FRAMING CONFLICT: A SOCIO-COGNITIVE APPROACH TO PRESIDENT BIDEN'S ISRAEL-HAMAS SPEECH

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ABSTRACT
This study conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of President Joe Biden's October 18, 2023, speech in response to the Israel-Hamas conflict, utilizing Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach. The research explores how language constructs and conveys representations of Israel and Hamas, revealing the rhetorical strategies and underlying ideologies embedded in the discourse. Through a detailed analysis of textual structures, socio-cognitive dimensions, and broader social contexts, the study identifies a dual narrative: strong condemnation of Hamas juxtaposed with unwavering support for Israel. The findings demonstrate the use of historical references, cognitive frames, and lexical choices to shape public perception and align with U.S. foreign policy objectives. By addressing both moral and humanitarian concerns, the speech strategically balances the U.S.'s commitment to Israel with empathy for Palestinian suffering. This research highlights the role of political discourse in influencing public opinion and reinforcing ideological stances within complex geopolitical contexts, contributing to the broader field of political communication and critical discourse analysis.
Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Socio-cognitive Approach, political discourse, Israel-Hamas conflict, President Joe Biden.

INTRODUCTION

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has become an indispensable methodological framework for the analysis of political speeches, providing critical insights into the ways language serves as a tool for asserting power, shaping public perception, and promoting political agendas (Widiastuti, 2020; Sarwat et al., 2024; Mehmood, 2023). By situating itself within an interdisciplinary approach, CDA examines the intricate interplay between language, power, and society, focusing on the uncovering of hidden ideologies and power structures embedded within discourse (Skichko, 2022; Khudhair,

2022). Since its inception in the early 1990s, driven by theorists such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Norman Fairclough, CDA has evolved into a pivotal framework for understanding how language operates within socio-political contexts (Moghaddam, 2024). This framework adeptly combines micro-level linguistic analysis with macro-level social analysis, allowing researchers to critically evaluate how discourse reflects and shapes social structures and power dynamics (Khudhair, 2022). Various models of CDA, including Fairclough's sociocultural model, van Dijk's

socio-cognitive model, and Wodak's historical-discourse model, offer unique lenses through which the historical context, social issues, and cognitive processes influencing discourse are examined (Riyanti, 2023). The application of CDA has demonstrated effectiveness across numerous studies, particularly in political discourse, where it reveals the strategic use of language to convey rhetorical strategies, communicative practices, and the interaction between linguistic and cognitive elements in political communication (Konopelkina et al., 2022). This growing body of work underscores the significance of CDA as a critical tool for dissecting the socio-political implications of language, providing profound insights into power relations and ideological constructs within contemporary society (Moghaddam, 2024; Riyanti, 2023).

Political Discourse

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) investigates how language is used within political contexts to understand the ways individuals think and behave politically through linguistic frameworks (Hart, 2005; Chilton, 2004). Emerging from the linguistic and political turns in the social sciences during the late 20th century, PDA often intersects with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), adopting an inclusive conception of both politics and discourse (Dunmire, 2012; Nafea & Taher, 2024). This field encompasses various inquiries, such as the use of religious imagery in political language, particularly notable in post-9/11 rhetoric (Hart, 2005; Chilton, 2004).

PDA employs diverse theoretical and analytical frameworks to address socio-political issues, often utilizing case studies of political figures to demonstrate the impact of political language. For instance, research has shown how a politician's rhetoric can influence public opinion and legal proceedings, particularly in high-profile trials (Chilton, 2004; Hart, 2005). The analysis extends beyond textual structures to include the broader political contexts, processes, and systems within which discourse is produced (van Dijk et al., 1997).

Recent studies highlight the interdisciplinary nature of political discourse, intersecting with fields like pragmatics, discourse analysis, and communication research (Du & Chen, 2022). Scholars have noted a shift from formulaic to more expressive and persuasive political texts, reflecting the evolving nature of political communication (Konopelkina et al., 2022). The analysis of political speeches reveals strategic linguistic techniques used to convey ideologies, establish power dynamics, and influence audiences (Qasim et al. (2024). Research on various political leaders, such as female politicians (Balla, 2023), Kwame Nkrumah (Addae et al., 2022), and Barack Obama (Mantovan, 2020; Kashiha, 2022), highlights the use of rhetorical devices, metaphors, pronouns, and modal verbs to shape public perception and advance political agendas (Addae et al., 2022; Mantovan, 2020).

