

# Ideological Discursive Strategies in the Work of American Think Tanks: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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## Abstract

While relatively decent attention has been paid to the analysis of ideological discursive strategies deployed by the political policy-producing institutions of think tanks, this study uncovers the strategies in the discourse of American think tanks that attempt to ideologically (re)produce social realities and shape public opinion at the textual and semantic levels. To this end, an eclectic model of critical discourse analysis CDA is adopted to qualitatively and quantitatively deconstruct and interpret nine texts from three conservative think tanks focusing on three political issues namely (1) Islamic terrorism, (2) Russian role in the Middle East, and (3) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The findings show the centrality of ideological discursive strategies in (a) polarizing a positive presentation of the *US* (in-group) against the negative presentation of *THEM* (out-group), and (b) advocating for a hegemony of current and/or desired socio-political realities.

**Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, ideological polarization, political discourse, think tanks

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Problem

In political discourse, ideological *discursive* strategies are deployed to control peoples' perceptions of reality. A rich space of political discourse is the works of the policy-making institutions (or think tanks). Think tanks are public and private research centers that follow a relatively academic tradition in producing policy analyses and research to support policy-makers in informing their public policies (McGann, 2019, p. 13) in the form of journalistic articles, reports, policy briefs, studies, and research briefs, etc. Think tanks can influence policy debates and fill particular roles for policymakers and the public. However, Plehwe (2015, p. 359) suggests that critical analyses of the works of think tanks have to target the legitimacy of claiming an independent and objective 'scientific' public image while the greatest majority of think tanks is highly characterized by the absence of transparent financial and funding practices. This consequently contributes to the fact that their works go mostly uncontested (Wiarda, 2010, p. 31). Advocacy think tanks (henceforth ATTs) defend Right or Far Right conservative ideologies. For Weaver (1989, p. 567), ATTs "combine a strong policy, partisan or ideological bent with aggressive salesmanship and an effort to influence current policy debates." A case in point is the role of the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation in feeding the U.S. mainstream media and informing the White House that Iraq allegedly possessed and had the intention to use Weapons of Mass Destruction (Paolucci, 2009, p. 879).

The hypothesis this study puts forwards is that the institutions of think tanks follow textual and semantic ideology-laden strategies to (a) polarize a positive presentation of the *US* (in-group) against the negative presentation of *THEM* (out-group), and (b) hegemonize current and/or desired socio-political realities.

Therefore, we grasp this study's contribution as providing a context-based, discursive, reflective, and easy-to-follow analysis of underlying ideological motivations in the work of American ATTs. These analyses are conducted at textual and semantic levels presenting a fathomable socio-political picture of the above-mentioned issued in terms of (1) ideological polarity of *US* against *THEM* and (2) hegemony of current and/or desired socio-political realities.

In the context of the above political issues and the textual and semantic levels of analysis, the goal of this study is twofold. First, it attempts to identify the ideological discursive strategies by which think tanks manufacture

ideological polarity and socio-political hegemony. Second, it attempts to provide context-based interpretations of selected excerpts to deconstruct how and why think tanks' work is ideologically-laden. To achieve this, we selected a representative sample of nine texts from three advocacy think tanks. Analyses will focus on three political issues namely (1) Islamic terrorism in the work of The Hoover Institute, (2) Russian role in the Middle East in the work of Brookings Institute, and (3) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the work of The Heritage Foundation. Thus, we seek to provide answers to the following questions:

*Research Question 1: What is the extent to which textual and semantic ideological strategies are utilized in the discourse of ATTs)?*

*Research Question 2: What interpretations do these strategies have that explain how and why ATTs seek to polarize US (in-group) against THEM (out-group) and impose socio-political hegemony?*

### *1.2 Previous Literature*

Barros and Taylor (2020) approached the role of think tanks from the perspective of management studies in the work of the Brazilian think tank of Instituto de Pesquisas e Estudos Sociais. They applied Gramsci's theory of the relations between the state and the civil society to develop an ethical-political framework in terms of the successful advocacy of neoliberalism. Barros and Taylor concluded that this think tank greatly contributed to presenting a social hegemony of a justifiable pro-capitalist corporate ideology and thus enhanced its public acceptability. However, Barros and Taylor's work amount to less fine levels of ideology interpretation of relevant texts which in turn may render their treatment a pure (socio-)political analysis that can, and indeed should receive a complementary linguistic (discursive) evidence of the type this study suggests.

Bruce (2021) investigated 12 reports produced by the neoliberal think tank of the New Zealand Initiative to expose its proposals aimed at reshaping the public education sector in New Zealand and advocate for the ideology of education as a measurable product consumed by students as consumers. Bruce conducted analyses at the levels of recursive themes (e.g. marketization), and genre (discourses of a business case that is based on e.g. executive summary, business memos, and journalistic writing). He concluded that this think tank practices consistent advocacy for change in education, i.e., the quantification of education as a consumable product for students and parents. Although Bruce's approach is highly informative, it limits itself to providing a relatively structural discursive account rather than contextual interpretations of the discursive resource employed in realizing this type of ideology. It is also confined to introducing the frequent themes identified in crystalizing this educational ideology with no reference (i.e., detailed interpretation) of how and/or why such an ideology is discursively manufactured.

Almiron, Rodrigo-Alsina, and Moreno (2021) examined the role of think tanks in Europe in mitigating social interactions pertinent to the negative impact of animal high-protein diets on global warming. They investigated 110 think tanks from 27 countries with 1,408 texts from 1948 to 2019. The theoretical framework of analysis included three dimensions one of which is ignorance (re)produced through discourse. To demonstrate how ignorance is manufactured, Stanley Cohen's (2000) three-level deniability was applied to classify three textual categories namely (a) denial of facts (literal denial), (b) denial of logical consequences (interpretive denial), and (c) denial of psycho-political and moral implication (implicatory denial). The texts were categorized into the three types (1) texts that propose strong relation between animal high-protein diets and global warming, (2) texts that present framed information (Goufman's 1974 frame analysis was applied) to decide whether negative or positive correlations are conveyed, and (3) texts that explicitly defended vegetarianism. The findings held think tanks responsible for the ignorance of the negative impact of animal high-protein diets on global warming which is mainly accomplished through the textual apparatus of deniability. The authors however admitted that the think tanks' ideological orientations were overlooked. Despite its profound contribution, this study may hold more of a statistical value rather than a qualitative interpretation of the discourse of the texts collected, a point the authors raised in their conclusive remarks.

