

POWER AND LEGITIMACY IN U.S. DIPLOMATIC DISCOURSE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF STATE DEPARTMENT BRIEFINGS ON THE PALESTINE-ISRAEL CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

The media coverage on the Palestine-Israel conflict has widely been studied for ideological bias, but the official discourse of powerful state institutions, specifically the U.S. State Department, remains a significantly under-investigated site of power and ideology. It is because its briefings shape international understanding and policy. This study through Critical Discourse Analysis, investigates the construction and exercise of power in political discourse. The study is based on the three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), developed by Norman Fairclough. It explores the discourse on three levels: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice to identify the role of political communication as a strategic process of power, legitimacy, and ideological control. This paper is an attempt to explore the use of linguistic choices and discursive strategies to portray the main actors i.e. Israel, Palestine, Hamas, and the United States, and to demonstrate the power structures affecting the official discourse of the foreign policy of the United States. The qualitative research method is followed for the purpose. The paper examined three purposely sampled U.S. State Department press briefings of October 10, 2023; May 20, 2024 and January 15, 2025. The research findings indicated the systematic trends of ideological lexicalization and moral polarization. The findings of the research highlight the systematic patterns of ideological lexicalization and moral polarization across the briefings. It is observed that at discursive level, meanings are shown to be institutionally rather than autonomously produced. Also the meanings are sustained through intertextuality, repetition of official narratives, and controlled interaction with journalists. The analysis reveals that hegemonic Western narratives of security, counterterrorism, and democratic legitimacy are consistently reproduced within broader geopolitical and ideological context. The United States and Israel are predominantly represented as rational, lawful, and stabilizing actors, while Hamas is constructed as a destabilizing and illegitimate threat. The study is significant as it holds practical significance for contexts such as Pakistan, where U.S. foreign policy discourse is frequently reproduced in domestic media coverage and public debate on the Palestine-Israel conflict. It is also significant in investigating the the need for critical engagement with the language of powerful international actors.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Political Discourse, Power and Ideology, Palestine-Israel Conflict, Diplomatic Language, Media Framing, Geopolitics.

1. INTRODUCTION

It has taken nearly seven decades to the war between Israel and Palestine and the war has had enormous consequences on the peace and stability in the Middle East. During this time the United States has been at the center stage in an effort to resolve the dispute and reestablish regional peace. As an intermediary, the U.S. has regularly urged the parties involved to engage in dialogue and negotiations. It has on various occasions succeeded in convincing each side to accept temporary ceasefires and to come to the negotiating table with the hope, that a peaceful solution can be arrived at. The fact that the problem has not been resolved in spite of these attempts, however, emphasizes how delicate and complicated the matter is (Nazir, Chaudhry & Javed, 2022). At least in historical terms realist perspective has prevailed in the perceptions of power in international politics and it has placed more emphasis on military and economic power as a way of compelling others. To illustrate, the post-American invasion of Iraq discourses focused on the unipolarity of the United States and its capacity to dictate the international affairs. However, this narrow view has the danger of overlooking other types of power. Power is not limited by military and economic aspects, it may manifest itself in many forms, and each of them can have different outcomes. Therefore, scholars are required to have wider horizons in order to have a complete picture of the international politics (Barnett and Duvall, 2005). Political discourses represent an identity that is simply a collection of ideas, beliefs, and values that determine the way people think and participate in political life. In politics, as opposed to philosophy, ideology is not considered true or false; rather, it is considered as to what the role of ideology is. Ideology in this sense is considered as a form of orientation or a mentality that affects political behavior, choices of decisions and how groups are mobilized to support them. It is tools for comprehending the role people establish collective identities, justifies behavior, and defining power. In such a way, the ideology in politics is not about its scientific correctness, but it is about functional place in the work of politics and political discourse (Sartori, 1969). The role