The importance of metadiscourse markers, especially interactional elements that engage listeners, is also emphasized, helping structure speeches and enhance their persuasive effect (Qasim et al., 2024; Kashiha, 2022). By employing CDA frameworks like Fairclough's model, these studies uncover hidden meanings in political discourse and explore how language negotiates power (Balla, 2023; Mantovan, 2020). Through these linguistic strategies, political leaders effectively shape public opinion, build legitimacy, and further their political goals. Understanding these techniques allows audiences to critically analyze political discourse, recognizing how language subtly manipulates consent and steers public perception.

Problem Statement:

Despite the extensive use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the study of political discourse, there remains a significant gap in its application to contemporary geopolitical conflicts, particularly in the context of U.S. foreign policy rhetoric. President Joe Biden's speech on the Israel-Hamas conflict provides a critical case study for examining how language is employed to construct political narratives and influence public perception. While existing research has explored various aspects of political discourse, there is limited analysis of how current political leaders use discourse to navigate complex international crises. Furthermore, the socio-cognitive dimensions of such speeches have not been

thoroughly investigated, specifically how they shape and are shaped by public ideology and policy objectives.

This research focuses on President Joe Biden's speech delivered on October 18, 2023, in response to the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict. This speech is a critical piece of political discourse, given the context of the recent Gaza War, which erupted on October 7, 2023, following a deadly attack by Hamas on Israeli villages near the Gaza barricade. The conflict, which resulted in the deaths of over 1,139 people, has deepened the already complex Palestinian-Israeli struggle, a conflict that has persisted since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 (Al Jazeera, January 21, 2024). By applying CDA to this speech, the research aims to explore how President Biden represents Hamas and the State of Israel, revealing the underlying ideologies and rhetorical strategies employed. This research seeks to address these gaps by applying Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to critically analyze President Biden's speech, focusing on the rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs within the discourse. This analysis enhances the understanding of political discourse in the context of international conflicts and sheds light on how language influences global perceptions and policy decisions.

Methodology:

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative methodology, which is particularly effective for exploring complex phenomena such as the representation of political entities in discourse. Qualitative research, as characterized by Lucas et al. (2022), involves the interpretation of non-numerical data to gain in-depth insights into human behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. This methodology was chosen for its capacity to provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate discourse structures within President Joe Biden's speech, applying Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach, which examines the interplay between discourse, cognition, and society (Sefrinta et al., 2020).

Data Collection: The dataset comprised the full transcript of President Biden's speech titled "Remarks by President Biden on the October 7th Terrorist Attacks and the Resilience of the State of Israel and Its People," delivered on October 18, 2023, in Tel Aviv, Israel. The transcript was sourced from the official White House website and rigorously cross-referenced with the original speech recording to ensure accuracy and fidelity. The selection criteria focused on capturing all linguistic elements relevant to the portrayal of Hamas and Israel.

Analytical Framework: This study employed Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, focusing on three analytical levels: textual characteristics, socio-cognitive dimensions, and broader social contexts. Textual analysis involves examining sentence structures, lexical choices, and rhetorical devices to identify underlying themes and narratives. Socio-cognitive analysis delved into the mental models and ideological constructs that the discourse reflects and reinforces. Lastly, the broader social context was assessed to situate the discourse within its geopolitical and historical milieu.

Data Analysis: The analysis was systematically conducted using qualitative coding techniques. Textual elements were categorized according to their thematic relevance, and software tools were employed to assist in managing and coding the data. This process involved iterative readings and coding to comprehensively examine the speech's discourse structures.

Interpretation and Synthesis: The findings were interpreted through a detailed comparison of the representations of Hamas and Israel, focusing on uncovering the rhetorical strategies and ideological stances embedded within the speech. The synthesis of these findings aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the discourse strategies used to influence public perception in a politically charged context.

This methodological approach ensured a robust analysis, revealing the complex interplay of language, power, and ideology in political discourse.

Discussion and Findings
Textual Level Analysis

In this analysis, the speech is examined through three primary structures: **macrostructure** (the

overarching theme), **superstructure** (the organization of content), and **microstructure** (the finer elements of the text).

Macrostructure

The central theme of President Biden's speech is the United States' steadfast support for Israel in the face of recent terrorist attacks by Hamas. This theme is reinforced by the dual narrative of condemning the atrocities committed by Hamas and asserting the U.S.'s unwavering commitment to Israel's security and well-being.