Jeziarska and Sörbom (2020) tackle the construction of the independent public image of think tanks in Sweden and Poland in terms of the maintenance of political distance and the organization of relational proximity. They develop a theoretical model to explicate the paradox that emerged due to claiming political, economic, and academic independence while retaining the desired influence. The data comprised of interviews and analysis of documents of Poland and Sweden as two selected cases taken from 21 think tanks. The analyses showed that the concerned think tanks utilize three discursive resources to be perceived as independent: (a) material (funds), (b) symbolic (academia), or relational (links with other political agencies). These resources were invoked via the process of discourse and practice where the former refers to the way think tanks put forth their different activities to which the latter lends its organization and formatting. The study concluded that the 21 think tanks all manage to promote a bias-free image by

retaining a certain distance and organizing proximity towards other political actors. Further, independence was constructed by the discourse of various types yet less pivotal for some think tanks whose partisanship and ideology-motivated stances were unproblematic for a legitimate front. The analyses mainly lean towards a political analysis rather than that of a linguistic character. The data (especially interviews) may not be a strong discursive indication that reflects ideological positionings. In other words, interviewees may well refrain from providing important information as opposed to what may be revealed in publications such as reports and policy briefs. Consequently, a vast number of ideology-embedding strategies may not be utilized in the first place.

The above contributions have in common several limitations. First, practical qualitative (textual) and thus discursively interpreted evidence seems to be missing. On one hand, this sort of evidence may reflect the very existence of ideological content. On the other hand, it provides an interpretation of the language-in-use applied in embedding ideology. That is the relative absence of a feasible linguistic apparatus that may be effective in challenging the products of think tanks that laypeople may put to use with ease whenever one comes across these products. Second, is the absence of a context-based treatment of the discourse of ATTs where analyses address the building blocks of the discursive micro-(re)production of ideology at the textual and semantic levels. This is particularly essential to further grasp what, how, and why such discursive strategies are drawn upon to propose policies that affect social practices and alter public opinion.

### 1.3 Critical Discourse Analysis CDA

According to Hart (2020), CDA is a linguistic approach through which language is perceived as an *instrument* to create power and unequal socio-political relations and thus provide sustainability which in turn manifests itself in concrete social practices and relations. The main tenet of CDA “draws heavily on social theories and seeks to develop a critically contextualized approach to linguistics which identifies issues of ideology, power, and inequality” (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018, p. 1). For Mulderrig, Montessori, and Farrelly (2019), CDA should be viewed as a contributor to the research of social sciences through the textual analyses of the investigated issues as it seeks to pinpoint how language is employed to reproduce social actions, re-introduce novel practices for thinking and doing, and favor certain social subjects over others. Mulderrig et al. also maintain that CDA is mainly concerned with the way language “figures in the constitution, contestation, and transformation of social problems, and thereby processes of social change” (p.1). The main focus of CDA is then the discursive traces that reflect different power injustices as well as other social problems such as gender and racism where discourses (texts) privilege some groups over others or introduce agentless groups compared to those given the responsibility of leading society (Björkvall, 2020).

Following Fairclough and Wodak (1997), the basic tenets of CDA are: (a) CDA is mainly concerned with addressing social problems in its discursive power relations, (b) the socio-cultural is produced by discourse within its ideological dimensions, (c) discourse should be considered in its historical context where the connection between society and discourses is mediated, and (d) critical discourse analyses are explanatory and interpretative that deal with discourse as another facet of social actions. Therefore, CDA breaks down naturalized discourses by analyzing the dynamics between society and discourse, i.e., macropolitical ideology-informed institutions/actors manifest themselves in everyday textual micropolitics that makes up polarized and biased power relations (Luke, 2002, p. 100). While CDA is not a discipline-based, rather, it is a problem-based approach that is inherently inter- and multidisciplinary, the main task of CDA analysts is therefore to challenge social inequalities, defend social and political justice, and endeavor to counter the hegemonic abuse of power and reproduced dominant discourses (van Dijk, 2016). Catalano and Waugh (2020) point out that CDA explicates the way social structures change due to the relation between power and ideology which in turn is crystallized, legitimized, and challenged through language. Catalano and Waugh further affirm that discourse such those of discrimination or social exploitation may amount to become socially incorporated and thus perpetuated unless their detrimental impact is exposed “so that awareness, resistance, emancipation, and social action can bring about social change and social justice” (pp. 1-2).

The above puts some social subjects (agents) in a better position to practice power abuse. While it is quite reasonable to describe CDA as normative social apparatus dedicated to the good of human beings, one can point to politicians as the most involved in the (re)production of power abuse. This makes CDA an effective analytical tool that is indispensable when the discursive dimension is investigated in politics (Filardo-Illamas and Boyd, 2018, p. 315). That is to say, politicians and policy-makers may determine the socio-political polarity in terms of which group is *right* and which group is *wrong* and is against the interests of society (Lorenzo-Dus and Nouri, 2021).

To sum up, CDA is an emancipatory and interdisciplinary analytical apparatus that analyzes spoken and written discourses for revealing and criticizing the enactment, (re)production, and legitimation of power abuse and inequality realized as various generic discourses (van Dijk, 2018). This means that linguistic meaning and ideology are

*inseparable* and both are heavily context-dependent which necessarily makes any linguistic analysis an influential instrument in studying the ways ideology mediates how power breeds dominance (Fowler, Kress, Trew, and Hodge, 1979)

#### 1.4 Ideology

Ideologies are patterns of ideas by which our experiences are hierarchized to make sense of the world where these ideas are set as core systems constituting ideologies which in turn are given birth through language (Hodge, Kress, and Jones, 1979, p. 81). However, the difficulties of defining the notion of *ideology* are immense and complex where ideology is often thought of as ideas that are vague, unreliable, and self-serving as opposed to the neutrality and logic-informed premisses of philosophy and the thoroughness and precision of the theories of sociology (Susser, 1996, p. 166).

Van Dijk (1998, p. 2) views ideology as a system of misguided and false beliefs which are attributed to social or political adversaries who either show or hide these ideologies to gain particular socio-political interests. Nonetheless, van Dijk mentions that although there is an intrinsic difficulty in defining the notion of ideology, it still defines inextricable social characters of groups or communities, and it is an irreducible part of the macro-level of the social structure and is usually linked with power and dominance (van Dijk, 1998, p. 2).

Trew (1979) posits that social orders would *not* be legitimated and maintained without social ideologies. His argument indicates that there exist conflicting social and political ideologies among discourse participants. Thus, there are differing socio-political ideologies according to which groups, institutions, governments, etc. act and react. To prevent the rapid and complex reproduction and enactment of these ideologies, Trew suggests a relatively practical solution: the clash of systems of thought maybe settled down when ideologies are denied, suppressed, or more importantly reinterpreted and re-explained. It is this latter suggestion to which the 'critical' dimension may be appropriately added to arrive at more *critically* informed reinterpretations of (re)produced ideologies.