of language in political operations is groundbreaking in the sense that it is not only a communication tool but also a tool of tactic because political players use it to influence the people and shape their opinion, create a story, and justify authority. Political language functions based on persuasive styles which include rhetorical devices, metaphors, and metonymy, use of pronouns, presupposition, and repetitions as noted by Rahmani and Saeed (2024), allow the politician to occupy his or her audiences emotionally and ideologically as well as create his or her political identities and frame contentious matters. Their analysis also reveals that through diplomacy, formal and well weighed language that is used helps in negotiation, resolving conflicts and cross-cultural communication, whereby English is utilized as lingua franca of international relations. In general, the perspectives of their studying accentuate that political language is crucial to the investigation of how discourse is able to influence political action, the perception of the population and the international interaction.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study aims to critically examine U.S. State Department briefings on the Palestine-Israel conflict in order to expose the ways in which language is infused with power. Mohamad (2019) states that the general strategy of; U.S. policy in the region has not changed, despite a few minor adjustments in recent years. The United States maintains a stance on the war that favors Israel over its adversaries, especially the Palestinians. In his thesis, Fitri (2023) explains that the Israel-Palestine conflict and the May 2021 Israel-Hamas ceasefire are among the global concerns covered by USA Today, a daily newspaper published in the United States. The Gaza Health Ministry was referenced by USA Today in their story, which stated that 1,620 persons were injured but did not provide the proportion of fighters or civilians. Furthermore, Hamas is classified as a terrorist group by USA Today. Because word choices and data presentation affect how readers comprehend the event, media outlets' coverage of the conflict can affect public opinion. Due of its high level of sensitivity, the Israel-Palestine conflict has sparked protests and international

intervention, among other reactions. For instance, hundreds of demonstrators gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in the United States to call for an end to American backing for Israel following the truce. Similarly, pro-Palestine protests were held in major European cities like Berlin and London. This demonstrates how important the media is in influencing popular perception of international wars. Present study is a critical discourse analysis of the briefings given by the U.S. State Department. The purpose of the study is to highlight the use of language influencing power relations and ideological descriptions in the Palestine-Israel conflict. The study will be helpful in understanding international political discourse.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The use of language in political briefings and media reports is never neutral. Instead, it plays a critical role in shaping ideologies, framing one side as legitimate or illegitimate, and reinforcing particular power relations. There is a significant need, therefore, to undertake a critical linguistic analysis of U.S. State Department briefings to clarify how discourse works to make and maintain power practices in the continued conflict between Israel and Palestine. The briefing provided by Matthew Miller was chosen due to his status as the spokesperson of the U.S. State Department (2023-2025), and he, therefore, offers the most up-to-date yet official statements of U.S. foreign policy on the conflict. This methodological option allows a better study of the modern linguistic application of power relations in the process of the interaction of real-time diplomatic dialogue.

1.2 Research Objectives

- 1) To analyze the textual features in representing power discourse in selected briefings of Matthew Miller (U.S. state Department) on Palestine-Israel Conflict
- 2) To demonstrate the discursive practice of text interpretation among key actors (Israel, Palestine, Hamas, and the United States).
- 3) To discuss the social, cultural and political context in the speech of the U.S. State Department in framing the power discourse on the conflict between Palestine and Israel.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1) What types of vocabulary, grammar and rhetorical devices are utilized in the text of selected briefings of Matthew Miller (U.S. state Department) about the Palestine-Israel Conflict?
- 2) Which sort of discursive practices are used in the text of selected briefings about power among key actors (Israel, Palestine, Hamas, and the United States)?
- 3) How do the socio-cultural and political contexts influence the discourse in these briefings?

2. Literature Review

Framing in news reports and social media tends to be biased towards pro-Israel, some recent Western media studies have applied Van Dijk ideological-square and other methods of the CDA. As an illustration, Kareem and Najm (2024) examined samples of Western media and online publications and discovered that the acts of Palestinians are frequently depicted as acts of aggression or a danger, whereas the actions of Israelis are presented as a form of self-defense. They observed such common devices as calling Palestinians negatively, not calling Israel the perpetrator of violence (e.g. civilians were killed without mentioning who killed them), and consulting more Israeli authorities than Palestinian ones. These patterns indicate that media framing influences and constrains the way that policy makers and the masses can discuss the conflict.

