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Resilience and resilient in Obama's National Security Strategy 2010: enter two 'political keywords'

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Resilience and *resilient* in Obama's National Security Strategy 2010: Enter two 'political keywords'

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Abstract

Under US President Obama, the words *resilience* and *resilient* have been applied beyond the odd occasion in the National Security Strategy (NSS) document. Through a systematic analysis of the NSS 2010, the research behind this article sought to determine if there was anything in this linguistic phenomenon of interest to scholars in political studies. The article argues that what makes the appearance of the two words in the NSS 2010 relevant is not what these words do but what is done to them in the text. It shows how the document constructs *resilience* and *resilient* in a distinct way as symbolic tools with a high degree of semantic openness, a particular positive connotation and deontic meaning. The article argues that the use of the two words in the NSS 2010 can be seen as an exercise in 'occupying' them with ideologically loaded meanings, which can be interpreted as the actualisation of both words as 'political keywords'. The article demonstrates the relevance of this insight for political scholars as the ground for future explorations of the popular discourse of 'resilience' through the concept of 'political keywords'.

Introduction

The two words *resilience* and *resilient* are strikingly popular within the public communication of US President Obama. Obama has used the words in his public papers more often than all of his Presidential predecessors combined. In particular, the application of resilience and resilient under Obama has also, for the first time, extended beyond the odd use in the document of the National Security Strategy (NSS). The NSS is a key public document within the US national security discourse that mirrors the Administration's strategic vision and worldview. It sets the tone for and legitimises security policies and strategy.

Intrigued by the de facto debut of the words *resilience* and *resilient* in the 2010 NSS, I was interested in what role these two words play in this text. This interest jumps off the scholarship in political studies and international relations that acknowledges the productive and generative role that language plays (e.g. Beer and Hariman, 1996; Fairclough, 2001; also Chilton and Schäffner, 2002). Language is not just seen as any kind of means of politics but as the very condition of its possibility because, unless physical force is used, politics is about symbolic action (Girnth, 2002: 1). Political goals have to be explained and opponents' visions have to be criticised and deconstructed in an attempt to secure public approval (Bergsdorf, 1991: 19). This is done through persuasion, argumentation and an appeal to the audience's emotions. It is done through the symbolic legitimation of past and future decisions and the presentation of one (understanding of the) world as more 'real' than another. Hence, the study of the use of language provides us with an insight into a crucial aspect of the 'world-making' that is politics. It provides us with an insight into how the world comes into being, in and for which political decisions are designed and taken.

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There is a well-established empirical scholarship that generates insights into this exercise of 'world-making' through the study of political language. Scholars analyse the use of metaphors (e.g. Howe, 1988; Lakoff, 1991), the framing of issues (e.g. Goffman, 1974; Spielvogel, 2005) and other ways in which past, present and future 'worlds' are created and decisions are legitimised (e.g. Dunmire, 2011; Fairclough, 2001). Yet, the express analysis of the role of two specific linguistic signs in a political text is not a self-evidently useful exercise for scholars in political studies. There is no a priori, theory-based ground on which it provides insights that are relevant beyond linguistics. It is a primarily inductive, text-specific exercise, in which the empirical findings show if there is value in it for scholars in political studies to begin with. Consequently, more than in other language- focused studies, the generation of such findings requires an experimental research design and an analytical frame that leaves space for the discovery of what one is not expressly looking for.

With the above in mind, I approached the appearance of resilience and resilient in the NSS 2010 through an open-outcome analysis that was guided by the question of whether there was anything in this linguistic phenomenon that is valuable for scholars   in political studies. I did this with the help of a triangular analytical frame, in which I brought together insights from security studies, critical discourse analysis, text analysis and politolinguistics with a grid developed from contemporary codified lexical meanings of *resilience* and *resilient*.

My systematic analysis generated an array of different insights, with one of them relevant for scholars in political studies: it unveiled a distinct construction of the words *resilience* and *resilient* in the text of the NSS 2010. What makes the appearance of these words in the NSS 2010 relevant for scholars in political studies is not related to what these two words do but what is done to them in the text. The use of *resilience* and *resilient* in the NSS 2010 constitutes an exercise in 'occupying' (Liedtke et al., 1991) them with distinct meanings. They are 'occupied' with the idea of an abstract quality that is constructed as follows.

1.   A foundational prerequisite for US national security.
2.   A distinctly American trait.
3.   A 'global' value.
4.   Something that can be demonstrated and shown.

I show that this finding is valuable for scholars in political studies not so much in relation to how the two words are actually 'filled' with meaning, but because it reveals that *resilience* and *resilient* are treated in the NSS 2010 as 'political keywords'. This is an important insight because 'political keywords', which are words that belong to the 'ideology vocabulary' of the political lexicon (e.g. Girnth, 2002: 50), play a distinct role in the 'world-making exercise' that is politics. Hence, my analysis provides the ground for future studies of the struggles over the 'occupation' of *resilience* and *resilient* as 'political keywords'. As such, it provides the foundation for novel explorations of the popular dis- course of 'resilience'.