Wodak (2007) distinguishes two major strands when characterizing ideologies. They are (a) theories that are false about reality which can be countered by theories based on sound science, and (b) are inescapable moments that slip into socio-political thinking and action. For Blommaert (2005), ideologies may be of two major types (a) the wider *global* range covering almost all the 'isms' such as socialism and racism which seeks specific socio-political purposes, and (b) the *local* total sum of cultural, historical, socio-political properties of a society or governing system which is the most difficult to define as it stands for the epistemic and cultural aspects of particular socio-political systems. Thus, it is quite difficult to even theoretically assume that the social discursive practices—often manifested in texts—are completely ideology-free. This is so for one logical reason: ideologies and language are interactively intertwined, as they together constitute the ultimate form of social behavior which manifests itself as the most commonsensical assumption of social interaction (Fairclough, 1989, p. 2). Therefore, one of the kernel tenets of CDA is confronting these commonsensical discursive assumptions to deconstruct those dominant socio-political inequalities realized as ideological naturalization (Fairclough, 1995, p. 23). To this extent, ideological differences appear to be a crucial classifying factor in the work of policy-making institutions (Rich, 2004).

The above definitions present ideology as false misguiding ideas upon which political discourse consistently draws. Generally, for Fairclough, ideology is "a modality of power" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 9) in contrast with mere descriptive accounts of socio-cultural perspectives, attitudes, beliefs, etc. with no reference to the resultant (in)visible forms of domination. However, one would reasonably question the actual extent to which ideologies are harmful to societies and communities. On the one hand, van Dijk calls for more attention to the role of *positive* ideologies such as feminism and anti-racism by referring to them as systemized sets of propositions that authorize opposing and resisting inequalities (van Dijk, 2000, p. 8). On the other hand, the majority of social, cultural, and political ideologies are malign and damaging to social relations in the sense that they are bases of tangible social enactments which are then necessarily engendered in the identity of social participants (Fairclough, 2003, p. 9) as opposed to more positive ideologies such as environmentalism, feminism, anti-racism. In line with Fairclough's position, the impact of ideological policies advocated by political institutions may be irreversible and non-rectifiable once enacted and inculcated as naturalized social practices.

## 2. Method

This study follows an eclectic model of analysis drawing on Fairclough's (2003) *Analyzing Discourse* and van Dijk's (2000) *Ideology and Discourse*. The overarching critical theme is van Dijk's 'ideological square', i.e., emphasize/de-emphasize our good/bad qualities and emphasize/de-emphasize their bad/good qualities. The qualitative analyses are conducted at the textual and semantic levels supported by an analysis of frequency plus

percentage to satisfy the quantitative aspect.

### 2.1 The Textual Level

Causal Relations reflect the grammatical warrant of the (re)produced events that are inevitably motivated by the causal powers at the level of societal structures and practices (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 88-89). This enables writers to encode social and political ideologies manifested as reasons and consequences. **Reason** is the grammatical structure of causality connecting two or more clauses whether explicitly manifested in a connector such as 'by' or implicitly encoded as 'X occurs only because of Y'. **Consequence** is a consequential relation established between two or more clauses: 'Y occurred as a consequence of X' to convey that Y necessarily follows from the occurrence of X. **Conditional relations** are typically realized in an 'if-clause' or any other equivalent grammatical form that puts two events in a conditional logic, i.e., if X then Y. **Contrastive relations** are textual tools used to push people to classify social life (Fairclough, 2003, p. 88). Contractiveness is achieved through the conjunction of two clauses using 'but', 'yet', 'however', 'instead of', 'although', 'even though', etc.

### 2.2 The Semantic Level

From van Dijk's (2000) *Ideology and Discourse*, only four semantic analytical resources are considered the most relevant to the data as the more flexible semantic spaces to embed ideologies (van Dijk, 2000, p. 42). **Lexicalization** is how speakers use certain negatively connotated lexical items to communicate their message in specific contexts. **Disclaimers** are structural combinatory devices that bring together positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation characteristics to further emphasize the latter. **Modality** expresses the speakers/writers' different propositional weights as either (a) necessary, (b) possible, or (c) known to simply be the case which reflects ideological (re)action towards socio-political issues in order to elicit more public legitimacy (van Dijk, 2000, pp. 51-52). **Evidentiality** explains the way speakers usually attempt to support what they say with evidence such as media, experts' comments, or international agreements to further render their statements more feasible and undeniable.

### 2.3 Data Description

The selected corpus is nine written texts that fall under the genre of political discourse. The texts are originally written in American English, sporadically covering the period from 2010 to 2021, and are of various lengths in terms of the number of words. The texts are directly retrieved from the official websites of the ATTs concerned. The selection criteria for the data are (a) texts must be a written textual content as opposed to other subgenres such as transcribed T.V. interviews, (b) they must be exclusively produced by one of the ATTs selected, and (c) they must reflect one of the three political issues of (1) Islamic terrorism, (2) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and (3) the Russian role in the Middle East. Each issue is represented by three texts taken from one of the three think tanks (Islamic terrorism at the Hoover Institute, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the Heritage Foundation, and the Russian role in the Middle East at Brookings). The following table illustrates the selected corpus of texts.

Table 1. The corpus of analysis

Political issue	No. of texts	No. of words	Publication year	Text type
Islamic terrorism	3	3,524	2016, 2016, 2010	Article, research brief, article
The Russian role in the Mid. East	3	8,284	2017, 2016, 2016	Policy report, testimony, policy analysis
Israeli-Palestinian conflict	3	3,277	2015, 2020, 2021	Issue brief, policy commentary, polic commentary
Total	9	15,085		

## 3. Results

### 3.1 The Quantitative Aspect

*Research Question 1: What is the extent to which textual and semantic ideological strategies are utilized in the discourse of ATTs to polarize US (in-group) against THEM (out-group)?*

The statistics below are not intended to hold comparisons between the two levels of analysis or even among the discursive constructability mechanisms of the three political issues as these two endeavors lie outside the scope of this study. However, an overview of the abundance of the discursive strategies investigated helps to understand the actual frequency of these strategies. The numbers below help make sense of the strategies at play in terms of reproducing the political issues tackled. The corpus analyzed indicates a moderate-to-high frequency of ideological

strategies which in turn reflect the relative employment of strategies at the textual and semantic levels. As the below table shows, at the textual level, the totals of these strategies are (16) *reasons*, (17) *consequences*, (10) *conditional relations*, and (39) *contrastive relations*. At the semantic level, the totals of the ideology strategies are found to be (12) *disclaimers*, (18) *evidentiality*, (58) *lexicalizations*, and (35) *modalities*.