Degaf, Aziza, and Anggrisia (2025) make a valuable addition to the literature on the media discourse about the Israel-Palestine conflict by analyzing the influence of the geopolitical and cultural variables on news coverage. In their qualitative analysis, they used the three dimensional model by Van Dijk (when accompanied by the discourse analysis instrument's used by Van Leeuwen) to compare how The Guardian (United Kingdom) and The Jakarta Post (Indonesia) covered the May 2021 escalation. Their results show that there is evident thematic stress, tone, and narrative structure. The Guardian was prone to prediction of humanitarian impacts and the use of euphemistic language so that it developed rather

detached description which tended to indirectly justify Israeli actions. The Jakarta Post on the other hand was more direct and explicit in its phrasing and often featured reactive news, Palestinian suffering and how Indonesia has been long time a diplomatic supporter of Palestine. On the structural level, the two outlets also differed in the way the stories were organized and the framing of the headlines The Guardian focused on chronological reporting, whereas The Jakarta Post focused on the national and cultural connection with Palestinians. Micro-analysis analysis has also revealed that The Jakarta Post employed more dysphemistic words to refer to Israeli action indicating more distinctly pro-Palestinian ideological leanings. On the whole, the research demonstrates that cultural position, political context, and institutional identity shape the narratives in the media and can provide us with the knowledge of the ideological framing in the international news discourse (Degaf et al., 2025).

Markkula (2025) critically analyzed the reportage of Palestinians and Israeli in American digital media with reference to CNN and the New York Post. In the study, lexical choices, transitivity structures as well as argumentation were investigated to unveil hidden ideologies and prejudices tendencies. The results indicated that both outlets were biased in one way or another. The New York Post were more inclined to report a greater array of violent incidences on either side but always framed Hamas as more brutal with the use of lexical frames. CNN however was more critical on the actions and allegations of Israel albeit incorporating some language that conformed to pro-Israel ideals. Notably, the two news outlets depended on various sources including the Times of Israel, Jerusalem Post and even Gaza Health Ministry, which could have affected their coverage. Markkula also noted the limited nature of the scope of the study and proposed that further studies should include a bigger dataset and other approaches, including using CDA and corpus analysis together or analyzing the structure of narratives. The study points out that continued reporting trends depict the issues of inequality in conflict representations.

There are various ways the term is applied to discourse analysis but there are two meanings of the term that are particularly important. The first meaning can be the general application of signs and symbols into social life, such as language, pictures, or even body language. This general meaning is frequently referred to in order to prevent confusion as semiosis. Second, the term discourse may be used to refer to particular modes of speaking about or describing aspects of social life. Indicatively, political discourses can be used to present questions such as poverty or inequality differently. Here, the second sense of discourse is interpreted with respect to the notions of so-called genre (kinds of communication) and style (approaches to expressing identity) (Fairclough, 2023). El Damanhoury, Saleh, and Lebovic (2025) contrast the coverage by the Al Jazeera English and the BBC in the initial phases of this war. They analyze such discursive features as transitivity (who does what to whom), intertextuality (how texts refer to each other or create a sense of authority), and lexical options. They discover that these sources differ in their representation of actors (e.g. “attackers”, “militants, civilians”) and their description of causality, exposing implicit ideologies regarding agency, victimhood and legitimacy.

Van Dijk (2008) “In the book *In Politics as text and talk*,” chapter Political discourse and political cognition: Political discourse is crucial because it is the means by which people acquire, disseminate, and mold their political beliefs, according to analytical approaches to political discourse. Our perceptions of politicians, parties, and policies are shaped by the things we read, hear, and discuss in the media, at school, and in casual discussions. This implies that knowledge of language usage is intimately related to knowledge of politics. We must relate what people say (at the small, everyday level) to larger political systems and collective beliefs (at the large, societal level) in order to completely comprehend political discourse. Making negative statements concerning the immigrants, e.g. it can be the deliverance of personal opinions, yet it can as well be an outcome of societal perceptions or ideas e.g. racism. Thus, interpretation of politics

discourse allows divining the discourse that bridges personal ideologies with the politics of the people.

Fairclough (1989) has expressed a three-dimensional approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, which, comprising text, discursive practice, and social practice, make it possible to fully analyze discourse. The initial dimension, text works at micro level and deals with finer analysis of the language, vocabulary, cohesion, syntax and grammatical structures to find the ways meanings are created in the text. The second dimension is the discursive practice, which operates at meso level and studies the text production, distribution, and consumption process, emphasizing the way a discourse is institutionally routinized and interpretively framed. The third dimension, social practice is macro and places discourse in the context of rather macro-societal structures, ideologies and power relations, viewing it as being socially conditioned and socially constitutive. The tri-dimensional model can support the process of determining major themes, hidden ideology, and the social-political backdrop of a discourse and exposing the relationship between language and power (Shakeel and Arshad, 2023).