Resilience and *resilient* in the NSS 2010, and what it does *not* mean

The words *resilience* and *resilient* have recently risen in popularity. They are used in many different contexts and across public and political discourses. For instance: the 2014 UN

Human Development Report (2014) is entitled *Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience*; the Rockefeller Foundation argues that 'building resilience delivers near-term economic benefits and jobs, while making everyone better prepared when a shock hits' (Boltz, 2014); referring to the UK response to the conflict in Syria, the UK Prime Minister explained to the UN General Assembly that '[a]long with our European partners we […] are strengthening the resilience of military forces in neighbouring Lebanon and Jordan'; World Bank Group President Kim suggests that '[f]uture-proofing African development by building resilience will determine how successful we are at ending extreme poverty and creating shared prosperity' (World Bank, 2013); and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (2014) finds that 'Syria's neighbours are showing remarkable resilience and generosity in hosting the huge number of refugees'. However, these two words have not always been as popular as they are in contemporary public and political communication. The public papers of the US Presidents provide ample examples (see www.americanpresidency.org). A systematic analysis of the two words in the corpus of the public Presidential communication shows that *resilience* and *resilient* rarely appeared in public papers before Presidents Nixon and Carter. The terms gained slightly in popularity in Nixon's via Clinton's to George W. Bush's public papers and have then seen a boost in popularity under Obama, who, relative to his predecessors, uses *resilience* and *resilient* more than on the odd occasion (see Figure 1). In fact, Obama has used both words in more of his public papers than all of the US Presidents before him combined (illustrated in Figure 2). As of 31 August 2014, *resilient* was used in 164 of Obama's public papers (equals 2.89% of the total number of his papers) and *resilience* in 298 public papers (equals 5.25% of the total number of his papers).

Under Obama, the application of *resilience* and *resilient* has also, for the first time, exceeded the odd use in the document of the NSS. This is noteworthy because the NSS is an important public document in the US national security discourse. Under the Goldwater–Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act 1986, the US President is required to submit an NSS to the US Congress annually for the purposes of communicating his or her 'strategic vision to Congress, and thus legitimize a rationale for resources' (Snider, 1995: 5). The adjective *resilient* had its occasional use in NSSs before 2010 (once in the NSSs 2002 and 2000, and twice in the NSSs 2001 and 1998) and *resilience* appeared once in George Bush's 1991 and 1990 NSSs. In Obama's NSS 2010, the word is now applied 21 times; the adjective *resilient* is used five times throughout the text.
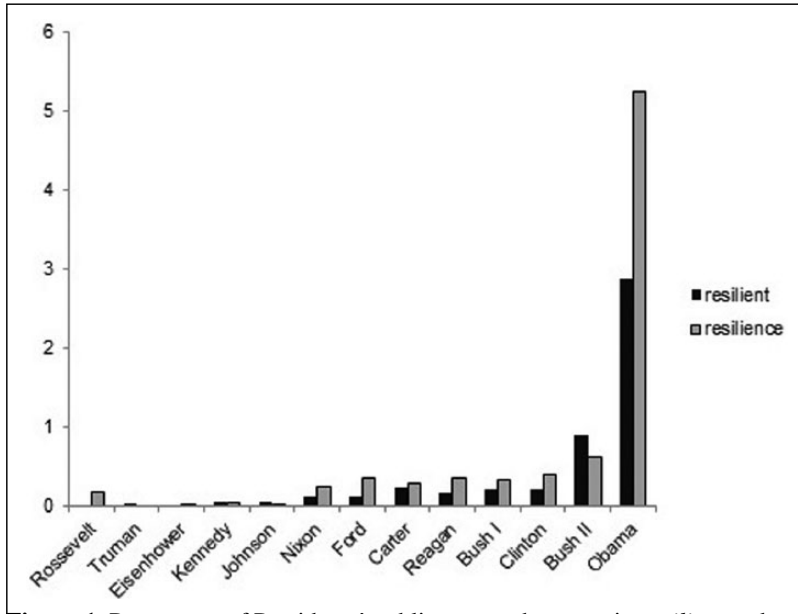
Figure 1. Percentage of Presidents' public papers that contain *resilient* and *resilience*.
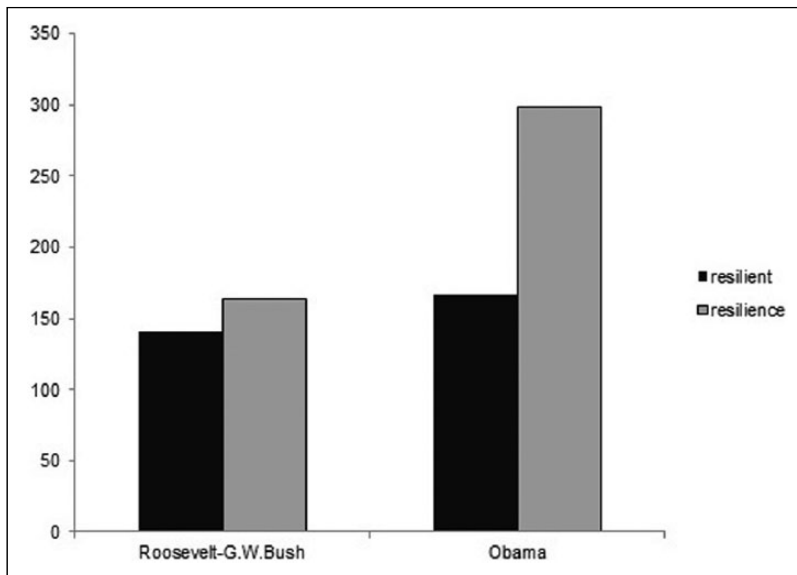
Figure 2. Number of Presidents' public papers that contain *resilient* and *resilience*.

