude of methodologies, as well as a myriad of subjects of inquiry. For example, the objects of study vary from power, politics, and oppression to family, government, equality and inequality, and crime (Bergström & Boréus, 2018, p. 17). This variation inevitably leads to a degree of confusion concerning the definitions of central terminology. Discourse in itself holds a multitude of meanings, resulting in a necessity of defining it for this paper. In the context of this paper, discourse is defined in line with the description found in the introduction of Potter (2007, paragraph 5): “Discourse is here understood as talk and text embedded in social practices of one kind or another (complaining about noisy neighbours, arguing about the royal family, offering therapeutic advice). The topic here is the activity and its role within the setting.” For this paper, then, discourse is limited to verbal, linguistical practices and excludes non-verbal practices as the method used for data collection does not allow for a closer analysis of the context and non-verbal communications in which the data was produced (Bergström & Boréus, p. 288)

Purpose and research question

The aim of this paper is to, through discursive psychology, identify general discourses and interpretative repertoires, utilised in the CIA in regard to terrorism and how these are used by their representatives when communicating with the public. This in order to gain an inclination of possible future research into the area of discourse on terrorism and its effects for intelligence communities.

Delimitations

For the purpose of this paper, focus on the CIA was considered advisable due to availability of data and the international presence of the agency. It receives a lot of attention in both news and popular media and the CIA is arguably the most famous and resource-rich intelligence agency in the world. This makes it relevant as the main focus for a study on intelligence discourse in the western world.

As a result of time and space limitations and considering the chosen method being work-intensive, data collection was intentionally limited. Though more data was available, it was kept to a manageable level while retaining sufficient levels to allow for conclusions. However, this does mean that potentially relevant source material was excluded, and the paper uses a convenience sample that opens it up to selection bias amongst other methodological issues.

Theory

Previous research

Understanding the changes in the intelligence community discourse following 9/11 requires insight in how the intelligence community constructs terror, terrorism, and terrorists. To enable the qualitative study of constructs and meaning, use of text- and discourse analysis is increasingly common in social sciences (Bergström & Boréus, p. 253). Discourse analysis is an approach within the constructivist methodology that analyses text or speech in order to reach conclusions regarding the meaning and purpose of content and terminology, given by the author in a context wherein he/she wants to deliver a message to an audience (Bergström & Boréus, p. 17).

The construction of terrorism has previously been studied from a variety of perspectives, for example through law (Barker, 2007), the construction of the enemy (Herschinger, 2011; Jackson, 2007) and the governmental construction of threat (Widmaier, 2007).

Barker (2007), using an interdisciplinary perspective, analysed the normative processes that formed the legal response to, as well as the construction of, 'security' in response to global terrorism. He remarks that states post-9/11 focused on security and institutionalised measures meant to criminalise terrorist activities, particularly through Resolution 1373. This was done through the United Nations Security Council, which raised questions regarding the role of the Security Council as a legislative organ (Ibid., p. 29). However, Barker (p. 29) concludes that all members of the UN accepted the obligations posed by the resolution, thus legitimising the process.

Jackson (2007) analyses the construction of the terrorist 'other' with discourse analysis, where discourse is used in a methodically broader sense than in discursive psychology. Rather than focusing on particular discourses in limited contexts such as the CIA, he instead uses it in the broader meaning as societal discourses. Therefore, his analysis is largely centred around core labels such as "the Islamic world" and "the West" (Ibid., p. 401). For this purpose, he uses a wide variety of source materials from newspapers to academic writing and political discourse. His conclusions are aimed at nuancing the image of "Islamic terrorism" by exposing the political and social functions of the discourse, hence enabling the formulation of non-violent alternatives to deal with terrorism (Ibid., p. 425).

Widmaier (2007) offers a constructivist analysis of the Bush doctrine speech in 2001 where he identifies a continuum in which the Bush administration initially, and briefly, focuses on the threat posed by Al-Qaida, describing Al-Qaida as "heirs to 'all the murderous

ideologies of the 20th Century’ and arguing that ‘they follow in the path of fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism’ (Widmaier, p. 790)”. Widmaier (p. 790) continues by describing how the administration subsequently widens the area of US interests in a way that includes organisations and states not necessarily involved in the 9/11 attacks while also emphasizing the spread of democracy as an essential interest for the US government.

Similarly, Baker-Beall (2014), has studied how the discourse of ‘the fight against terrorism’ and the construction of the terrorist ‘other’ has evolved in the European Union. He identifies three “strands” of discourse that he argues are key elements in the construction of the terrorist other: terrorism as an act of criminal and emotive violence (p. 220), terrorism as an act carried out by non-state actors (p. 222), and terrorism as a ‘new’ and ‘evolving’ threat (p. 224).

The work of Hunter and MacDonald (2017) on the emergence of a new security discipline in the post 9/11 US discourse investigated several webpages run by US security agencies. Using two distinct perspectives, security as field and security as discipline, they analysed the existing discourse for how security activity was presented to the public.

Connell and Galinski (1996), used critical linguistics analysis to study a number of documents from the CIA *factbook on intelligence*. The documents related to the initialization of the CIA, their history and their activities. These documents, according to Connell and Galinski (p. 183), serve an image-building purpose in the guise of information.