As the researcher focused on Fairclough's framework, because it provides the analytical structure for this study. It is of critical importance to situate this choice to the work of van Dijk and Wodak, two of the field's other foundational theorists. Van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive approach to CDA highlights the role of mental models and social cognition in mediating between discourse structures and societal power structures. The study emphasized that ideologies are organized along an "ideological square," in which in-groups are represented through positive self-presentation while out-groups are subjected to negative other-presentation (van Dijk, 1998). This concept is particularly relevant to the present study, as the consistent positive framing of Israel and the United States alongside the negative framing of Hamas observed in the analysis closely mirrors the polarized representational pattern that van Dijk's model anticipates. Similarly, Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) insists on the importance of situating discourse

within its specific historical, political, and institutional context, tracing how discursive strategies evolve across time and are shaped by the socio-political conditions of their production (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Wodak, 2011). Wodak's emphasis on historical context offers a useful complementary lens for studies, such as this one, that examine briefings issued at different temporal stages of an evolving conflict. Although both van Dijk's and Wodak's models could productively inform this analysis, Fairclough's three-dimensional model was selected as the primary framework because of its explicit and systematic integration of textual, discursive, and social practice levels within a single coherent structure, which aligns directly with the study's research objectives of examining language at the textual, discursive, and socio-political levels of the briefings. Nonetheless, insights from van Dijk's ideological square and Wodak's historically grounded approach are drawn upon where relevant to enrich the interpretation of findings.

Previous studies have shown that discourse has significant impact on public opinion and political cognitions regarding Palestine-Israel conflict. Media reporting has been found to be ideologically selective, biased, fragmented and to frame stories thematically, to choose lexical terms, to select a set of sources and to stress agency, victimization and legitimacy issues in its reporting. Palestinian actions are often reviewed negatively and Israeli's are framed in narratives of security and self-defense, and thus shaping audiences' perception of the conflict. Comparative international media studies have also shown that the meaning of the news, in terms of the experiences attributed to the main actor, are shaped by the political, cultural and institutional circumstances prevailing in the media landscape. In addition, study of political communication has focused on the role of language in the exercise of power, in the formation and expression of public opinion, and in the creation of legitimacy for public policy. Despite this, CRA has made significant advances and is a popular methodology across the board because of its capacity to reveal the role ideological, power and institutional elements play

in the construction and maintenance of dominant political narratives within the text. Research on the conflict's coverage in the media has taken focus, and little research has been done on official governmental discourse. This underscores a need to investigate political briefings and official statements to gain a broader understanding of how the language is used to shape the events, construct identities, validate political positions and reinforce power relations in the context of Palestine-Israel conflict.

2.1 Research Gap

When it comes to the framing of the Palestine-Israel conflict by the official U.S. government discourse, it is observed that greater part of the associated research are concerned with the media representations or the addresses of local leaders. Not many analyses have been conducted on institutional speech like those by the U.S. State Department briefings. This is an area that has been ignored by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) scholars to a great extent. This gap in the literature is rather noticeable and therefore, the research aims to address the gap through CDA by discoursing the selected briefings by the U.S. State Department in terms of ideological attitudes. It examines the practice of building power relation among the main actors in the Israeli Palestine Hamas and the U.S. by use of language. The study, in contrast to the previous research studies, deals with official diplomatic discourse, not the speeches of media or political leaders.

This study is innovative in that it involves the use of CDA and analysis of the foreign policy language in the U.S. It shows the use of official discourses in influencing the international opinion, justifying some actors, and portraying power struggles. This offers an interesting insight into how institutional discourse affects the policy and the perception of the people.

3. Research Methodology

Because the researcher is aiming to investigate and analyze meanings, viewpoints, and representations rather than quantifying the data through numbers, this study falls under the qualitative research paradigm. This research focuses on examining how discourses, texts, and language shape reality. By analyzing words, settings, and patterns, it reveals presumptions that underlie ideologies and power dynamics, emphasizing depth over breadth.