The relative popularity of these two words in the public communication of Obama and especially in his 2010 NSS is striking and, arguably, intriguing. But, it is not *per se* relevant for scholars in political studies. In fact, a look into the COBUILD (http://www. collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/american-cobuild-learners) corpus suggests that the two words have gained popularity in American English over the past 100 years in general. Hence, rather than being linguistically out of line, Obama seems to follow a broader trend.

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However, a closer investigation of the document of the NSS 2010 suggests there is more to *resilience* and *resilient* than the fact that they are applied more often these days than they used to be. The referent of the words seems to be attributed a central role in the strategy to secure US national security. This is apparent in the following quote from page 1 of the document:

> This strategy recognizes the fundamental connection between our national security, our national competitiveness, resilience, and moral example. (White House, 2010: 1)

So, what role do the two words play in the NSS 2010? Does the study of the use of *resilience* and *resilient* in the NSS 2010 generate insights that are relevant to scholars in political studies? What does it mean that these two words are applied beyond the odd occasion for the first time in an NSS document?

It is clear what it does *not* mean: the relative popularity of the words *resilience* and *resilient* in Obama's NSS 2010 cannot be taken as an indication that *practices* and *policies* which are shaped by the *concept(s)* of 'resilience', or are commonly referred to with the *linguistic signs resilience* and *resilient*, entered the national security strategy of the United States for the first time under Obama. This would be a scholarly misconception. The *document* of the NSS is not the national security strategy, understood as the military or other practices and policies that are developed and applied to secure the US state. Hence, it cannot be analysed as a proxy for security practices. The NSS is a public *text* with a distinct symbolic function. Its purpose is to communicate a worldview and provide a basis for the *legitimation* of practices. It is to 'describe the President's key concepts' in 'broad' ways, as Stolberg (2012: 93) reports. The NSS further serves to generate consensus across government departments, especially when a new President comes in (see Snider, 1995). This is why it is usually crafted in a consultative way, integrating suggestions from across departments (e.g. Stolberg, 2012: 92–97). Hence, to study the document of the NSS 2010 is to study nothing more or less than a multi-authored *text*, which might include the practice of the production of the text and its functions. But it is not to study (the existence or not of certain) security *practices*. Put simply, the de facto debut of *resilience* and *resilient* in the NSS 2010 does not necessarily mean that practices which are guided by the *concepts* that are usually addressed with these words play a role in national security practices under Obama. It is likely that this is the case, but it cannot be easily deduced from an examination of which *words* are used. The question what insights the study of *resilience* and *resilient* generates is an empirical question, the answer to which needs to be found through the analysis itself. A political studies-relevant approach to these two words in the document of the NSS is first and foremost about answering the question *if* their appearance is of any relevance for scholars in political studies to begin with. It is about exploring what (potentially) sits between the discursive lenses of academic disciplines, without being guided by presumptions about what this is. As such, it is a somewhat unusual exercise, different from but complementary to the above-mentioned existing studies of language in politics.

Methodological approach: a dual analysis through a triangular analytical frame

Given the above, my analysis of the role of *resilience* and *resilient* in the text of the 2010 NSS required the development of an experimental research design, which facilitated a

primarily inductive, open-outcome empirical study that held the *possibility* of generating insights relevant beyond linguistics and to scholars in political studies.
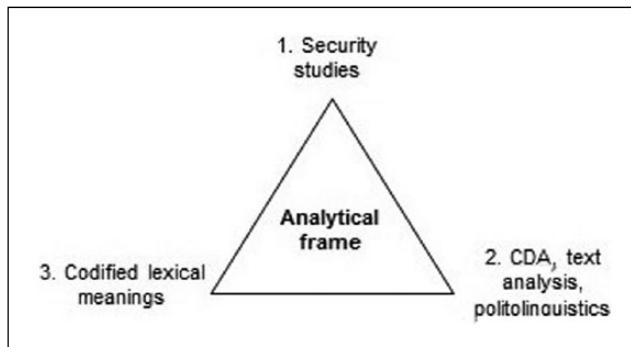
Figure 3. Analytical frame

I took a multi-layered approach. First, I generated three broad guiding questions from within the field of linguistic text analysis. These questions gave my analysis a general direction.

1. How are the two words used in the text?
2. What meanings are attributed to them?
3. Which functions do they serve in the text?