Table 2. Deployment of ideological strategies per political issue

Ideological Strategy	Islamic Terrorism	The Russian role in the Mid. East	The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
<i>The Textual Level</i>			
Causal Relations (Reason)	4	9	3
Causal Relations (Consequence)	5	9	3
Conditional Relations	1	5	4
Contrastive Relations	15	11	13
<i>The Semantic Level</i>			
Disclaimer	8	2	2
Evidentiality	6	8	4
Lexicalization	23	16	19
Modality	7	14	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>62</b>

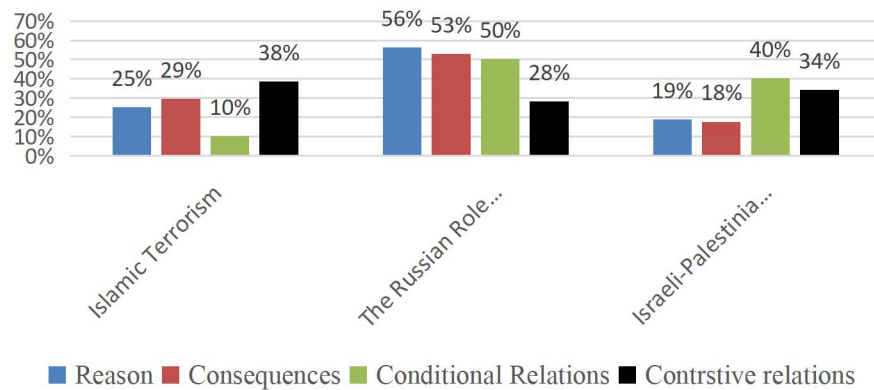


Figure 1. Ideological strategies at the Textual Level

Figure 2 below shows the percentages of the strategies detected in the process of realizing the three political issues at the semantic level.

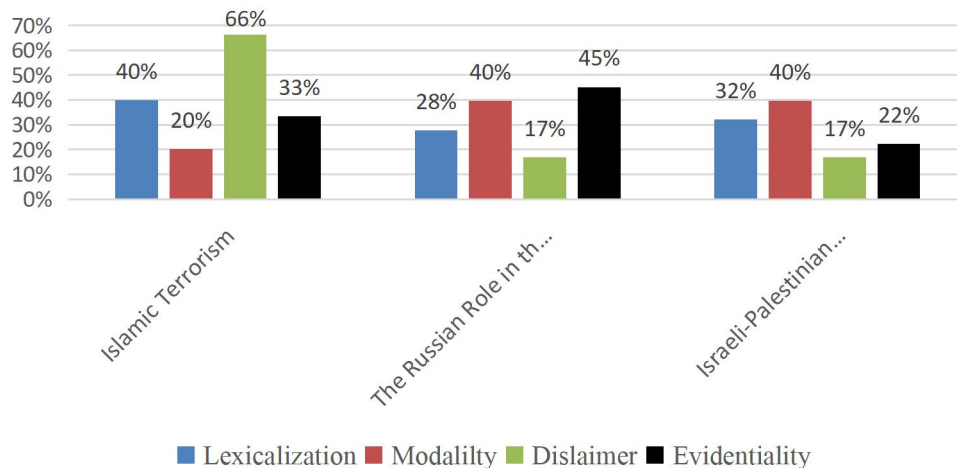


Figure 2. Ideological strategies at the Semantic Level

### 3.2 The Qualitative Aspect

*Research Question 2: What interpretations do these strategies have that explain how and why ATTs seek to polarize US (in-group) against THEM (out-group) and impose socio-political hegemony?*

#### 3.2.1 The Textual Level

##### a. Casual Relations (Reason)

- (1) Palestinians made a bad situation worse by rejecting a series of peace plans proposed by the Carter administration in 1978, the Reagan administration in 1982, and the Clinton administration in 2000. (Heritage, 2020)

The Heritage Foundation (2020) establishes a causal relation between the first clause 'Palestinians made a bad situation worse' and the second clause 'a series of peace plans...' mediated by the preposition 'by'. That is, the first clause suggests the claim that it is the Palestinians who hold the full responsibility for worsening the current situation as they consciously reject 'a series of peace plans'. This is done to convey that the true *reason* behind the failure of settling down the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, according to Heritage, the Palestinians' continuous rejection of the 'peace' plans offered to them. On the one hand, this rejection foregrounds the Israelis as the ones who are serious about arriving at mutual settlements—who may well be so in terms of normal peace-making negotiations—since they adhere to following those plans. On the other hand, rejecting such 'peace plans' re-introduces the Palestinians as the party who keeps dismissing the opportunities to bring peace to the region. Out of the causal relationship between the first and second clauses, blame arises towards the Palestinians for worsening a political situation in which they are invited to dispense with their homeland.

- (2) He [President Obama] is not alone in this delusion for "religion of peace" and "nothing to do with Islam" have been mantras chanted by our foreign policy savants. (Hoover, 2016a)

In this policy commentary, the Hoover Institution (2016a) develops a causal relationship between the two clauses mediated by the connector 'for'. Islam as a religion of peace is reduced to be a 'delusion' in which President Obama and his fellow foreign policy advisors live. Hoover stresses that the reason why many Democrats support Obama in this regard is that they are ignorant of Islam's true nature and whose publicly repeated statements are but false slogans about the Islam they imagine to exist. Accordingly, the causal relation invites the receivers to ponder the Democrats' ideological political bias towards Islam and thus their failure to deal with it as they are supposed to, i.e., the intended connivance of Islam as a religion that is the exact opposite of those mantras that engender nothing but violence.

- (3) All Russia is currently offering is boisterous opposition to the United States and a nebulous argument that it is fighting terrorism and maintaining Western values. Russian leadership might truly believe this, and/or is using it as a smokescreen to divert domestic attention (Brookings, 2016b)

The Russians strive to portray themselves as fighters against terrorism while they ensure their adherence to the western 'values', yet their political role comes off as a vague argument (Brookings, 2016). The entire Russian role in fighting terrorism in the Middle East is marginalized and is presented as a mere political 'opposition' to the U.S, an opposition which is further reduced to be an intentional 'smokescreen'. Russia's counter-productivity in the Middle East is mediated through the clause 'using it as a smokescreen', with 'it' being the positive role the Russians claim to assume, and the clause 'to divert domestic attention'. Brookings (2016) reintroduces the Russian role in a false construction of causality, i.e., the *reason* Russia fights in the Middle East is solely limited to facing severe political and economic domestic failure. Brookings (2016), therefore, dismisses the Russians to be in a dire need for a strong distraction to block out their political failure.