Discursive psychology and terrorism

The search terms ‘CIA’ and ‘discursive psychology’ in LUBsearch yielded only two results, neither relevant for this study. Searches for ‘terrorism’ and ‘discursive psychology’ yielded 130 results, but most used other methods than the methodology of discursive psychology analysis. Instead, most results were either irrelevant or focused on other psychological or discourse aspects like social psychology (Jackson, 2013) or critical discourse analysis (Bartolucci & Gallo, 2015). One study dealing with discursive psychology was found, Jackson and Hall (2016). They examined a ‘vernacular’, or the everyday narrative of lay members of the public, in regard to discourse on terrorism. Consequently, it seems few-to-none have studied how an intelligence agency itself communicates with the public and constructs terrorism using the specific methods of discursive psychology.

Contributions to the field

As identified above, there have been few attempts at analysing the specifics of intelligence agency discourse on terrorism in communications with the public using the

method of discursive psychology. Therefore, this paper might broaden the view of how and when discursive psychology can be applied. Furthermore, the results on interpretative repertoires in the CIA could allow future study of how intelligence organisations talk about terrorism and what effects and risks this brings.

Method

Discursive psychology

Discourse analysis maintains a view of language as constructive and functional. When applied in psychology it means that instead of looking at language as a way of reaching the attitudes or beliefs of an individual, the goal is to look at what the discourse itself is doing. That is, what the *action orientation* of the discourse is (Willig, 2013, p. 119). Discursive psychology then, is about a particular way of reading a text, more from the perspective of ‘what is this text doing?’ rather than ‘what is this text saying?’ (Willig, p. 119). The focus lies in finding out the how and the why behind the act of delivering a message.

Discursive psychology is further described by Potter (2007):

The focus is on psychology as something that is understood, expressed and described in discourse. That is, it is research that considers psychology as a practical object for people while interacting with one another, either directly or through texts or other written forms. It covers, for example, research on how conversation can display a psychological state, and how such a display can be treated as upset, say, or manipulative. It surveys work on the way attitudes or dispositions are invoked in arguments. (Paragraph 1)

To clarify, discursive psychology can be contrasted with the other major form of discourse analysis: Foucauldian discourse analysis (Willig, p. 116-117). According to Willig (p. 116-117), the two major practices share the interest in how language constructs social reality, but they differ in what research questions they ask and identify with separate intellectual traditions. Foucauldian discourse analysis focuses on how language constitutes social and psychological reality, on what discursive resources are available to individuals, and how discourse constructs subjectivity and power relations (Willig, p. 117). Discursive psychology, on the other hand, is more interested in *discourse practices*. That is “how people use discursive resources in order to achieve interpersonal objectives in social interaction” (Willig, p. 117).

Interviews are a common material for study using discursive psychology, where they are transcribed in detail, but have decreased in importance compared to Foucauldian discourse analysis, in favor of naturalistic data (Willig & Stainton, 2017, p. 95). Regardless, the first step after the collection of data is to read the text without any analytic intention, to allow the reading researcher to experience the discourse themselves. Data is then read and re-read again. Willig (p. 119) describes the importance of experiencing the discourse first-hand through the example of a letter that comes off as an apology without the words “I’m sorry” ever appearing in the text. To read the text without analyzing lets researchers understand what the text is doing. The analysis that follows then aims to understand *how* the text accomplishes what it is doing.

Secondly, the reading and re-reading phase is followed by a *coding* phase, wherein materials are sorted and selected for analysis. How the data is coded is related to how the research question is formulated. All potentially relevant information must be included, even if the possible connections are vague, as to not miss important content. This includes *implicit constructions*, which means that key words are not necessary for inclusion (Willig, p. 120). For example, in this study that would mean that text does not need to include words like “terrorist” or “CIA” to be included, instead references in the widest sense are sufficient for the text to be deemed relevant at this stage.

Thirdly, the analysis is done parallel to the researcher’s interaction with the text, as a result of the gradual emergence of analytic insight (Willig & Stainton, p. 103). The results and discussion sections found in other methodologies is made up of the analysis in itself, and the content of the analysis is presented with illustrative quotes from the analyzed texts with an ongoing discussion (Willig, p. 121-122). The main method of analysis while be described under the subheading *Interpretative repertoires*.

Finally, a conclusions section is included to discuss wider issues of methodology and theory, as well as implications of the study and future research (Willig, p. 122).

Interpretative repertoires. In order to analyse the context, variability and construction of discourse in a systematic manner, researchers may use *interpretative repertoires*. Interpretative repertoires refer to systems of terms, that include “terminology, stylistic and grammatical features, preferred metaphors and figures of speech” (Willig, p. 120), which an individual use to construct different versions of an event. They tend to be organised around a central metaphor and are often used with grammatical regularity (Willig & Stainton, p. 94).

To find what interpretative repertoires are used in a text and what they contain, the researcher asks how the text constructs its objects and its subjects, how these constructions vary over contexts and what consequences their use has (Willig, p. 120). The same individual can use different interpretative repertoires in different discursive context, which leads to the importance of the action orientation in research on discourse: the context, goal of the producer of text as well as the intended recipient must be included in analysis of the data (Willig, p. 120).