Second, I developed a triangular analytical frame (see Figure 3). This frame was tailored in a way as to capture and weave into my analysis insights from security studies and critical discourse analysis, text analysis and politolinguistics. For the third pillar of my analytical frame, I generated a scheme of categories from current codified lexical meanings of *resilience* and *resilient.* The first two pillars of my frame were informed by an initial open coding of the document of the NSS 2010. The third was developed purely 'outside' of the document.

Pillar 1: Security studies. The purpose of the first pillar of my analytical frame was not to enable a targeted analysis into a distinct security-related issue, such as the notion of 'necessary force' (Henderson, 2010), 'continuity and change' (Hemmer, 2011) or 'threats, challenges, vulnerabilities and risks' (Brauch, 2011), but to gain a broad sense of the NSS 2010. Thus, my approach had to be sufficiently broad. I took up general concerns about what a (US) national security strategy could be about. Grounded in an initial open coding of the text, I identified six basic categories as potentially useful for my purposes. These are (1) the expressed object of security (Buzan and Hansen, 2009: 38), (2) the expressed goals, (3) the expressed strategy to achieve the goals, (4) the expressed perceived threats, (5) the expressed understanding of security agents, and (6) the expressed understanding of the inside/outside dichotomy (Buzan and Hansen, 2009).

Pillar 2: Critical discourse analysis, text analysis and politolinguistics. The second pillar of my

analytical frame was inspired by the scholarship on critical discourse analysis, text analysis and politolinguistics (e.g. Fairclough, 2001; Girnth, 2002; Hillier, 2004; Liedtke et al., 1991; Niehr, 2014; Stubbs, 1996). Critical discourse analysis, text analysis and politolinguistics are three different approaches to the study of language and written texts. My aim was not to apply or 'test' premises and analytical tools of any distinct scholarly approach alone but to explore in an open-outcome process if there was anything valuable in the appearance of *resilience* and *resilient* in the text of the NSS 2010. Hence, I developed a coding scheme inspired by each of the three different approaches and on the basis of an initial close reading of the text. This strategy brought out seven aspects of potential use for the generation of insights about the words *resilience* and *resilient* in the NSS 2010. These are (1) the distribution of the words in the text, (2) the collocations, (3) the use of personal pronouns, (4) time references, (5) meta-linguistic references, (6) evaluative contextualisations and (7) the addressees.

Pillar 3: Contemporary codified lexical meanings. The third pillar of my analytical frame was developed 'outside' of the document of the NSS 2010. It was grounded in contemporary codified lexical meanings of *resilient* and *resilience* as provided by three standard American English dictionaries (see Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix 1). Codified lexical meanings are not *the* meanings of *resilience* and *resilient.* They are just 'context-free, speaker-free, non-referential meanings' (Wavell, 1986: 29). Accordingly, the grid that I generated from the three codified lexical meanings did not serve the role of a master copy of the 'true' meanings of *resilience* and *resilient* but as a template of categories grounded in *currently common* meanings as identified by the editors of the respective dictionaries. I developed this grid in order to provide a reproducible ground for the generation of insights about the meanings of *resilience* and *resilient* in the text of the NSS 2010, which did not arise *from within* this text. This scheme of categories served as a reference grid that helped me to identify the particular senses and uses of the two words in the document. The codified lexical meanings and the analytical grid are contained in Appendix 1.

I applied my triangular analytical frame in a dual analysis: on the one side, I coded and analysed the whole text in order to get a general and comprehensive sense of the (security) worldview expressed in the NSS 2010. On the other side, I coded and analysed the text with a particular focus on the two words *resilience* and *resilient* and how they are used in the document.

My dual approach was labour-intensive. Inevitably, it generated a high degree of 'scattering loss', that is, I generated a high number of findings that might be interesting in different contexts but irrelevant for a political studies-related analysis of the role of *resilience* and *resilient* in the NSS 2010. Yet, the absence of an *a priori* and theory-grounded basis for value and direction of the study of two specific linguistics signs within a text from a discipline other than linguistics meant that only an analytical strategy that casts a wide net to then narrow in on the two words would guarantee a genuine *chance* of generating insights of relevance beyond linguistics.

For my coding and analysis, I established two databases. One of them comprised the entire text of the NSS 2010 and the other comprised all text segments that contain the words *resilient* and/or *resilience* (*n* = 18). Given that the document of the NSS 2010 is divided into short

paragraphs, these naturally occurring paragraphs were taken as text segments. For practical reasons, the coding and analysis was assisted by the computer programme, *Atlas.ti*.

Analysis: *resilience* and *resilient* in the NSS 2010

There is a total of 26 instances of *resilience* ($n = 21$) and *resilient* ($n = 5$) in the text of the NSS 2010. They appear in 18 text segments. The first occurrence of any of the words is on page 1, in the first of four chapters of the NSS that is entitled 'Overview of National Security Strategy' (White House, 2010: 1). The subtitle of the section is 'The World as It is. A Strategy for the World We Seek' (White House, 2010).