##### b. Consequence

- (4) Yet during these two decades of attacks that proved the jihadists' words were not just bluster, we did little in response. We interpreted the attacks as crimes, not battles in a war, and reflections of poverty, autocracy, or vague "evil," rather than as the fulfillment of Allah's divine commands. (Hoover, 2016a)

Hoover (2016a) puts forward policy recommendations to deal with the 'war' led by Muslims against the U.S. It mentions that the U.S. faces a 'war' that is purely the direct consequence of the religious commands from the God of Muslims 'rather than' the mundane motivations of violence such as the criminal nature of humans or poverty. The ideological consequential interpretation arises from attaching the clause 'We interpreted the attacks as crimes...' to the consequential clause 'the fulfillment of Allah's divine...'. In other words, the jihadists' attacks *necessarily* follow Allah's commands to Muslims who, according to Hoover, shall never quit this war nor come to terms with peaceful

agreements as long as their religion commands otherwise. Thus, for Hoover, violence is the inherent result of being a Muslim and it calls for dealing with these 'attacks' as an open 'war' that deserves more aggressive military and political retaliation against Muslims. Hoover (2016a) implicates two ideological layers. The first layer of the polarizing ideology is a typical *US*, the American society, against *THEM*, the terrorist Muslims. The second layer is Democrats against Republicans, i.e., Hoover maintains that Democrats have run the risk of mitigating Islamic terrorism by *criminalizing* its acts and attributing to it loose motivations such as 'poverty' or 'autocracy'.

- (5) ... and once the international community moves from conflict management to peacebuilding in the [Middle East] region, Russia will have no role to play, no resources to invest, and no experiences to share. (Brookings, 2017)

Brookings (2017) views the Russian political role in the Middle East as one of the reasons behind military and political instability. Brookings (2017) thereby dismisses Russia as inferior to the international community as the latter works to stabilize the Middle East. The ideological connection between the clause 'Russia will have no role...' and the clause 'the international community moves from conflict...' is facilitated by the conjunction 'once' and hence the actualization of a consequential relation. Brookings polarizes the Russians *against* the international community and, by so doing, the image of Russia is reshaped as having 'no role.', 'no resources', and 'no experiences'. In other words, according to Brookings (2017), the turmoil in the Middle East, at least partly, results from the Russians' political action. That said, as the Russians keep affecting the Middle East negatively, Russia's anti-peacebuilding role will come to end as soon as the U.S. and the international community bring peace to the Middle East, hence embedding a political polarization of *US*, the U.S./the west (the good-doers) against *THEM*, the Russians (the evildoers).

- (6) Hamas issued an ultimatum, threatening to attack if Israel did not withdraw its police by Monday evening. When Israel ignored that blackmail attempt, Hamas unleashed a rocket barrage at Jerusalem and southern Israel. (Heritage, 2021)

Regardless of the political and military legitimacy of Hamas which we neither support nor attempt to legitimize, Heritage (2021) draws on a typical consequential relation to (a) better victimize Israel and push it away from the recent Sheikh Jarrah developments, and (b) to criminalize the Palestinians and especially Hamas during the most recent so-called mini-war. This is constructed through linking the clause 'Israel ignored that blackmail attempt' with its consequential action 'Hamas unleashed a rocket barrage'. Heritage implies that Hamas has *proactively* sought to attack Israel only to kill innocent civilians and harm a peaceful state. On the one hand, Heritage reinforces the positive presentation of Israel as a country that does not and indeed should not submit to 'blackmail attempts' and thereby is the victim of violence that follows such a brave position. Hamas, on the other hand, is portrayed as a force that is anti-Israel for no legitimate reasons whatsoever as it reacts to a legitimate deployment of the Israeli police with rockets launched on civilians.

### c. Conditional relations

- (7) If the Palestinians are to be deterred and pressured to resume earnest negotiations, the U.S. needs to adopt a clear and consistent policy by maintaining and enforcing the prohibition of funding U.N. organizations that grant full membership to the Palestinians. The Administration should cease its efforts to amend the law to allow funding. (Heritage, 2015)

The Heritage Foundation sets the condition of adopting 'clear' and 'consistent' policies to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through deterrence and pressure toward the Palestinians' international attempts to gain a U.N. recognized independence. The issue is presented through the if-clause, i.e., by becoming a member of a U.N. organization, the Palestinians behave as an independent state, uncompromisingly refuse to sit at the negotiations table, and act unilaterally. The second clause 'the U.S. needs to adopt...' introduces the conditions to halt Palestine's efforts to gain independence. The misleading juncture is twofold. First, the U.S. decides, absent or with legal and/or U.N.-based justifications, whether or not Palestine acts as or can be a recognized state. Therefore, such U.N. membership requests are only approved by the U.S. provided that they do not delegitimize the Israelis' independence. Second, the Palestinians are reproduced in an ideological polarization that shows the U.S. and Israel as *responsible* peace-making brokers—where we neither marginalize nor deny their intention—and the Palestinians as *imprudent* who seek political exploitation of the U.N. organizations.

- (8) The attacks on 9/11 supposedly "changed everything." When it comes to foreign policy, they didn't. One shudders to think how much worse the destruction and death will have to be to wake us up. (Hoover, 2016a)



In the context of this article, the 9/11 attacks are suggested to amount to be *the* conditional premises upon which the U.S. local and foreign policy toward Islam and Muslims should have been radically reconsidered. Hoover (2016a) re-creates a conditional relation between the first sentence ‘The attacks on 9/11...’ and the second sentence ‘When it comes...’. This is done to convey that since the U.S. was brutally attacked by Muslims (al-Qaeda), then American leaders are supposed to have recognized that Islam is the enemy of the state, hence the Muslims being peaceful and tolerant is simply a *misconception* that the 9/11 attack has unequivocally clarified. Not only does Hoover polarize an *US* against *THEM* theme, but it embeds another layer of ideological polarization. Hoover introduces a populist interpretation of events against the Obama administration who intentionally overlooks the surrounding socio-political reality and refuses to call the enemy by its true name.

- (9) The Syrian ceasefire began because Russia said it could. It represents a strategic pause for Russia to reposition itself both politically at home and abroad, and militarily on the battlefield. If it ends, it will likely be because it claims the United States is not living up to its terms. (Brookings, 2016b)

It is Russia who decides when and how a ceasefire is active in Syria, a move of great political benefit for the Russians (Brookings, 2016). According to Brookings (2016a), while the Russians do realize that their ceasefire is susceptible to vanish at any moment, they have already prepared who should be blamed: the United States. For Brookings, the Russians cannot and will not take the responsibility for their own strategic mistakes which are the real reasons behind the would-be failure of the ceasefire. This ideological reproduction of the Russians is manufactured through an if-clause conditionality between the if-clause ‘if it ends’ and its *purported* conditional clause ‘it will likely be because it claims the United States...’. That it, the Russians, Brookings claims, have already found someone to blame for Russia’s political mistakes.