Methodology for this paper

Optimal data would be spontaneous speech or text (Willig, p. 118), but for availability reasons this study used written down press statements and speeches from the CIA archives. Data was collected by going through three sections of the CIA website: “Press releases & statements”, “speeches & testimony”, and “CIA & the war on terrorism”. Initially a number of relevant texts were chosen based on title and content that related to terrorism and/or Al-Qaida. Due to time limitations and the labour-intensity and complexity of the analytic method (Willig, p. 118), the number of analysed texts were limited to nine and selection was based on convenience. The selected texts ranged from scripts for speeches to Op-Ed pieces, statements to employees, and written reports from after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. All statements, bar one, are taken from the directorships of either Leon E. Panetta or Gina Haspel. The data collected was deemed sufficient to gain an inkling to an overall CIA discourse on terrorism as well as an idea of how these discursive resources are used by the organisation’s representatives while communicating with the public. The data will be further discussed under the heading *materials*.

The time period was not further specified and no texts from before the attacks of 9/11 were included, as this was not deemed necessary due to the fact that the paper does not aim to study discursive shifts, but rather establish a baseline of existing interpretative repertoires and their use.

The data was first read without any analytical intention to grasp the general sense of the text and therefore experience the discourse first hand. Then the texts were coded and sorted for relevancy in regard to the research question using Nvivo+. All sections of text deemed relevant were then filed for analysis. Care was taken to ensure all potentially relevant text was included in the analysis, hence all parts not selected by the auto-coding were re-read and relevant parts missed by the program manually included.

Analysis followed the principles outlined by Potter and Wetherell, where the researcher continuously “asks: ‘why am I reading this in this way?’ and ‘What features [of the

text] produces this reading' (Willig, p. 120)". Furthermore, the constructive and functional aspects of discourse were analysed with regard to context, variability and construction. This was achieved through looking at how the text constructs the objects and the subjects, how these constructs vary over discursive contexts, and the potential consequences of how these constructs are used. This allowed for the identification of interpretative repertoires, the context in which they were used, their goal, and the subject and object of the interaction.

Then data was analysed and structured by themes and the identified interpretative repertoires, with an ongoing discussion on the context, goal of their use, and implications of the findings.

Finally, the conclusion provides a summary of the analysis, discussion on the limitations of the study and implications for future research. The source material used has been coded as sources 1-9 to be easily identified throughout the analysis. These sources are listed as appendices and can be made available by contacting the author.

Materials

Discussion regarding the source material and its limitations. The data used is comprised of mixed documents taken from the cia.gov website. All data is publicly available and gathered over the span of one day. Therefore, all data was simultaneously presented to the public by the CIA. Due to the nature of the gathered texts, certain linguistic nuances, body language and more implicit discourses might not be readily visible. This because the data consists of edited, written down text rather than spontaneous and naturally occurring speech or transcriptions of such speech. However, all texts except one were chosen in order to be as close to naturally occurring speech as is possible from text on a webpage. The exception will be explained in the last paragraph under this subheading.

Being a convenience sample from a vastly larger pool of available data, the conclusions that may be drawn from the analysis are limited in that significant information is lacking. However, the intention of the study is not to give a comprehensive summary of CIA discourse, but rather to give an idea of what the discourse contains and what interpretative repertoires follow.

Also, discourse analysis is, by its nature, subjected to bias on behalf of the researcher. What themes are identified and how they are interpreted will be, to varying degrees, affected by the cognitive biases of the author.

Furthermore, the texts were chosen in an attempt to achieve a variation in tone and context without losing the overarching theme of how the CIA presents itself and terrorism.

This does, however, increase the risk of selection bias that significantly affects the conclusions.

Finally, all texts except one are in some way created by or taken from speeches and messages by CIA directors, and a US president. The one text that stands out, the excerpts from the “Global trends 2015” report, was chosen as a shortcut attempt to gain width in order to enable a contextual analysis. In other words, as a contrast to the delivered speeches which allow for a more accurate assessment of overall discursive content and action orientation. However, only one such text was chosen due to constraints in time and word count.

Analysis

Presentation of themes

Three overarching themes were identified: *We, the CIA*; *We, the American people*; and *Them, the Enemy*. The three overarching themes do, in turn, summarise the fourteen subthemes comprised of the distinct terminology, stylistic and grammatical features, preferred metaphors and figures of speech used by the CIA. The identified themes will first be presented in chart 1, then be described and analysed.

Table 1.
Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
We, the CIA	Courage Difficulty and danger Duty and mission Our strength – CIA Protecting our country Sacrifice Safety and justice Secrecy
We, the American people	Divine support Our strength – USA We are at war
Them, the Enemy	Vicious foe Geography

As previously stated, in order to establish what interpretative repertoire are used we need to understand how the texts construct subjects and objects, how they vary over contexts, and what the consequences and intentions of their use are. Therefore, throughout the presentation of themes and subthemes, there will be a continuous discussion regarding the essential traits of interpretative repertoires. The main themes themselves deal with the construction of the subject and object. The subthemes will more closely describe how these constructions are made, the contextual variability, as well as consequences and intentions of how the texts use the language they do. The results will then be summarised and further analysed under the subheadings *construction of the subject* and *construction of the object*. Thus, it allows for the contents of all subthemes to be included and used to define any existing interpretative repertoires.