Excerpt 1: "The State of Israel was born to be a safe place for the Jewish people of the world."
This statement reflects the broader theme of Israel as a refuge for the Jewish people, tying the current conflict to the historical narrative of Jewish survival and the U.S.'s role in ensuring that Israel remains a sanctuary. Biden's speech leverages this historical context to justify continued U.S. support for Israel.
Excerpt 2: "We are going to keep Iron Dome fully supplied so it can continue standing sentinel over Israeli skies, saving Israeli lives."
This reinforces the theme of security and the U.S.'s role as a protector of Israel. The commitment to maintaining the Iron Dome highlights the tangible support the U.S. provides, tying the broader theme of U.S.-Israel relations to specific military and strategic actions.

Superstructure

The superstructure of the speech is organized around several key ideas that guide the audience through the main arguments and messages:

Condemnation of Hamas

Example: "There is no rationalizing it, no excusing it. Period."
Biden's strong condemnation of Hamas's actions serves as the foundation of the speech. By stating unequivocally that there is no justification for the violence perpetrated by Hamas, Biden sets a clear moral boundary. This section is structured to elicit a sense of outrage and moral clarity, reinforcing the U.S.'s stance against terrorism.

Support for Israel

Example: "You are not alone. The United States stands with you."
The speech emphasizes the continuity of U.S. support for Israel in terms of moral backing and practical assistance. By reiterating that Israel is not alone, Biden seeks to reassure both Israeli and international audiences of the U.S.'s commitment. This section of the speech is designed to bolster Israel's confidence in its alliance with the U.S. and to project strength and solidarity.

Humanitarian Concerns

Example: "We mourn the loss of innocent Palestinian lives."
This acknowledgment of Palestinian suffering is strategically placed to balance the speech's strong pro-Israel stance. By expressing sympathy for innocent Palestinians, Biden aims to present the U.S. as a compassionate and just actor in the conflict, addressing the humanitarian dimension without diluting the overall message of support for Israel.

Microstructure
Syntax Elements

The syntactical analysis focuses on how sentence structures and pronouns convey specific messages and reinforce the overall theme.

Syntax Element	Israel	Hamas
Sentence Form	"Israel is a miracle — a triumph of faith and resolve."	"Hamas unleashed pure, unadulterated evil."
Sentence Form	"We will stand beside you now and forever."	"Hamas puts their command centers, their weapons, their communications tunnels in residential areas."
Pronoun	"We will ensure that Israel can defend itself."	"Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people."
Pronoun	"The people of Israel live."	"They use the suffering of their people to further their own violent agenda."

The sentence forms and pronouns used when discussing Israel are inclusive and assertive, aiming to build a sense of unity and assurance. In contrast, the sentences about Hamas are accusatory and distancing, employing third-person pronouns to emphasize their separation from the broader Palestinian populace. This contrast reinforces the dichotomy between Israel as a democratic state deserving of support and Hamas as a terrorist group deserving of condemnation.

Semantic Elements

This section examines how Biden uses details and presuppositions to shape the audience's perception of Israel and Hamas.

Semantic Element	Israel	Hamas
Detail	"We have deployed additional U.S. military assets to the region to prevent the conflict from spreading."	"Hamas uses innocents — innocent families in Gaza as human shields."
Presupposition	"As we have stood by Israel since its founding, so we will stand with you today and in the days to come."	"Hamas has demonstrated a complete disregard for human life."

The details provided about Israel emphasize the proactive and protective actions of the U.S., ensuring that Israel remains secure and supported. On the other hand, the details about Hamas focus on their use of civilians as shields, framing them as a group that endangers rather than protects its people. The presuppositions reinforce the long-standing U.S.-Israel alliance and the moral condemnation of Hamas, suggesting that these positions are self-evident and universally accepted.

Lexicon Elements

Lexical choices are key to differentiating the portrayal of Israel and Hamas in the speech. Biden's words carry specific connotations that influence the audience's emotional and cognitive responses.

Lexicon Element	Israel	Hamas
Rhetoric	"Israel must be a beacon of hope and resilience."	"Hamas acts with a level of barbarity that shocks the conscience."
Rhetoric	"We will walk beside you in those dark days."	"Hamas exploits the pain and suffering of their own people."