My initial analysis that was guided by the set of text analytical questions alone revealed that there was nothing that makes the two words stand out – except for when *resilience* is used in the earlier mentioned quote on page 1. Here, its referent is presented as a foundational aspect of US national security. Beyond this, however, *resilience* and *resilient* do not play a significant role in the construction of the text and its narrative. Hence, after an initial analysis, my answer to the question whether there was anything in the appearance of *resilience* and *resilient* in the NSS 2010 that is relevant to scholars beyond linguistics was simply: the referent of *resilience* is presented as an essential aspect of US national security. Nothing more or less.

This changed with (1) the application of the grid developed from the codified lexical meanings of the word, (2) the analysis of the dispersion of *resilience* and *resilient* and (3) the study of meta-linguistic reflections in the text. The combination of these analytical lenses brought to light the following phenomenon.

There is a peculiar break in the document of the NSS 2010. This break takes place on page 18, where the word *resilience* is expressly defined. The document explains that *resilience* refers to 'the ability to adapt to changing conditions and prepare for, withstand and rapidly recover from disruption' (White House, 2010: 18); a page later, the word is explained as referring to 'maintaining of critical operations and functions, returning to our normal life and learning from disasters so that their lessons can be translated into pragmatic changes when necessary' (White House, 2010: 19). As mentioned above, page 18 is not the first page on which the word is used. On the contrary, the systematic examination of the dispersion of *resilience* and *resilient* in the document shows that half of their uses ($n = 13$) happen before the definition on page 18. Yet, it is only on page 18 that *resilience* is expressly defined.

It is not remarkable *per se* that there is no definition or other meta-linguistic reflection on the two words *resilience* and *resilient* when they are first applied. There is no inherent need for a speaker or author to explain, let alone define, a word if its meaning is assumed to be obvious. But the sudden, late and express definition of *resilience* on page 18 indicates that *resilience* and *resilient* are actually *not* perceived to be sufficiently clear as to be taken for granted and used without explanation. This means we can take how the two words are applied in the first part of the text, namely by insinuating they *were* clear, as a distinct phenomenon. Something is symbolically done here. There are two components to what this is.

First, the application of the grid that was generated from the codified lexical meanings of *resilience* and *resilient* unveils that, before page 18, the two words are applied to refer to some kind of *quality*, which is attributed or attributable to something or somebody.

However, there is no reflection – explicit or implicit – on what exactly constitutes this quality. There is also no apparent pattern regarding the exact 'reference object' of *resilience* or *resilient*. Neither the potential attributes of this quality, which I generated from the codified lexical meanings of *resilience* and *resilient* (see Appendix 1), or any other attributes for this quality, are apparent in the text. The two words are used in broad senses, as illustrated by the following examples:

> Our society is exceptional in its openness, vast diversity, resilience, and engaged citizenry. (White House, 2010: 9);

> [T]he men and women who make up America's all-volunteer force […] have shown tremendous resilience, adaptability, and capacity for innovation. (White House, 2010: 14)

As with the other applications before page 18, these uses of *resilience* and *resilient* are neither preceded nor followed by further explanation. This is intriguing, but there is more to this. On closer examination, it becomes apparent that the referent of the words *resilience* and *resilient* is not simply unspecified. It is actually *constructed* as an *abstract entity*. *Resilience* and *resilient* are constructed as referring to an *abstract* and *generic* quality. This point becomes apparent through the analysis of the use of pronouns in the text. The already-mentioned text segment from page 1 of the NSS 2010 can serve as an example to illustrate what I mean:

> Our national security strategy is, therefore, focused on renewing American leadership so that we can more effectively advance our interests in the 21st century. We will do so by building upon the sources of our strength at home, while shaping an international order that can meet the challenges of our time. This strategy recognizes the fundamental connection between *our* national security, *our* national competitiveness, resilience, and moral example. And it reaffirms America's commitment to pursue our interests through an international system in which all nations have certain rights and responsibilities. (White House, 2010: 1; emphasis added)

While the text speaks of '*our* national security' and '*our* national competitiveness', *resilience* and 'moral example' are used without a pronoun. It is not '*our* resilience' and '*our* moral example' that are said to be fundamental for securing US national security and competitiveness but the *generic idea of* 'moral example' and of the referent of *resilience*, that is, an abstract quality. Taking the above two points together, it is apparent that the text establishes the idea of an *abstract quality* as the referent of the two words *resilience* and *resilient.*

The second component to what is symbolically done in the text refers to the nature of this abstract quality and how it is established. There are four aspects to this:

1. The first aspect can be illustrated with the help of the text segment from page 1 of the NSS, extracted above. The word *resilience* is used here not only in a prominent position within the text, namely on the first page of the document. It also refers to something that is accredited with an important role within the presented idea of the

US national security strategy. The referent of the word *resilience*, which is, as we now know, an abstract quality, is established as nothing less than the foundation of one of the two pillars of the presented national security strategy. This pillar is 'building upon sources at home' (White House, 2010: 1); the second pillar is 'shaping of an international order that can meet the challenges of the con- temporary time'. In fact, the referent of *resilience* is constructed as the *natural* foundation of this first of the two pillars. The naturalisation of the referent of the word *resilience* as a foundational aspect of US national security happens through the use of the verb *recognise*, through which a distinct claim to knowledge is made. This verb turns the *suggestion* that there is a 'fundamental connection between our national security, our national competitiveness, resilience and moral example' into an ostensibly obvious and ostensibly observable *fact*.