Description and analysis of themes and subthemes

We, the CIA. This theme aims to understand how the CIA describes itself. The distinction between how it describes itself and how it includes itself in the American people can be exemplified in the difference of speaking about “these seven American heroes” (Source 3) and “Our Agency family lost seven courageous and talented colleagues” (Source 6), where the latter separates the *family* that is the agency (The CIA) from the general public that is *American*. How this separation is linguistically constructed will be presented below.

Courage. Throughout multiple texts, the CIA describes their own officers as exceptionally brave. This can take many different forms:

Source 1: Our officers – whether at our Headquarters or in the foreign field – carry out those jobs with courage, ingenuity and derring-do, and I could not be more proud of them (Source Gina Haspel speaks at Auburn).

Source 1: As an agency, we have found consolation in the strength and heroism of our fallen colleagues and their families.

Source 6: By putting their lives on the line to pursue our nation’s terrorist enemies, they taught us what bravery is all about.

They all exemplify the CIA emphasis on its own heroism, that separates them from both the public of America as well as their enemies. This way of defining the people who work for

them is present throughout the texts and seem to be an underlying assumption that colours all the remaining self-defining subthemes. The subject, the CIA, is then clearly distinguished from their enemies and the American public

Difficulty and danger. The previous subtheme, courage, is further emphasised in the presentation of the challenges and dangers faced by the CIA. They are faced with immense challenges and danger, but they face them with awareness and strength in a way that separates them from the people and the enemy. The CIA are the ones who willingly do the hard jobs:

Source 1: But the business of espionage is risky work. As former Director George Tenet used to say, 'CIA doesn't do easy—the hard jobs come to us'.

The CIA also emphasise the challenges their personnel face, that push them to the limit. It further separates and glorifies them:

Source 1: What I can tell you is that our officers take on jobs that test their mental and physical strength to the fullest. I just returned from a visit to a war zone where I met CIA men and women who on a one-year deployment work seven days a week – often going days without sleep. These officers were so hard working and so motivated by the mission in this dangerous location. [...] Their missions are long and arduous, and the operational tempo can be gruelling.

When mentioning the risks, the CIA lifts their own competence and courage in the eyes of the reader without having to openly mention it. Furthermore, a dual consequence is that it builds an image of the CIA as exciting and at the same time essential in dealing with things that only they can:

Source 6: The work carries, by its very nature, significant risk.

Source 8: A very dangerous, but essential, mission.

Thus, by continuously underlining the danger they face, the CIA succeed with separating themselves from the public, stresses the courage displayed by their employees, and creates an

image of excitement while also providing a logical reason for their existence to defend America from threat.

Duty and mission. This subtheme deals with the use of terminology and phrases that serves to uplift the importance of the CIA's mission and the sense of duty of their employees. The importance of the work being done by the CIA and their sense of duty is framed by largely defining their job as saving American lives:

Source 3: If the CIA was not in that rugged outpost and many more like it, obtaining information that could save American lives, the agency would not be doing its job.

The importance of mission and duty is accentuated through displays of commitment and defence of America as a whole, while also connecting it to historical losses that further highlights the CIA's larger-than-life mission:

Source 6: CIA is conducting the most aggressive counterterrorism operations in our history, a mission we are pursuing with a level of determination worthy of our fallen heroes. We will sustain that momentum and, whenever possible, intensify our pursuit. We will continue to fight for a safer America.

The sense of duty is mentioned both relating to individuals and the entirety of the CIA:

Source 8: [...] a man who served his country, who did his duty, and who gave his life to keep her safe.

Source 8: Their devotion to duty is the foundation of our country.

Here the CIA presents themselves as dutiful heroes with an important mission, the protection of America.

Our strength – Skill and learning. One prominent theme used by the CIA is to discuss their own strength, which can be divided in two main areas: Skill and learning. This also includes the few existing references to missteps by the CIA and how they are dealt with. In the analysed texts, the CIA remarkably turns failure into a sign of strength:

Source 6: In addition, I asked Ambassador Thomas Pickering and Charlie Allen, a highly accomplished former Agency officer, to conduct an independent study of the Khowst attack and to review the work of the task force. They concurred with its findings. One of the CIA's greatest strengths is our ability to learn from experience, refine our methods, and adapt to the shifting tactics of America's enemies.

Source 6: Based on the findings of the task force and the independent review, responsibility cannot be assigned to any particular individual or group. Rather, it was the intense determination to accomplish the mission that influenced the judgements that were made.

The Khowst attack, that killed seven CIA employees, is framed as an important learning experience that in the context of great ability to adapt serves to improve the CIA instead of damaging it. Effectively turning a loss into a victory. This adaptability and ability to learn is used to create the image of an ever more efficient organisation that uses all available cutting-edge techniques and technology to defeat the enemies of America:

Source 1: Additionally, we're applying cutting-edge technologies and tradecraft to allow us to react more quickly to global developments – like targeting a terrorist organization wherever it arises and before it spreads.

Source 5: Our men and women designed highly complex, innovative, and forward-leaning clandestine operations that led us to Bin Ladin. One operation would yield intelligence that was carefully analysed and then used to drive further operations.

The CIA is then not only the epitome of skill and effectiveness, but also impervious to failure, as any failure will only serve to further strengthen them.