The three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model developed by Norman Fairclough serves as the theoretical foundation for this work. Since it provides a systematic approach to discourse analysis on three related levels: 1: textual analysis (the examination of the briefings' vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical devices), 2: discursive practice (the distribution and interpretation of the texts), 3: and social cultural practice (the framing of the discourse within broader social, political, and ideological contexts), the Fairclough model is the most suitable. By employing this approach, the study may go beyond the literal meanings of words and show how the rhetoric of the US State Department reflects, reproduces, or contradicts the power dynamics and ideological positions that are now in place in the Israel-Palestine conflict. The model was selected because it is perfect for revealing the hidden power dynamics and ideological stances present in political discourse because it not only examines language as text but also links it to social activities.

The current research relies on official press briefings of the U.S. State Department published on the official site of the department (<https://www.state.gov/briefings/>). Three briefings are selected (one per year of the study period, 2023-2025): October 10, 2023; May 20, 2024; and January 15, 2025.

Table 1: Data Corpus – Purposively Sampled U.S. State Department Briefings

Briefing No.	Date	Conflict Phase	Rationale for Selection
1	October 10, 2023	Immediate Crisis	First official U.S. response after the October 7 Hamas attack; captures reactive framing at the most acute stage of the conflict.
2	May 20, 2024	Escalation & Scrutiny	Mid-conflict period marked by intensified international humanitarian scrutiny and growing diplomatic pressure on the U.S. position.
3	January 15, 2025	Negotiation & De-escalation	Later stage associated with renewed ceasefire negotiations and shifting diplomatic emphasis; captures discursive shift in U.S. framing.

Note. Briefings retrieved from the official U.S. State Department website (<https://www.state.gov/briefings/>). All briefings were delivered by spokesperson Matthew Miller during 2023–2025.

These three briefings were selected for the study by their correspondence to distinct phases in the escalation and evolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict during the study period. First briefing covers the time of October 10, 2023. It was preferred as it represents the immediate official U.S. response in the days following the October 7 Hamas attack. It is also capturing the initial framing of the conflict at its most acute and reactive stage. The second briefing is made on May 20, 2024. It was selected to reflect the mid-point of the conflict. It was a period of intensified international scrutiny, humanitarian concerns over the Gaza offensive, and growing diplomatic pressure on the U.S. position. Then the last/third briefing was covering the time of January 15, 2025. This briefing is focused to capture a later stage associated with renewed ceasefire negotiations and shifting diplomatic emphasis. The briefings are selected from distinct phases i.e. immediate crisis, escalation/scrutiny, and negotiation/de-escalation etc. because it would be helpful to trace the discursive strategies utilized by the U.S. State Department and how these strategies are shifted across the trajectory of the conflict, rather than offering only a static

snapshot. This purposive, phase-based sampling strategy is consistent with qualitative CDA research. It prioritizes analytical depth and contextual relevance over statistical representativeness (Fairclough, 1989).

3.1 Ethical Consideration

As the position of a researcher functions as the primary interpretive instrument. therefore, her personal, cultural, and national positioning inevitably shapes the selection and reading of data. Therefore, in this research, the researcher acknowledges that being a Pakistani, where public opinion and media discourse have historically expressed considerable sympathy toward the Palestinian cause; her position may have influenced sensitivity toward particular linguistic patterns. For example, in framing of Palestinian suffering or the delegitimization of Hamas etc. during the coding and interpretation process. To avoid maximum subjectivity and saving my influence of this positioning on the findings, the analysis was grounded strictly in the textual and contextual evidence present in the briefings themselves. The counter verification is done with each interpretive claim against specific

lexical, grammatical, or rhetorical features in the source text rather than derived from prior assumption. Moreover, in order to avoid confirmation bias in theme development, the researcher remained attentive throughout the analysis, so that the interpretation of the text might not contradict the emerging pattern of bias. But the researcher accept that she cannot claim complete neutrality. It is an interpretive discourse research, and she acknowledges the reflexivity in the interest of methodological

transparency and to allow readers to contextualize the findings accordingly.

4. A Critical Discourse Analysis of U.S. State Department Briefings

In this section, the analysis is organized by following the Fairclough's 3-D model as the theoretical framework in this research, addressing the textual, discursive, and social practice levels in turn as they pertain to the representation of Israel, Palestine, Hamas, and the United States across the selected briefings.