The comprehensive analysis of the text of the NSS 2010 as a whole makes clear that this 'realist' symbolic strategy is an instance of, and mirrors, the general tenor of the NSS 2010 as a whole. It is expressed clearly in the first subtitle of chapter 1 ('The World as It is. A Strategy for the World We Seek' (White House, 2010: 1)), as well as in the sentence that introduces this sub-chapter: 'To succeed, we must face the world as it is' (White House, 2010). This sentence insinuates that the premises that are presented throughout the document of the NSS 2010 about the global security environment in particular and the state of the world in general are made with no other aim but to capture 'the world as it is', that is, to provide an objective account of the status quo in order to react with the 'right' strategy. With that, the world is presented as if it was transparent, as if all that was needed was an act of 'neutral' observation of a fixed and objective world 'out there'.

The naturalisation of the connection between national security and the referent of the word *resilience* is reinforced at a later point, when the document explains: 'National security draws on the strength and resilience of our citizens, communities and economy' (White House, 2010: 10). The fact that 'national security' is used here without a pronoun, that is, it is not '*our* national security', let alone, 'the US national security *strategy'*, fosters the connotation that this was the observation of a general fact about the generic thing 'national security'.

In general, this naturalisation can be seen as a strategy that strengthens the credibility of the document of the NSS 2010 and its position in the struggle over the interpretation of the world (see Hall, 1982; also Beer and Hariman, 1996). The 'realist rhetoric' transforms the propositions and statements in the NSS 2010 into a 'natural inevitability' (Hall, 1982: 75). In particular, it establishes the referent of *resilience* and *resilient* as a natural and unquestionable ingredient of US national security.

2. The examination of pronouns also holds a clue to the second aspect of the way in which the nature of the abstract quality is established to which *resilience* and *resilient* refer. Although the referent of the words *resilience* and *resilient* is constructed as an abstract quality, it is not completely detached from the 'us' that the pronoun *our* refers to in the earlier provided quote from page 1 of the NSS. On the contrary, the referent of *resilience*, this abstract quality, is established as nothing less than a natural and foundational aspect of (the culture of) the United States. This link is produced in the text

through the establishment and opposition of two pairs of terms, these are 'our national security' and 'national competitiveness', on the one side, and *resilience* and 'moral example', on the other side. Through the establishment of the two pairs of terms, the referent of *resilience* is symbolically knitted together with the term 'moral example' in what can be called an 'evaluative contextualisation' (see Girnth, 2002: 67). This means that *resilience* is linked to a term that can be taken as an intertextual reference to one of *the* US's founding myths (Hughes, 2003). This is the myth that the United States is (by nature of its very foundation) fundamentally committed to the status of moral exemplary, that it is a 'City upon a Hill' (Winthrop, [1630] 1996), which 'identifies itself as an exception to the rule of human history – as an innocent nation exempt from earthly constraints and endowed with the manifest destiny of a chosen people' (Ivie and Giner, 2009: 361; see also Baritz, 1985; Bostdorff, 1994). The claim that 'resilience has always been at the heart of the American spirit' (White House, 2010: 19) presents the idea of the abstract quality, which the words *resilience* and *resilient* refer to, as some- thing inherent in US nature, as opposed to something that is to be realised and gained. It is an American disposition. And, more than that, it is a disposition that forms part of nothing less than the (perceived) exceptionality of the United States, its citizens, its communities and its economy. This is apparent in the following quote:

> 'The United States retains the strengths that have enabled our leadership for many decades. Our society is *exceptional* in its openness, vast diversity, resilience and engaged citizenry' (White House, 2010: 9; emphasis added).

A further analysis of the contextualisation of the two words brings to light the third aspect of the way in which the nature of the abstract quality, to which *resilience* and *resilient* refer, is established. The following three text segments help to illustrate what this is:

> […] Our society is exceptional in its *openness*, vast *diversity*, resilience, and *engaged citizenry*. […] (White House, 2010: 9; emphasis added)

> The *ideas*, *values*, *energy*, *creativity*, and resilience of our citizens are America's greatest resource. (White House, 2010: 16; emphasis added)

> […] With *tolerance*, resilience, and *multiculturalism* as core values, and a *flourishing civil society*, Indonesia is uniquely positioned to help address challenges facing the developing world. […] (White House, 2010: 44; emphasis added)

Words gain a part of their meanings, namely the connotative meaning, from the context in which they are used. In these three examples, we see that *resilience* is used in line with terms such as 'multiculturalism', 'flourishing civil society', 'creativity, 'engaged citizenry' and so on. First, these words hold positive connotations within the US context. This reinforces the above-mentioned point that the referent of *resilience* and *resilient* is constructed as a truly American disposition. Second, terms such as 'flourishing civil society', 'creativity' and 'engaged citizenry' have come to serve as 'global' values, associated with and globally fostered by liberal Western democracies (e.g. see the rhetoric in UN, 2008). Hence, through this

'evaluative contextualisation', the abstract quality, to which *resilient* and *resilience* refer, is constructed as a(n) (ostensibly) 'global' value itself. This is why the reference to Indonesia in the above quote is interesting. It shows how the possession of the referent of *resilience* puts societies into a privileged position (in the eyes of the United States). It conveys the message that the referent of *resilience* is a desirable quality to be gained in order to 'belong globally'.