#### d. Contrastive relations

- (10) Yet even ISIS works in stages. When criticized by Muslims for killing fellow Muslims and not attacking Israel—the supreme enemy—ISIS responded by saying it was following the pattern of the historic caliphate founded in 632. Then, Caliph Abu Bakr beheaded and crucified tens of thousands of Muslims for apostatizing. (634–750). (Hoover, 2016b)

Hoover (2016b) argues that ISIS is but a natural manifestation of the true violent nature of Islam. For Hoover, ISIS is an extension of the same way Islam began in the days of the first caliphate who exactly committed the same atrocities and killed ‘thousands of Muslims’ before raging wars against the rest of the world. Hoovers’ readers are invited to *compare* the atrocious of ISIS with the apostatizing wars (also Ridda wars) the first caliphate Abu Bakr Alsididq launched against those who renounced the Islamic teachings and announced apostatizing and rebellion after the death of Prophet Muhammad (Vaglieri, 1977, pp. 57-58). Hoover describes those rebels as ‘Muslims’ to promote an identical version of the early days of Islam and ISIS, its most recent representation in Iraq and Syria. When contrasting ISIS’s self-proclaimed Caliph to that of the dawn of Islam, Hoover collapses ISIS to be a true representative of Islam while it reproduces the former to be a legitimate manifestation of the Islamic teachings.

- (11) Putin has sought to cultivate relations with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu while continuing his relationship with Iran; he maintains relations with the Kurds and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, with Fatah and Hamas, and with anti- and pro-U.S. regimes. (Brookings, 2017)

Brookings (2017) analyzes the way the Russian president handles external politics. The contrastive relation between the clauses ‘Putin has sought...’ and ‘continuing his relationship...’ is meant to establish a flawed political position to which president Putin adheres and thus deviates from the ethics and practices of international politics. The contrast, realized by the conjunction ‘while’, attempts to naturalize president Putin as a hypocrite who violates the *right* international political norms. That is, Brookings implies that Putin seeks a solid political relationship with Israel but at the same time he cunningly develops political relations with its rivals such as Iran, Hamas, North Korea, and Turkey. Therefore, for Brookings, if Putin is to be an honest politician, he should decisively cut any ties with those countries if he sincerely seeks relations with Israel, otherwise, he would be adopting the *wrong* politics.

- (12) Unlike Israel, which seeks to minimize Palestinian civilian casualties in conflicts, Hamas terrorists hide among Palestinian civilians to launch rockets to kill Israeli civilians, a double war crime. (Heritage, 2021)

A humanitarian polarization informs the premises of placing Israel and Hamas on two different extremes. It is the Israelis who, even at the times of war, care about the lives of the Palestinians, while it is Hamas who not only causes the death of their fellow citizens but also bases their military arsenal among civilians. By doing so, Heritage argues that Hamas is killing innocent Palestinians *and* Israelis. Heritage invites the receivers to contemplate a simple comparison between the first clause ‘Israel, which seeks to minimize...’ and the second clause ‘Hamas terrorists

hide...'. This is a polarization between the Israelis and the Palestininas (Hamas). Heritage reproduces the former as the party who, while defending themselves, ensure they cause no harm to anyone. Meanwhile, Heritage reintroduces and brings to the fore the latter as the ones who seek the destruction of Israel. Once again, the deconstruction of this and similar excerpts that reflect the political issue at hand is not intended to lend Hamas any sort of legitimization, yet the analysis is merely meant to show the way ideology is reproduced in the work of the Heritage Foundation.

### 3.2.2 The Semantic Level

#### a. Disclaimer

- (13) Despite America's financial support and its repeated diplomatic efforts, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has demonstrated little serious interest in negotiating a peace agreement that recognizes Israel's right to exist. (Heritage, 2015)

This policy brief explains the ways to push the Palestinians to recognize the Israelis' 'right to exist'. The excerpt shows an *apparent effort* disclaimer through which one side is portrayed as exerting enormous efforts to settle down a particular struggle while the other side is presented in a negative light (van Dijk, 2000, p. 50). The U.S. is presented as the side that is generous and works hard to diplomatically support the Palestinians. This disclaimer, realized by the preposition 'despite', carries an ideological message. Heritage masks the U.S. bias and dismisses the Palestinians' right to keep their homeland in the first place while it implicitly favors the Israelis' 'right to exist'. This disclaimer projects a polarization of a positive presentation of the U.S. (the generous peace-broker) and the Israelis (the people with the deserved 'right to exist') against a negative presentation of the Palestinians who purportedly exploit that generosity and deny a legitimate 'right' of the Israelis.

- (14) As one panelist noted, a country [Russia] can benefit from cultivating relationships with all actors but such a strategy leads these same actors to doubt whether the country can be trusted. (Brookings, 2017)

Brookings (2017) puts forward a policy analysis to undermine the Russian role in the Middle East. The first clause 'a country can benefit...' materializes what van Dijk (2000, p. 50) calls an *apparent concession*. In this clause, Brookings appears to recognize Russia's right to develop numerous political relations with other countries. However, the ideological contrast is mediated by the conjunction 'but' to introduce the second clause 'such a strategy leads...' which reproduces the Russian foreign policies as misleading and difficult to be trusted as long as Russia seeks political relationships with America's enemies. By doing so, Brookings overlooks the very political well-established norm that the U.S. and other countries generally pursue in developing political and economic ties with other countries, some of which may well be enemies of Russia, based primarily on mutual strategic and economic interests.

- (15) The Islamists are now within the gates. They fled the fires and the failures of the Islamic world but brought ruin with them. (Hoover, 2010)

In general terms, Hoover (2010) mentions a core reason why the 'Islamists' have 'fled' their home countries. It is understandable, Hoover argues, that they left due to the harshness of their homelands, yet these people have 'brought the ruin' to the western societies. This is what van Dijk (2000, p. 50) calls an "apparent empathy disclaimer." It is instantiated through (a) the disclaiming clause 'they fled the fires...' where Hoover empathizes with the suffering of the 'Islamists', and (b) the but-clause 'brought the ruin...' by which an Other negative presentation is provided to further reinforce an implicit *US* positive presentation. Hoover also draws on an ideological polarization between Islam and the west. According to Hoover (2010), the former is never appropriate with the western socio-political norms and is thus seen as a totality of 'fires' and 'failures'. The latter is the victim that welcomes those 'Islamists' but only receives 'the ruin' in return.