Table 2: Summary of Key Discursive Features Identified Across the Briefings

Discursive Feature	CDA Level	Example from Briefings	Ideological Function
Ideological lexicalization	Textual	"legally", "security", "accountability", "self-defense" (Israel); "terrorists", "brutal", "violence" (Hamas)	Constructs moral polarization; positions Israel as legitimate and Hamas as criminal.
Active vs. passive transitivity	Textual	"Hamas launched attacks" (active); "civilians were killed" (passive)	Assigns clear agency to Hamas; obscures accountability for Palestinian casualties.
Modal verbs	Textual	"Israel must be able to defend itself"; "We will continue to support"	Frames U.S. support for Israel as moral obligation, not political choice.
Nominalization	Textual	"security", "stability", "protection", "deterrence"	Abstracts violent/political acts into neutral concepts; conceals policy decisions.
Intertextuality & repetition	Discursive	Repeated citation of prior U.S. policy positions across briefings	Reinforces official narrative continuity; delegitimizes alternative interpretations.
Institutional modality	Discursive	"We remain committed"; "We continue to support"; "We believe"	Positions the U.S. as a confident, authoritative, and reliable global actor.
Binary framing	Social	Stability vs. chaos; democracy vs. extremism; security vs. terrorism	Simplifies complex geopolitics into moral binaries; excludes Palestinian political agency.

Discursive Feature	CDA Level	Example from Briefings	Ideological Function
Selective representation	Social	Emphasis on Israeli victims; minimal mention of Palestinian structural grievances	Reflects and reproduces global power asymmetries in official diplomatic discourse.

Note. Examples drawn from the three selected briefings (October 10, 2023; May 20, 2024; January 15, 2025). CDA Level refers to the corresponding dimension of Fairclough's model at which each feature operates.

4.1. Lexicalization of Ideologies and Moral Polarization

The briefings at the text level use the strategically selected lexicon that collectively gives their message an ideological coloring, creating a distinct moral structure between the subjectively different sides in the conflict. Positive attributes of Israel are 'legally', 'security', 'accountability' and 'self-defense', while Hamas is always referred to in the negative form, which are all aspects of 'terrorists', 'violence' and 'brutal'. Palestinians themselves are recognized primarily as targets of suffering, in the language of humanitarianism.

These transitivity patterns similarly emphasize this ideological positioning. In active constructions, Hamas is explicitly assigned agency for violent acts that it didn't commit; for instance,

"Hamas launched attacks," "Hamas murdered civilians," and "Hamas continues to hold hostages." (U.S. Department of State, October 10, 2023)

These clauses make it obvious that the perpetrator of the violence is Hamas. In contrast, with reference to casualties of Palestinians, it is more common to see passive language, for instance, 'civilians were killed' or 'people were displaced'. Situations in which the actor is omitted in such sentences draw less attention to responsibility and may lead to focusing on the humanitarian outcome as opposed to the actor of the action.

At a discursive practice level, these meanings are strengthened in the repetition of official narratives, intertextual reference to previous official discourses and the management of journalist interaction. Through the process of alternative narratives, aspects of non-conforming views are often channeled back into official institutional discourses.

These lexical structures reflect larger and dominant security discourses that the conflict is represented through Western views and ideas. As a result, it is largely becoming de-legitimized, as Israel and the USA are created as rational and lawful actors and Hamas built as a security and stability threat.

a. Israel's Legitimacy via Defensive Framing

The textual context regularly depicts Israel as acting in self-defense: it is repeatedly asserted that Israel has right to defend itself; the subject of democracy and accountability for its actions comes up, as well as security concerns. An attack on any country is seen as a defensive, not offensive, measure, and justified.

These claims are supported with the help of modal verbs like "must," "should" and "will." Statements like, "Israel must be able to defend itself" express support for Israel as a moral obligation and not a political decision. Another factor that plays a role in constructing the legitimacy is also the use of nominalization. The language is often quite abstract and directly references acts of violence including "security," "stability," "protection," and "deterrence." Such nominalized versions of these actions are not only difficult to establish, but they also embed the particular action while concealing the policy and making it look as though it's a neutral and universally desirable concept.

At the discursive practice level, this legitimacy is linked to various repetitions of official policy positions, answers to questions of critics with ease, and the re-framing of humanitarian and legal issues as parts of security narratives. Issues that have traditionally been part of journalism are

sometimes refocused into security issues and diplomatic processes.