3. The grid that I generated from the codified lexical meanings of *resilience* and *resilient* exposes the fourth aspect of how the nature of the abstract quality, to which the two words refer, is established. This is that this abstract quality is not only something that is inherent in, that is, a disposition of whatever or whoever it is attributed to, such as the United States. It is also presented as something that can be *actively* demonstrated. The following two quotes illustrate this observation:

> When incidents occur, we must *show* resilience by maintaining critical operations and functions [...]. (White House, 2010: 19: emphasis added)

> America must *demonstrate* through words and deeds the resilience of our values and Constitution. (White House, 2010: 10; emphasis added)

This is interesting because it expressly shifts responsibility to the (active) individual (see further Joseph, 2013; also Reid, 2012).

Interpretation: powerful symbolic tools and 'political keywords'

The systematic analysis of *resilience* and *resilient* in the NSS 2010 brings out that what is intriguing about the two words in the NSS 2010 is not what these words *do* in but what is *done to them* in the text. *Resilience* and *resilient* are used in a distinct way: first, they are established as linguistic signs with a high degree of semantic openness, which are then, second, 'occupied' with the idea of an *abstract quality* that is constructed as:

1. A foundational prerequisite for US national security;
2. A distinctly American disposition;
3. A 'global' value;
4. Something that can be demonstrated and shown.

This finding can be interpreted in two ways.

On the one hand, through this practice, the two linguistic signs *resilience* and *resilient* are transformed into *powerful symbolic tools*. There are three aspects to this transformation.

First. Resilience and *resilient* are established in a way that makes it difficult to dispute or question them critically. Given that their referent is constructed as an abstract quality, *resilience* and *resilient* are established in the text as referring to something ahistorical, that is, something that is static and supposedly apolitical. Furthermore, through forms of

evaluative contextualisations, *resilience* and *resilient* are established as indisputably positive words. They are established as nothing less than the signifier for an ostensibly 'global' value as well as a distinctly American disposition. In this way, they are accredited with an aura of indisputability (e.g. Beer and Hariman, 1996; Hall, 1982).

Second. The linguistic signs *resilience* and *resilient* are transformed into powerful symbolic tools that are ascribed with a deontic meaning. The concept 'deontic meaning' refers to a meaning of a word that triggers a sense of obligation. Deontic meanings are appellative (e.g. Hermanns, 1989). *Freedom*, *liberty* and *democracy* are words that in most contexts hold a deontic meaning. They imply the obligation to defend whatever is meant by them, which facilitates political mobilisations in their name. *Resilience* and *resilient* are established in the NSS 2010 as words that (aim to) oblige the addressees because they are constructed as signifiers for a 'global' as well as a distinctly American value. In this sense, this obligation is established in a way that addresses a wide array of different people, within and outside the United States, such as in Indonesia. At the same time, it addresses actors that are expressly ascribed with agency and, in fact, responsibility when it comes to the quality to which *resilience* and *resilient* refer. As my analysis reveals, the NSS 2010 makes clear that it is not only that actors might *be* 'resilient'. It is actually in the actors' hands to *show* and *demonstrate that* they are 'resilient'. The active demonstration of the quality, to which *resilience* and *resilient* refer, is constructed as a required and desirable practice.

Third. Resilience and *resilient* are transformed into powerful symbolic tools that are loaded in a way that allows their strategic use for legitimising all sorts of political mobilisations as if they were as follows:

   (a) a matter of existential relevance (because their referent is naturally linked to the idea of 'national security');
   (b) genuinely or truly American (because their referent is presented as a unique American disposition); and/or globally natural (in that their referent is presented as equaling the status of 'global' values such as 'tolerance', 'openness', 'civil society').

   With that, the NSS 2010 establishes *resilience* and *resilient* as symbolic tools that are not only useful for legitimising purposes but are also identity-forming in regard to the US nation and a (new) 'global' value community. The United States is constructed as being naturally at the heart of this (new) 'global' value community because 'resilience' is (presented as) one of the natural aspects of its ostensible exceptionality.

On the other hand, the distinct construction of the two words *resilience* and *resilient* can be read as the establishment of two 'political keywords'. Politolinguists divide political language into four different vocabularies: the institutional vocabulary, resort vocabulary, general interaction vocabulary and ideological vocabulary (e.g. Girnth, 2002: 50). The 'ideology vocabulary' is particularly interesting because it is the part of the political language that carries explicitly politically loaded meanings and perceptions of the world. 'Political keywords' are words, such as *democracy*, *freedom*, *security*, that belong to the 'ideology vocabulary'. They are subject to struggles over their 'occupation' with 'loaded'

meanings. These are meanings that arise from and 'carry' a particular, ideologically tainted idea of the world. Taking up this idea of 'political keywords' here, the construction of *resilience* and *resilient* in the text of the NSS 2010 can be seen as a practice, a move through which the two words are 'occupied' (Liedtke et al., 1991) with distinct meanings. This, in turn, indicates *that* they are perceived and treated as 'political keywords'.