Protecting our country. At the heart of the CIA mission lies the driving force of protecting the country, the USA, from threat. The formulation of threat is important for the intent of the CIA, as it is what motivates their very existence. Mobilisation of public opinion

to support them is highly dependent on proving the validity of the threat as well as the CIA's capability to stop it:

Source 7: That is our mission at CIA. We are entrusted with the high privilege and hard work of tracking down the terrorists who threaten our country.

Source 8: [President Obama] told CIA officers that their "seven heroes" were at the vanguard of a mission vital to national security. "Let their sacrifice be a summons. To carry on their work. To complete this mission. To win this war, and to keep our country safe.

Furthermore, the CIA uses the terminology of being at war to include the public while also allowing for a description of themselves on the front lines. It legitimises them in a similar fashion as it would a uniformed soldier, in that they then represent valid state interests in a justifiable conflict:

Source 3: The main lessons from this attack is that, like our military, CIA officers are on the front lines against al-Qaeda and its violent allies.

This also serves to clarify the actors, the subjects and the objects, and their respective roles. The CIA, the subject that protects and serves the public that it is also an integral part of. A public which is then in some form an extended subject in the CIA story, while they fight the terrorist 'other' in an essential mission, during a time of war.

Sacrifice. The descriptions of cost or sacrifice take two primary expressions, the one presented here and the one presented under the heading *We are at war* under *We, the American people*. What they have in common is the use of loss to justify the war on terror while honouring and respecting those lost. The difference is in who it is that is grieving, the agency or the American people, and what this implies when it comes to the intent of the message.

Source 5: Within our agency family, our thoughts turn to those who died fighting to make this day possible. Our brothers and sisters who gave their lives in the war against al-Qa'ida—from Mike Spann to our heroes at Khowst—

are with us, in memory and spirit, at this joyful moment. In all that we do, they are our constant inspiration.

This difference is further emphasised in relation to risk, by focusing on who it is that is willing to sacrifice their lives for the safety of all:

Source 1: Our men and women put their lives on the line every day, often in the world's most dangerous locations. They do it to uncover the secrets our nation needs to defend itself and to advance American interests across the globe—secrets we can't get any other way.

Safety and justice. This theme is mainly used to separate the CIA from the enemy, where the driving forces of the CIA are presented as protecting, pursuing justice, or fighting for safety of the USA and the world as a whole.

Source 1: There, he tracked the authors and allies of terror. There, while fighting for the future of the American people, he fought to bring a better future to the Afghan people.

The will and courage to fight for both the future of the American and the Afghan people stands in stark contrast to the description of the authors and allies of terror. The CIA also makes a point of actively avoiding civilian casualties, which stands as an opposite to the enemies' active targeting of civilians:

Source 5: Thankfully, no Americans were lost, and every effort was taken to avoid civilian casualties.

Source 7: Their objective is to take innocent lives—ours is to save them.

An image of good versus evil, safety and justice versus terror and murder, appears to be the intent.

Secrecy. One final aspect that will be discussed here is the CIA use of secrecy to look good in the eyes of the public, without having to state what they have done.

Source 3: The CIA cannot speak publicly about its major victories – the plots foiled, the terrorists neutralized.

Source 9: Our work requires secrecy, and secrecy in turn requires a profound degree of trust from the American people. Nothing is more important to us at CIA than our obligation to earn the trust of our fellow citizen.

The major victories that cannot be mentioned allow the CIA to paint themselves as successful and skilful, while hiding behind a veil of secrecy that grants them an aura of mystery. This secrecy is then used in a way that seems to have the goal of increasing public trust in the agency. In some way, the need for secrecy is framed as something that makes them more trustworthy. Instead of having to be public about their activities, they state that their having secrecy in itself shows that they are deserving of trust.

We, the American people. This theme is similar in the way it separates itself from the enemy but puts a larger emphasis on the unity of CIA and America, in contrast to the previous theme that served to show the exceptional skill and bravery of the agency. Here, instead, the focus is on proving that the interests of the general public and the CIA align. That they are united against a common enemy.

Our strength – The USA. In a similar manner to when the CIA talks about itself, they also discuss the strength of the entire USA. Instead of underlining the skill and courage of the agency, here the texts describe the agency and the public as a family, bound together by values, liberty, and law:

Source 7: They are our brothers and sister. I hope many more Americans like them will join us. We are one family, bound together by our values, our liberty, and our Constitution.

This unity is further represented by how the strength of the entire nation rests on brave American individuals:

Source 8: Throughout history, our nation's strength has rested on the service and the sacrifice of individual Americans – brave warriors who believed that the life of the nation was worth their own lives.

Gina Haspel also uses the anniversary of the common losses inflicted on the US by the 9/11 terror attacks to reflect, and frames it as evidence of common American strength:

Source 2: In a note to the workforce reflecting on the attacks, CIA Director Gina Haspel said, “Every year, the anniversary of 9/11 is a time for both remembrance and renewal. It’s a time to remember not only the lives we lost, but also the resilience of the American people, the strength of our values, and our determination to stand up to terrorism. As much as anyone, CIA epitomized our nation’s fighting spirit following 9/11, [...]”