Defensive framing resonates with the global geopolitics themselves and older world discourses on security and international relations at the social practice level. By citing 'legality', 'sovereignty', and 'regional stability', criticism is muted and Israel's normalization as a legitimate participant in international affairs is supported by shaping it as a democratic partner.

b. Criminalization and Delegitimization of Hamas

Hamas is consistently criminalized and delegitimized at the textual level by the repetition of various delegitimizing and criminalizing discourses that link the Hamas with 'terrorist organization' and 'absolute dealbreaker'. Those lexical decisions depict Hamas as the main cause of the conflict and instability in the Gaza Strip.

At the discursive practice level, this representation is reinforced by repeating information, highlighting information selectively, and deflating other interpretations. The spokesperson routinely shifts the focus of issues addressed to Hamas if any humanitarian or legal issues are raised, never letting any other actors appear on the scene to take responsibility or receive blame. The discourse at a social practice level has been shaped by a larger global counterterrorist discourse placing Hamas outside the realm of political participation. In light of this, military, diplomatic, and legal measures taken against Hamas are legitimate and natural, and its exclusion from future political processes is a necessary condition for peace and stability.

c. Using Institutional Authority and Modality Strategically

Institutional authority is reinforced by the use of frequent first-person plural pronouns and use of modal expressions. Phrases like "*We remain committed*", "*We continue to support*" and "*We believe*" make the USA appear to be a strong and reliable international voice.

Modality is very important in the handling of certainty and responsibility. With expressions like: "*We will continue to support Israel*" there is

commitment and confidence. On the other hand, using "*we are assessing, we continue to evaluate,*" and "*we cannot speculate*" to indicate that there isn't a clear through line of command and accountability to the matter. It is also strategically perfected with passive constructions. Statements, for instance, like an investigation is underway" or "there are concerns" are anything but transparent, and actually diminish direct responsibility. The modal expressions and references to institutional authority at the textual level make the USA a self-assured, responsible, and influential global player. The phrases "*We stand ready*", "*We are committed,*" "*We believe*" do so with authority.

At level of discursive practice, modality serves as a way of managing and constructing information, to restrict accountability, and regulate sensitive matter. Vigilant use of both words and meter, hedging, and selective use of information allows the spokesperson to keep the organization credibly on the right side of the law while evoking no explicit discussions of controversial subjects.

At the level of social practice these language strategies serve as reinforcement of power relations that occur in the world, and make the U.S. a key player who is driving outcomes on the international stage. The legitimization of a U.S. foreign policy stance and the marginalization of alternate legal-political foreign policy views, through institutional authority.

4.2. Choice in Representation and Discursive Exclusion

One example of selective representation can be seen at text level in the way that actors and events are treated. There is considerable focus on Israeli victims, security considerations, and diplomatic endeavours and much less on Palestinian displacement, suffering, and structural grievances. It is clear that the Passive voice sentences make a major part of discursive exclusion. The culpable parties for such killings and destructions are removed from tantalizing expressions like "civilians were killed" and "homes were destroyed". This type of grammar helps to focus not on accountability but on consequences. Exclusion at the level of discursive practice is

bound up in two aspects of choosing a topic and managing an agenda. Grievances of the Palestinians are frequently presented or not discussed in the context of wider security concerns. Some questions get very much debated, and others don't get any discussion. These representational decisions manifest themselves at the social practice level as part of a wider power dynamic in international discourse. The discourse prioritizes state approaches, obscures Palestinian agency. At the discursive practice level, exclusion happens in the following ways: the choice of what is excluded as the topic, set aside in shifting focus, and strategically omitted. When it comes to humanitarian crises and accountability, words and phrases are frequently brought into play regarding security issues, political answers and diplomatic successes.

These patterns at the social practice level are indicative of wider power imbalance and are in favor of dominant actors which gain more power over public narratives. The discourse gives precedence to state centered understandings of security and obscures the visibility of Palestinian lives, rights and political agency.

4.3. Geopolitical Narrative and Binary Framing

Textually, the conflict is often viewed as a dichotomy, for example, one between stability and chaos, between a democratic society and extremism, between security and terrorism. These rudimentary differentiations set up easy partitioning between legal and illegal players. Binaries are bolstered through rhetorical strategies such as repetition and presupposition. The phrase "*Israel's right to defend itself*" implies the right of Israel to act in such a manner, and debate the rightness of its actions will not be had.