#### b. Evidentiality

- (16) According to polls, "Islamophobia" is on the rise in the West, especially after the rise of ISIS, prompting several politicians to speak more candidly about the catalysts for terrorist violence. (Hoover, 2016b)

This excerpt mirrors the use of polling as a piece of evidence that supposedly provides quantified statistics about controversial public issues. The fear of Islam, or Islamophobia, is presented to be increasing *after* ISIS's breakout in the Middle East (Hoover, 2016b). These 'polls', according to Hoover, reflect a realistic perception of Islam as an originally pure religion of terror that has eventually exported ISIS to the world. This fear, Hoover implies, is the reason why 'several' politicians have always held this fact, have now become more *honest* with their audiences, and have spoken the truth: Islam is the one single 'catalyst' behind terrorism. The receivers are therefore pushed to

reinforce a supposedly mere common sense, i.e., Islam *is* terrorism, with the assumed credibility of the polls as the tangible evidence which thus enhances the image of Islam as the religion of violence.

- (17) Since 2014, the Palestinians have rejected negotiations with Israel unless it froze its settlement program, a condition that was not included in the Oslo peace negotiations. (Heritage, 2020)

The Oslo peace accords signed in 1993 and 1995 are a milestone in the conflict between Palestinians and the Israelis. The Heritage Foundation (2020) invokes these accords to blame the Palestinians for not cooperating and rejecting negotiations with Israel while the latter keeps building up settlements that force the Palestinians to leave their homes. Heritage employs the Oslo accords to say that the settlement activities were neither brought up nor excluded in the Oslo accords so the Israelis *thereby* have the right to go on with the settlement building program. Oslo is presented as the evidence of the Israelis' commitment in which the issue of the settlements programs was not mentioned. In other words, Heritage (2020) argues that as long as the Oslo accords do not address and thus do not prohibit the settlements, then the Israelis can rightfully initiate and continue building new housing territories. What Heritage communicates is that it is the Palestinians who should be blamed for rejecting to follow what the accords had stipulated *and*, most arguably, what the accords had not.

- (18) Analysts have pointed to Russia's "Chechenization" of the conflict, where Moscow subdued an Islamist-led insurgency without getting bogged down as the Soviet Union had in Afghanistan. (Brookings, 2016b)

To win the war in Syria, the Russian will again follow what they successfully did against the 'Islamist-led insurgency' in Chechnia (Brookings, 2016). Brookings draws on the strategy of bringing to the table what other experts have to say or those views *evidenced* by analysts' insightful perspectives to set up an accurate position as well as an objective stance towards the Russian role in the Middle East. While Russia resorts to the same strategy in dealing with the Syrian crisis just like the way it did in Chechnia, Brookings re-introduces the Russians as politically incapable of settling down this crisis. When confronted with such challenges, Brookings (2016b) argues, Russia irrationally 'chechenizes' its crises and embarks on using force only. Thus, backed with the view of 'analysts', a political polarization arises as Russia is being pictured as historically lacking political prudence compared to that of the U.S.

### c. Lexicalization

- (19) With institutions like the EU, NATO, and with lesser powers, Moscow wants everyone to acknowledge that Russia has the right to block steps that it does not like. (Brookings, 2016a)

Through the lexical choice of 'block', 'steps', and 'it does not like', Brookings emphasizes the temerity of the Russians who are stereotyped to hurry to challenge the peacebuilding processes and 'block' planned 'steps' only because they do not 'like' the way things are done. Brookings stresses the ideological polarization between the rational U.S. and the irrational Russians as a power that carelessly reacts to sensitive political calculations without a careful reconsideration of those 'steps' in comparison to, say, requesting policy modifications or negotiating possible political changes. Instead, Russia's political capacity is dismissed as a country that pays no attention to the political consequences and the perspectives of other countries while it rushes to hinder the structured efforts that attempt to stabilize the region.

- (20) Russia's military intervention in Syria has upended Western calculations in the Middle East. (Brookings, 2016a)

The Russian role is adversely depicted due to the objectionable 'intervention' that has disturbed the 'calculation' of the United States and the western community. Brookings (2016a) implies that the overall interests of the West and the well thought 'calculations' of the political, economic, and even peace-building policies have been recklessly and indeed intentionally undermined by the Russian intervention. This has caused the turmoil in Syria and the Middle East. Brookings manifests the recklessness of the Russians in the lexical choice of the verb 'upend' i.e. to disturbingly turn things upside down without due mindful consideration of potential consequences. This represents the political polarization of *US*, the U.S., and the West, who devotedly work to keep the Middle East stable and safe, yet it is *THEM*, the Russians, who attempt to bring chaos to it.

- (21) The national borders were real and reflected deep civilizational differences. It was easy to tell where "the East" ended and Western lands began. Postmodernist ideas had not made their appearance. Western guilt had not become an article of faith in the West itself. (Hoover, 2010)

Hoover (2021) repackages a retrospection of those times when the 'real' national borders reflected the now mourned

differences between the east and the west on the one hand, and between Islam and western societies on the other. This is another example of a multi-layered ideological polarization yet the second one is of more acute ideological messaging. The lexical connotation of 'an article of faith' is that indeed Islam has always deemed the social and political western life as wrongdoing (and hence *the infidel west*). Islam is against the western lifestyle that is, Hoover implies, prohibited in the Islamic faith. Islam thus calls for fighting against such 'guilt' in 'the west itself'. Hoover (2010) dismisses this fight as a questionable 'article' that constitutes the Islamic faith.

#### d. Modality

- (22) This economic program... would boost prosperity among Palestinians, free them from dependence on foreign handouts, and give their children hope for a much brighter future. (Heritage, 2020)

The recent Abraham Accords between Israel and the Arab countries of UAE and Bahrain were signed in Aug 2020. Since then, they have received considerable promotion by the U.S. think tanks. Heritage (2020) presents a series of local economic benefits for the Palestinians once they agree to join the Accords. The *attainable possibility* of namely better 'prosperity', freedom from financial 'foreign handouts', and most importantly, a 'hope for a brighter future' for the children is employed to promote a modalized state of affairs for the Palestinians' life after they sign the Accords. Encoding these benefits with the verb 'would' indicates their feasibility which at the same time sets up a route through which the Palestinians are invited to consider the close achievability of their long-awaited interests. This will radically change their economic status if they agree to normalize political ties with the Israelis. Meanwhile, Heritage implicitly highlights the opposite side of the suggested economic modalities. The Palestinians have no prosperity, no freedom, and no hope for a better future *unless* they choose normalization. A polarized *US* versus *THEM* is also inserted. The former being the Israelis and the U.S. who are offering *THEM*, the Palestinians, a possible way to bring about peace and prosperity but the Palestinians' choice remains to be instability and poverty.