The lives lost are described as something “we” lost, in this context referring to the American people as a whole. Thereafter, the strength of the entire American people is presented, and then connected to how the CIA is the peak of the American people and its fighting spirit. Here, the descriptions serve to connect the CIA to the general public, while still providing evidence for the exceptionality of the agency.

We are at war. However, the most prominent way the texts show the unity of the whole nation is when discussing sacrifice, mutual loss, and mutual threat that are presented in a context of the waging of a war on terror.

Source 3: Our focus now is on these seven American heroes and those wounded beside them. They knew the value of their work against terrorism and did it with talent, energy and a full appreciation of the risks involved.

Here the seven dead in the Khowst attack are specifically referred to as American heroes instead of a part of the CIA family, hence tying the CIA and the American people together and highlighting mutuality. This is seen in a different aspect of this quote from source 2:

Source 2: CIA Director Gina Haspel said, “Every year, the anniversary of 9/11 is a time for both remembrance and renewal. It’s a time to remember not only the lives we lost, but also the resilience of the American people, the strength of our values, and our determination to stand up to terrorism.

Here Director Gina Haspel shows the CIA and the public unifying in loss while the CIA once again turns defeat into strength. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 aren't only a devastating loss, it is also a proof of American strength and a rallying call to support the CIA in the war on terror.

Divine support. One final aspect of how the CIA aligns itself with the American people is by uniting them in the name of god:

Source 5: God bless the United States of America.

Source 8: [...] that our nation is blessed to have men and women such as these.

Source 8: May God bless these seven patriots, may he watch over their families. And may God bless the United States of America.

In other words, the CIA and the people of America are unified in a nation blessed by God. The intent of using this divinity can be that it provides something larger-than-life that brings them all together, while allowing them to view their nation as the good side; hence justifying the war on terror and the CIA's role.

Them, the Enemy. This theme concerns how the CIA constructs the object, the enemy – terrorism. In contrast to how the CIA relates to the public, where they on the one hand views itself as an extension or part of the public but on the other hand as the uniquely skilful and brave first line of defence of the United States in the war against terror, their relationship to the enemy is less conflicted. The enemy, the 'other', are clearly in every way different from the CIA. An in essence different being that contrasts with the good of the CIA.

Vicious foe. The terrorist is described as a vicious foe, striking the United States out of hateful visions and carrying out atrocities. The terrorist is a barbarian, a murderer that with fanaticism and cruelty murders the innocent. He is everything the CIA is not:

Source 3: This is a vicious foe, one that has struck our country before and is determined to do so again.

Source 5: The only leader they have ever known [Bin Ladin], whose hateful vision gave rise to their atrocities, is no more.

Source 5: May the fact that Usama Bin Ladin no longer inhabits the earth be a source of comfort for the thousands of families, here in America and around the globe, who mourn the victims of al-Qa'ida's barbarity.

The foe is not brave nor courageous. Instead it is described in terms of criminality and horror [cursive added by author]:

Source 6: The Khowst *assailant* [...]. He was, in fact, a *brutal murderer*.

Source 7: [...] because the *fanaticism* and *cruelty* of the *murderers* were so vile; and because *their hatred* was aimed squarely at the values we stand for as a nation, [...].

The enemy, the vile and cruel murderers, are attacking the CIA and the American people, the entire nation, out of hatred. Inexplicable violence from criminal madmen.

Source 7: The enemy is not defined by any religion, but by their actions—their atrocities.

Exclusively, terms like foe, enemy, murderer, extremist, or terrorist, are used to refer to the opponent. At the same time, this is constantly contrasted to the work of the CIA that aims at protecting American and innocent life to make the country and the world safer. Therefore, an act of identifying oneself by being diametrically opposed to one's enemy is clearly visible in the texts.

Geography. Furthermore, geographical distance is used to separate the USA, the CIA, and the American public from the enemy. On a regular basis, when talking about interactions with the enemy, it is clearly mentioned that it takes part somewhere that is not in the USA:

Source 3 [excerpts]: in Afghanistan; The front lines; Our country; other part of the world

Source 3: If the CIA was not in that rugged outpost and many more like it [...].

Effectively, this linguistic marking of distance also enforces a feeling of mental distance; they, on the other side of the world that seek to murder us.

Source 4: States with poor governance; ethnic, cultural, or religious tensions; weak economies; and porous borders will be prime breeding grounds for terrorism. In such states, domestic groups will challenge the entrenched government, and transnational networks seeking safehavens.

Source 4: Much of the terrorism noted earlier will be directed at the United States and its overseas interests. Most anti-US terrorism will be based on perceived ethnic, religious or cultural grievances.

These foreign lands are also different from the United States in a way that allow terror to breed. Terror is thus something that is created somewhere else. Wording like 'breeding grounds' brings to mind images of rodents or insects that cause an infestation of terrorism. An image that sets the CIA up as exterminators and the terrorist as a pest.

Construction of the subject

What then summarises the results of the two ways the CIA frames the subject? Firstly, the CIA is primarily given positive traits, often on an individual level, where they are described as brave, skilled, and talented. The majority of the texts make a general distinction between the CIA and the American people or public. This is not, however, always the case. Occasionally, the connectedness or unitedness of the two is emphasised. Therefore, two major ways of constructing the subject is visible in the texts. Both are defined through the 'war' against the terrorist. It would then seem that the terrorist serves an important purpose in defining the CIA and its relationship to the people. The goodness of the CIA is dependent on the stark contrast given by the evil terrorist. The image of an undeniable and murderous enemy gives strength to handle loss and opportunity to celebrate victories, while also honouring the fallen Americans.