Conclusion: enter two 'political keywords'

My research was prompted by a query about whether there was anything in the de facto debut of the words *resilience* and *resilient* in the document of the NSS 2010 that is of interest beyond the linguistic discourse.

Grounded in an experimental, open-outcome analysis of the document of the NSS 2010, I found that what is intriguing is not what the words *do* but what is *done to* them in the text. My analysis revealed a complex use of *resilience* and *resilient* in the NSS 2010 as referring to the idea of an abstract quality that is constructed as a foundational prerequisite for US national security, a distinctly American disposition, a 'global' value and something that can be demonstrated and shown.

I interpreted my findings in two ways. First, I suggested they can be seen as the construction of these two words as powerful *symbolic tools*. This insight is interesting as it gives us an idea of how the document actually and actively fills the two words *resilience* and *resilient* with meanings. Second, and perhaps less obviously, I suggested it can be seen as an instance in which the words *resilience* and *resilient* are established as '*political keywords*'. I argue it is this second, less obvious insight that makes the study of *resilience* and *resilient* in the text of the NSS 2010 relevant beyond linguistics and to scholars in political studies.

To detect that *resilience* and *resilient* are treated in the text of the NSS 2010 as 'political keywords' is valuable because 'political keywords' are important components of the political language. As the contributions in Liedtke et al. (1991) show, the study of the 'fight' over 'political keywords', provides distinct access to the 'world-making activity' that is politics (see also Hellmann et al., 2007). Yet, as much the study of the 'fight' over the 'occupation' of 'political keywords' is interesting for political scholars, 'political keywords' are not fixed components in a language. A word is not a 'political keyword' *per se.* 'Political keywords' are not easily recognisable. Words are only apparent as 'political keywords' if they have come to be treated and used as such. While certain words can now be readily identified as 'political keywords', such as *democracy*, *freedom*, *security*, this is only because they have been observed by scholars as being *used* as such. A 'political keyword' is a phenomenon that is the product of and only apparent in its actualisation. Hence, 'political keywords' need to be detected as 'political keywords' to begin with before the 'fight' over them can be studied. This is exactly what my study of *resilience* and *resilient* in the NSS 2010 did. My analysis reveals that the two words are not simply words that are used in the text to play into the legitimation of past and future security policies and strategic moves, but are treated as, hence, turned into 'political keywords'.

With this empirically grounded insight, my study provides the foundation for a new

object of study. This is the 'fight' over the 'occupation' of the two words *resilience* and *resilient* (understood as 'political keywords') with ideologically and party-specific loaded meanings within and beyond the US security discourse. Novel research questions arise: What does this 'fight' look like? Who participates in it, and how? These questions would not be apparent and 'valuable' questions to be asked by scholars in political studies if it was not for the realisation of the actualisation of *resilience* and *resilient* as 'political keywords' in the text of the NSS 2010. With that, my study can serve as the ground for explorations of the popular discourse of 'resilience' through the concept of 'political keywords'. This adds a novel direction and research focus to the burgeoning scholarship that critically engages with the discourse of 'resilience' and its increasing popularity in different policy fields such as 'security' (e.g. O'Malley, 2012; Reid, 2012; Walker and Cooper, 2011; see also Brassett et al., 2013, as well as the contributions to *Politics*, 2013).

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Appendix 1

Table 1. Codified lexical meanings of *resilience* and *resilient* as provided by three contemporary dictionaries.

	Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2011: 1060)	Cambridge Dictionary of American English Dictionary (2008:732)	Collins Dictionary for American English[a]
resilience	(a) the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress (b) an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change	[listed as a derivative of resilient]	the quality of being resilient (; esp.,) (a) the ability to bounce or spring back into shape, position and so on. (b) the ability to recover strength, spirits, good humour and so on quickly; buoyancy
resilient	characterized or marked by resilience: as (a) capable of withstanding shock without permanent deformation or rupture (b) tending to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune of change	able to improve quickly after being hurt or being ill.	(a) bouncing or springing back into shape, position and so on. after being stretched, bent, or esp., compressed (b) recovering strength, spirits, good humour and so on. quickly; buoyant

[a]http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/american

Table 2. Grid developed grounded in contemporary codified lexical meanings of *resilience* and *resilient*.

Holder of quality	Who/what?	
Nature of quality	Disposition Ability	Physical Emotional Existing To be gained
Sort of shock Impact of shock	Misfortune Change Bent Stretched Compressed Being hurt Falling ill Adjust	
Indicators of quality		Measurement
	Recover Withstand Bounce back Spring back Improve	Original state
Quality of indicators	Easily Quickly	
Referent of indicators	Size Position Humour Spirit Strength	