Also, when Palestinian Islamic movement Hamas is said to be a terrorist outfit, there is an assumption of the nature and conflict.

In discursive practice, the briefings set the patterns for the whole narrative and influences the interpretation by the audience by limiting the extent to which the conflict or debate can be interpreted as a moral or political issue. There is a tendency to dismiss alternative explanations and perspectives. Indeed, at the social-practical level, this can be read as a part of broader geopolitical discourse, where the United States and its allies are presented as saboteurs of disorder and instability, and the opposing actors as ones to "fight" against for order and stability. The result is the reinforcement of existing ideological divisions and global power relations.

The analysis is based on the premise that U.S. State Department briefings are a means of building political realities and shaping the public perception of the Palestine/Israel conflict. Throughout the three tiers of Fairclough's model, the discourse consistently justifies the legality and the responsibility and the defensive stance of the United States and the state of Israel against Hamas, represented through its portrayal as a violent, terrorist and unstable power. In narratives about human rights and suffering, Palestinian civilians are typically portrayed as victims with a subdued political voice. The discourse reflects wider ideologies and power relations in their use of lexical choice, defensive framing, institutional authority, selection of representation and binary oppositions. These results indicate that political rhetoric operates as more than just a representation of events: it can shape perceptions, create the legitimacy, and reinforce key geopolitical stories.

Table 3: Representation of Key Actors Across U.S. State Department Briefings

Actor	Primary Framing	Key Lexical Choices	Grammatical Role	Ideological Outcome
Israel	Legitimate defender	"right to defend", "democratic", "accountable", "legal"	Active subject (agent)	Normalized as lawful international actor
Hamas	Criminal & illegitimate	"terrorist organization", "brutal", "absolute dealbreaker"	Active subject of violent acts	Excluded from political processes
Palestine (civilians)	Humanitarian victims	"civilians", "people displaced", "humanitarian crisis"	Passive object (acted upon)	Depoliticized; agency suppressed
United States	Rational stabilizer	"committed", "support", "believe", "stand ready"	Institutional authority (first person plural)	Self-positioned as global moral arbiter

Note. Actor representation patterns were identified through systematic lexical and grammatical analysis at the textual level of Fairclough's model and situated within broader geopolitical context at the social practice level.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, it is concluded that language in U.S. State Department briefings on the Palestine-Israel conflict is never ideologically neutral. The State Department deliberately uses language tool to construct its political legitimacy, to reinforce power relations, and to systematically marginalize the competing narratives. The findings show that the discourse has been consistently geared towards the legitimization of the United States and Israel, and towards delegitimization of Hamas, with the effects of these legitimizations and de-legitimizations being achieved through strategic lexical selection, moral polarization, framing of the narrative from a defense angle, and invocation of institutional authority. But at the textual level, Israel is depicted as a lawful and a defensive entity, and Hamas is depicted as a violent and an illegitimate entity. These meanings are reinforced at the discursive practice level by the official's narrative being repeated, intertextual references, the chosen representation, and controlled interactions with journalists. At the social practice level, the discourse is saturated with broader geopolitical ideologies that are

based on security, democracy and stability, and in contrast, ignore alternative discourses and the Palestinian political capacities. These briefings build a specific comprehension of the conflict which reinforces political perspectives and powers. The study consists of only three briefings by U.S. State Department, and are delivered by a single spokesperson, Mathew Miller. Therefore, the findings should be read as illustrative of recurring discursive patterns instead of as fully generalizable across the entirety of U.S. diplomatic communication on the conflict. The exclusive focus on one spokesperson also means that potential variation in framing across different officials, administrations, or institutional voices was not captured in this analysis. In future studies the database could be extended, comparative perspectives added, and other analytical methods used to extend the understanding of the processes used to construct, distribute and engage with competing narratives about the Palestine/Israel conflict in various political and media arenas. Beyond its contribution to Critical Discourse Analysis as a field, the study is significant as it is relevant for

contexts such as Pakistan, where U.S. foreign policy discourse continues to shape domestic media narratives and public opinion on the Palestine-Israel conflict. The study highlights that U.S. policies are reinforcing the broader need for critically informed engagement with the language of powerful international actors.

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