The rhetoric surrounding Israel emphasizes positive attributes such as "hope," "resilience," and "partnership." These words are chosen to evoke feelings of admiration and solidarity. In contrast, the rhetoric used to describe Hamas is intended to evoke horror and moral outrage, with words like "barbarity" and "exploits" painting Hamas as a cruel and inhumane organization. This lexical contrast strengthens the speech's overall narrative by clearly delineating the moral boundaries between Israel and Hamas.

Socio-Cognitive Analysis

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach explores how discourse reflects and shapes a society's underlying beliefs, knowledge, ideologies, and attitudes. In President Biden's speech, several socio-cognitive dimensions are evident:

Knowledge and Historical Awareness

President Biden demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the historical and political contexts surrounding the Israel-Hamas conflict. His references to the Holocaust and the founding of Israel are not merely rhetorical but serve to contextualize the current situation within a broader historical narrative. This historical awareness is crucial in shaping the audience's perception of the conflict. As Biden states, "October 7th, which was sacred to — a sacred Jewish holiday, became the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust." This comparison is a deliberate strategy to evoke the historical trauma of the Holocaust, reinforcing the

severity of the current situation and justifying the U.S.'s strong support for Israel.

This historical framing also serves to align the United States with Israel on a moral level, suggesting that supporting Israel is not just a strategic decision but a moral obligation rooted in historical injustices. By invoking these memories, Biden taps into the collective memory of the Jewish people and the broader international community, positioning the U.S. as a defender of justice and human dignity.

Cognitive Frames and Ideological Representation

Cognitive frames are mental structures that shape the way individuals perceive and interpret information. In Biden's speech, several cognitive frames reinforce ideological stances.

Good vs. Evil Frame:

Biden repeatedly contrasts the actions of Hamas with those of Israel, framing the conflict as an apparent struggle between good (Israel and its democratic values) and evil (Hamas and its terrorist actions). Biden describes Hamas as unleashing "pure, unadulterated evil upon the world," which not only dehumanizes Hamas but also morally justifies Israel's response. This framing aligns with a broader ideological narrative that positions the U.S. and Israel as champions of democracy and human =rights against the forces of terrorism.

Victimhood and Resilience Frame:

Another cognitive frame is the portrayal of Israel as a victim of unprovoked aggression yet resilient in the face of adversity. Biden's assertion, "The brutality we saw would have cut deep anywhere in the world, but it cuts deeper here in Israel," underscores the unique suffering of Israel while also highlighting its resilience. This frame serves to garner empathy and support for Israel, positioning it as a nation that, despite repeated attacks, remains steadfast and determined to protect its people.

Solidarity and Brotherhood Frame:

Biden frequently uses language that emphasizes solidarity and unity between the U.S. and Israel, fostering a sense of shared identity and purpose.

Phrases like "You are not alone" and "We have stood by your side ever since" reinforce a cognitive frame of enduring alliance, suggesting that the U.S. and Israel share common values and destinies. This frame strengthens the diplomatic bond and mobilizes domestic and international support for Israel.

Attitudes and Opinions

Biden's attitudes and opinions are consistently aligned with a strong pro-Israel stance, which is evident in both his explicit statements and the underlying assumptions of his speech. His repeated use of inclusive pronouns like "we" when referring to the U.S. and Israel ("We're going to stand by your side now") reflects an attitude of unity and shared purpose. In contrast, when discussing Hamas, Biden uses distancing language ("Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people"), indicating a clear demarcation between the Palestinian population and the militant group, thereby avoiding broad generalizations that could alienate the Palestinian people.

Biden's attitudes are rooted in principles of justice, human dignity, and moral responsibility. These themes are evident in his calls for a measured response to the conflict ("While you feel that rage, do not be consumed by it") and his emphasis on the need for humanitarian aid, even as he condemns Hamas.

Social Context Analysis

The social context analysis examines the broader geopolitical and historical backdrop against which President Biden's speech is delivered. This context is essential for understanding the implications of his statements and the reception they might receive both domestically and internationally.

Historical and Geopolitical Context

The Israel-Hamas conflict is deeply embedded in the broader Israeli-Palestinian struggle, which has roots in the early 20th century and was significantly shaped by the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The conflict has been marked by cycles of violence, territorial disputes, and failed peace efforts. In his speech, Biden acknowledges the historical significance of

Israel's existence: "The State of Israel was born to be a safe place for the Jewish people of the world." This statement ties Israel's current situation to its historical purpose, justifying U.S. support as not only a strategic necessity but also a fulfillment of historical justice. Biden's speech also reflects the current geopolitical dynamics, particularly the role of regional actors like Egypt and Qatar, who have often mediated between Israel and Hamas. The mention of these countries suggests an understanding of the complex alliances and rivalries that characterize the Middle East.