- (23) The Obama administration's weak responses feed into AQ's [Al-Qaeda] narrative that Islamic terrorism at least in part reflects Islamic grievance; and it refuses to connect the actions of any jihadi organization—whether ISIS, al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, et al—to Islamic teaching. (Hoover, 2016b)

The modality type of a merely well-known state of affairs may be the most difficult to reveal. Hoover (2016b) draws the attention of their readers to the way President Obama views the Islamic terrorist actions. Obama's words go in line with those of Al-Qaeda who justify these violent actions as a deserved reaction to the grievance from which Muslims around the world suffer. Heritage ideologically interpolates the modality of a broadly *accepted* state of affairs by developing two epistemically modalized propositions. First, Islamic terrorism reflects and is motivated by Islamic grievances. Second, all jihadi organizations are inextricably connected to Islamic teachings. The modalization of these two propositions is mediated through the verb 'reflect' and its tense format, i.e., present simple tense is used to establish the sense of an indisputable *fact* that communicates the existence of the undeniable connection between terrorism and Islam. Heritage further the blames the Obama administration which refuses to recognize that Islamic terrorism fundamentally stems from the Islamic teachings.

- (24) The Biden administration should unequivocally support Israel's right to self-defense and back Israel to the hilt at the United Nations Security Council. It also should support diplomatic efforts by Egypt to wind down the crisis without jeopardizing Israeli deterrence of future Hamas rocket attacks. (Heritage, 2021)

The support of the Biden administration must continue to allow Israel to practice a well-deserved right of self-defense. Upon this 'right', Heritage (2021) bases the entire modalized proposition: The U.S. 'should unequivocally support' a peaceful ally that is under the attack of proactive terrorism. This proposition is actualized through the communication of a modalization of *necessity* that further introduces the way the U.S. is supposed to back a loyal ally like Israel. Heritage thus undermines the more urgent issue, i.e., some Israelis have claimed ownership of houses that are already inhabited by Palestinians in the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. This is further reinforced by dismissing the most recent Israeli-Palestinian military confrontation as mere pro-active terrorism against Israel while the U.S. should back 'to the hilt'. The modalization of necessity is extended to include supporting 'diplomatic efforts' *provided* that these efforts do not undermine Israel's right to deter 'future Hamas rocket attacks'. The result is a polarization that Heritage adopts to reproduce Israel as a mere defensive state while dismissing the Palestinians (Hamas) as the ones who take the initiative to attack Israel absent justifications—which we do not support nor attempt to legitimize.

#### 4. Discussion

The institutions of think tanks are a complex arena in which policy-makers compete to market and thus help to

implement ideology-informed social and political proposals. In the discourse of ATTs, the discursive resources seem to be of great importance to embed ideology-laden policy recommendations. However, the contribution of the previous studies above reviewed is characterized by the relative absence of easy-to-follow and practical discursive interpretations that may amount to be clear evidence of embedded ideologies and may be an apparatus for laypeople to deconstruct the ATTs' products. We, therefore, sought to tackle some of the micro-level discursive practices of (re)producing ideology through qualitative and quantitative analyses to accentuate some of the key textual and semantic strategies used for that purpose. The quantitative aspect provides a landscape view of the frequencies of the textual and semantic strategies deployed. The qualitative aspect presents context-based critical interpretations of these strategies to explain how and why ATTs draw on such discursive resources to interpolate various ideological orientations. Both analytical aspects defend a critical stance upon which the goal of this study is based.

The above research questions seek to project more light on the work of ATTs. The first research question (*What is the extent to which textual and semantic ideological strategies are utilized in the discourse of ATTs?*) is tackled with the frequencies of the observed textual and semantic strategies found in the corpus of analysis. The number of deployed strategies at each level reflects the extent to which textual and semantic ideological strategies are drawn in the discourse of ATTs. In terms of the political issues selected, the strategies identified at the textual and semantic levels are found to be of moderate to relatively high frequency in the data analyzed. The Russian role in the Middle East is observed to be (re)produced with the highest number of (74) ideology-embedding strategies. This may well be reflective of the conservative political stance ATTs adopt toward the Russian presence in this region and the way the Russian role is re-created to be perceived as harmful to the American interests in this part of the world. The second most deployed ideological strategies are used in the (re)presentation of Islam through the application of (69) strategies. ATTs may push toward re-drawing the image of Islam as a religion of terror and bloodshed to which this faith is reduced. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has the third-highest employment of (62) ideological strategies. This shows ATTs' political orientation pertinent to fostering and non-bias political position concerning the question of Palestine.

The second research question (*What interpretations do these strategies have that explain how and why ATTs seek to polarize US (in-group) against THEM (out-group) and impose socio-political hegemony?*) is intended to elicit text-based evidence as to what interpretations the work of ATTs would have when discursively deconstructed in terms the three political issues selected. ATTs may endeavor to alter the way laypeople think which in turn may have a direct influence on their ideological social and political behavior. As the qualitative aspect shows, ATTs attempt to achieve the polarity of in-group against out-group, i.e., an ideology-informed polarization of *US* (good-doers/peace-defenders) against *THEM* (evil-doers/war-seekers). The textual analyses also reflect the key role of the discursive strategies in imposing an ideological socio-political hegemony. That is, ATTs may seek to realize discursively hegemonized social practices (e.g., everyday behavior toward Muslims or the Russians) which in turn push in the direction of establishing a entrenched, and potentially inevitable, ideological view of these two 'enemies'.

## 5. Conclusion

The ideological discursive strategies are found to be abundant and are of considerable importance in the ATTs' discourse. In the light of the three political issues under analysis, ATTs as policy-making institutions may endeavor to ideologically hegemonize or radically change the socio-political status. This is done at two levels. First, ideology is manufactured at the textual level as causal, conditional, and contrastive relations are used to alter the minds of receivers and invite them to seriously (re)consider their surrounding socio-political reality in terms of what/who *causes* which events, what premises *condition* which events, and what political reactions should/shouldn't *follow* which events. Second, ideological polarization is realized at the semantic level by implicitly embedding a positive self-presentation of *US*, i.e., the conservative United States and its allies against a negative other-presentation of *THEM*, i.e., political rivals and enemies of the United States such as Russia and Islam. Ideological polarization is constructed as *lexicalizations* (words with negative connotations), *disclaimers* (apparent denial of negativity or hostility towards others), *evidentiality* (what others, e.g. experts, say about the issue at discussion), and *modalities* (re-introducing events as possible, necessary, or known to be the case). The above analysis shows that lay receivers may be easily affected when coming across the products of the institutions of think tanks such as policy recommendations. These products are disseminated, inculcated, and thus reproduced as naturalized/naturalizing social practices. Readers may be susceptible to harbor immediate deductive propositions (i.e., Islam or Russia is the avowed enemy) when they come across such ideologically-laden content. This is especially likely when the ATTs' conservative products are reaffirmed in the media and, more recently, social media platforms.

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