The construction of the subject has varying intent. As an agency, the CIA has not always been appreciated. They stand to gain from creating an image of themselves as protectors, which in turn protect them from negative political and public opinion. Driven by budget, threat is essential to their existence. This also implies a need for the CIA to prove their skill and usefulness. As an intelligence agency, however, they are faced with issues caused by secrecy when it comes to proving this. Instead, they use publicly known successes

and failures to prove they are needed. This could also explain why the failures are described the way they are, as another form of success. The CIA simply cannot afford to have publicly known information be seen as evidence of incompetency, as they are severely limited in terms of public relation opportunities.

The main intentions, therefore, seem to be to maintain an idea of a strong and skilled agency, that is of the people for the people fighting their common, evil enemy. This is achieved through emphasising Americanness, justifiable motives, and skill, which are combined with self-glorification of CIA courage and ability. To properly frame them, it is necessary to have an ever-present threat, a clearly ill-willed danger that is aimed at the shared interests of the CIA and the American public. The intent in the use of the discourse seems to be to define this exterior threat, separate it from the US and use it as a uniting force while also entrenching and improving CIA power.

What consequences, then, does this intent entail? The consequences of how the constructed subjects are used primarily indicates the intended motivational and unifying effects. Losses and casualties are framed as sacrifice by all of America, while victories and successes are framed as evidence of CIA and US superiority. Thusly, any lost American lives are upheld as examples of why to fight on rather than a reason to lose heart and the successes are given as contrasts that show that the war is going in the right direction. The war, with a feeling of urgency and anger, is perceived as an undeniable reality. This, in turn, ensures that the distinction between friend and foe is indisputable.

However, the use of defeat as a sign of strength is potentially damaging to the ability to learn from mistakes, which is something the CIA lifts as one of their main strengths. While it is motivating, the use of the current discourse to avoid viewing failure as failure risks preventing actual learning to avoid hurting the motivational and unifying intent. Therefore, it is important to remain vigilant as to how this discourse affects the internal workings of the CIA. If it were to become too prominent within the organisation itself, the results might be a culture of silence where failure is ignored or reframed in favour of clear successes. For an intelligence agency, the inability to realistically overview failure is potentially devastating to the ability to learn and adapt. Ironically, the way the CIA frames their failures as positive learning experiences might be indicative of the exact opposite.

Construction of the object

The object is defined as *the enemy*, with the use of distancing language that serves as a tool defining the subject through the object. This is effectively achieved by describing the enemy as an undistinguishable unit, the vicious foe, whose barbarity and violence directly

threats the courageous and skilled individuals of the CIA and the USA. Only Bin Ladin is a defined individual but framed as the leader of evil. He embodies the enemy, but is presented as a figure head, that represents the hatefulness he imbued them with. The descriptors used for the enemy all serve to provide evidence of their criminality and cruelty, which distinctly marks them as different from the subjects. Interestingly, this seems to be further strengthened by highlighting the strictly geographical distance between the subjects and the object. Terror, and therefore the terrorist, is born and bred abroad. With the exception of Bin Ladin, the face of the enemy, their exact locations are not important but presented in general terms like “states with poor governance”, “rugged outposts” on the “front lines”. Afghanistan is the only country mentioned in connection with the terrorist. The role of the terrorist in part defined through not being in or from the US homeland, but from “abroad”. They do however threaten the homeland and the overseas interests of the United States. The motives of *the enemy* are never clearly described. While the subjects are driven by a will to defend themselves, to make the world a better and safer place, by honourably defending their country, the terrorist’s motivation is briefly and vaguely described as a response to perceived “ethnic, religious or cultural grievances”. Their main driving force is, rather, their barbarian ways. The criminal cruelty of the enemy seems to be, in itself, the primary motivation.

The intent then is to distance the subject from *the enemy*, by framing them as cruel and violent barbarians, in order to justify the war on terror and, on the one hand motivate the American public to support the CIA while on the other hand strengthening the resolve of the CIA employees. Effectively using an “us and them” division to create an image of the CIA heroes on the front lines against the irrational violence of the terrorist. Consequently, the analysis of the enemy becomes limited, as their intentions as a necessity are vague, non-existent or evil. In the context of intelligence analysis, there is a risk that this is creating multiple forms of analytical and cognitive bias. If the goal is to, for example, predict future terrorist attacks or to better align potential terrorist groups with your own goals, lacking the will and frame to understand their actual motivations can potentially hinder the analyst from reaching reasonable conclusions. Conversely, not implementing a strictly negative view of the enemy would undermine the narrative in which the CIA and the USA are heroes and could have an impact on morale, in the CIA, the military, and the public. A more nuanced view of the enemy, then, is potentially damaging to the CIA mission. It is possible, however, that a more reasoned approach in the long run would serve to heighten national and international trust in the competency of the agency. Both alternatives carry potential risks and rewards. The current narrative carry risks for analysis but facilitates motivational work and can increase

morale. If the CIA manages to keep their public relations separate from the analytical work, the issues might be limited.