International Relations and Diplomatic Implications

The speech is also situated within the context of U.S. foreign policy and its implications for international relations. The U.S. has long been a staunch ally of Israel, providing military, economic, and diplomatic support. Biden's speech reinforces this alliance and addresses the broader international community's concerns, particularly regarding humanitarian issues. Biden's announcement of "$100 million in new U.S. funding for humanitarian assistance in both Gaza and the West Bank" indicates an awareness of the international expectation for the U.S. to balance its support for Israel with concern for Palestinian civilians. This gesture mitigates potential criticisms from allies and international organizations that advocate for protecting human rights in conflict zones. The thematic focus on humanitarian aid, even amidst a strong pro-Israel stance, reflects the U.S.'s attempt to maintain its moral leadership on the global stage. It also signals to other nations, especially those in the Middle East, that the U.S. recognizes the broader humanitarian consequences of the conflict and is willing to address them.

Domestic Political Context

Domestically, Biden's speech is likely shaped by the political landscape in the United States, where support for Israel is strong among certain voter blocs, including the Jewish community and evangelical Christians. However, there is also a growing discourse around Palestinian rights, particularly among progressive groups. Biden's careful differentiation between Hamas and the

Palestinian people ("Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people") is likely intended to appeal to this more progressive audience, acknowledging their concerns without alienating pro-Israel constituents. This balancing act is crucial in maintaining broad domestic support while navigating the complex opinions within his own party. Biden's speech, therefore, must be understood as part of a larger strategy to maintain U.S. influence in the Middle East, uphold Israel's security, and address the evolving domestic and international expectations regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Thematic Considerations

Several overarching themes emerge from the social context analysis:

Security and Stability: The speech emphasizes the theme of security for Israel and the broader region as Biden pledges continued U.S. military support and deterrence against further aggression. This theme is central to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, where stability is often equated with the security of key allies like Israel. For example, "We are going to keep Iron Dome fully supplied so it can continue standing sentinel over Israeli skies, saving Israeli lives."

Moral Responsibility: Another theme is the moral responsibility of the U.S. to support its allies and stand against terrorism. This theme is evident in Biden's condemnation of Hamas and his invocation of historical parallels, such as the Holocaust. For example, in the speech, he mentions, "There is no rationalizing it, no excusing it. Period."

Humanitarian Concern: Despite the strong support for Israel, Biden also introduces the theme of humanitarian concern, recognizing the suffering of Palestinian civilians and the need for aid. This theme reflects the U.S.'s broader commitment to human rights and international law. In a speech, he says, "Today, I asked the Israeli cabinet... to agree to the delivery of lifesaving humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza."

Conclusion

This study employed Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine President Joe Biden's speech on the Israel-Hamas conflict. The research uncovered the strategic rhetorical choices and underlying ideological constructs embedded in the discourse through a detailed analysis of the speech's macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure.

The findings reveal that Biden's speech employs a dual narrative: unequivocal condemnation of Hamas and resolute support for Israel, underpinned by historical references and moral obligations. The speech effectively utilizes syntactical structures, semantic elements, and lexical choices to convey an apparent dichotomy between the democratic values associated with Israel and the violence attributed to Hamas. This dichotomy is reinforced by cognitive frames that portray Israel as a resilient victim and moral protagonist while framing Hamas as an inhumane aggressor.

Furthermore, the socio-cognitive analysis highlights how the speech reflects and shapes public perceptions, drawing on collective memory and ideological narratives to justify U.S. foreign policy. By addressing both the humanitarian concerns for Palestinians and the strategic alliance with Israel, Biden's speech seeks to balance moral responsibility with political pragmatism.

In conclusion, this research underscores the power of political discourse in influencing public opinion and reinforcing ideological positions. The study contributes to the broader understanding of how language functions within political contexts, demonstrating the critical role of discourse in shaping socio-political landscapes and guiding international policy decisions. Through this analysis, the enduring impact of rhetoric in high-stakes geopolitical conflicts is made evident, offering valuable insights for future studies in political communication and critical discourse analysis.

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