Interpretative repertoires

From this analysis of the discursive content of the CIA interaction with the public, conclusions about interpretative repertoires can be drawn. They are closely related to the three overarching themes: We, the CIA; We, the American people, and; Them, the Enemy. However, the interpretative repertoires are more focused on the specifics of language used to construct an event. Therefore, each of the three themes can include one or the other, as well as combinations of different interpretative repertoires depending on the event they are describing. In a way, this becomes the verbalisation of the underlying discourse.

The interpretative repertoire that describes the CIA itself in contrast to terrorism, mainly uses uplifting, glorifying language. Hence, it will here be called the *Heroism* repertoire. This includes the manner in which Americans, employed by the CIA, that have fallen in action are described, as well as descriptions of skill and courage in the line of duty. Words like brave, courageous, officer, effort, important, mission, heroes, experts, security, duty, sacrifice, protecting, strength, skill, and learning, are all common components in this repertoire. When these are used to refer to the CIA itself, it paints a picture of an effective and strong organisation. As heroes.

The second identified interpretative repertoire relates to the other way the CIA presents itself in relation to terrorism, that is as a part of a war effort by all of the USA. Here it has been named the *Unity* repertoire, as it mainly serves the purpose of showing that both the CIA and the public are part of something greater than themselves. The difference in intent creates a different use of terminology and words such as values, war, determination, fighting spirit, and liberty, are more prominent. Language that with broader strokes describe things that everyone has in common, rather than more specific and heroic qualities such as courage or skill.

Finally, the description of the object, the enemy, gives rise to two different interpretative repertoires: *Threat* and *Evil*. Though similar, there are an important nuance that separates the two. Threat focuses less on the barbarity and cruelty of the enemy and is often used to describe the future of US action. Instead of value laden adjectives to describe the actions of the enemy, this interpretative repertoire uses words like vulnerable, disruption, sophisticated, mass casualties, asymmetric, and exploit. A more technical repertoire, that aims at objectively identify and describing future risks. It does not attempt any detailed description of the terrorist or terrorism, more than as a somewhat obscure or unclear, but ever-present,

threat. The repertoire *Evil* on the other hand is entirely focused on separation of subject from object, especially when the terrorist is mentioned in the context of dead Americans. Instead of an attempt of objectivity, this repertoire primarily uses words such as vicious, barbarity, cruelty, assailant, hateful, atrocities, dangerous, and murder.

Conclusions

The identified repertoires are used depending on the matter that is primarily the focus of the texts. Multiple repertoires can be identified in the same texts, which is clearest when the text changes tone and topic. The three themes and four interpretative repertoires are perhaps not in themselves surprising, what they contribute is instead the ability to analyse the effectiveness and potential issues of how terrorism is framed by the CIA. Furthermore, it adds a discourse perspective to how the CIA defines itself in relation to the American public and to the terrorist threat.

Regarding the interpretative repertoires, it is important to keep in mind that they all exist within the CIA simultaneously, but are used depending on the action orientation – the contextual goal of the user. This paper has mainly used messages from the director with parts of presidential speech, with the only contrast being the excerpts from the Global Trends 2015 report. It is vital to remember the limited data selection, as other interpretative repertoires most likely exist in the agency but have not been discovered here. Both due to the chosen data and as a result of the subjective influence of the author in the writing of this paper. As a consequence of the chosen method and data, the conclusions and implications for future research must be seen in the light of the specified limitations of this paper.

Implications for future research

Firstly, this paper's main contribution is the application of the discursive psychology method on issues relating to intelligence work and intelligence analysis. Focusing on action orientation and interpretative repertoires to study discourse has the potential of closing the gap between academia and tradecraft, making the results useful for analysis by agencies themselves.

Secondly, the paper opens up for future research. Better understanding of the impact of discourse and language for intelligence agencies and in intelligence analysis could improve the ability to deal with both terrorism and public relations.

Thirdly, it emphasises the risks of cognitive bias in analytical work and provides a method capable of identifying concrete expressions thereof. These can then in turned be used

to isolate risks to the accuracy of analysis due to discursively coded content providing predispositions that risk skewing results.

In summation, this paper has described how the CIA uses different aspects of language to construct messages regarding terrorism, terror, and themselves in relation with the public. This was done through the identification of interpretative repertoires, that exemplify how the CIA utilises different discursive content to achieve narrative goals. The results have the potential to widen the base of research on intelligence work and can be used to prevent the negative effects of cognitive bias on the basis of existing discourse, while improving public relations.

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Appendices

The analysed texts are listed here. All can be provided by contacting the author.

Source 1: CIA Director Gina Haspel speaks at Auburn University

Source 2: CIA honors victims

Source 3: Director Panetta's Op-Ed on Terrorist attack in Afghanistan

Source 4: "Global Trends 2015" Terrorism-related Excerpts

Source 5: Message from the Director: Justice Done

Source 6: Message from the director: Lessons from Khowst

Source 7: Message from the director: Remembering September 11th

Source 8: President Obama and CIA director Panetta speak at CIA memorial service

Source 9: Remarks for Central Intelligence Agency Director Gina Haspel – McConnell Center at the University of Louisville