# Moral Framing and Legitimizing Asymmetry in Joe Biden's Post–October 7, 2023 Israel–Palestine Rhetoric

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## Abstract

The Israel-Palestine conflict had long been a focal point of global attention, drawing interest from various perspectives. Within this landscape, the speech delivered by President Joe Biden stood as a significant subject for critical examination. Employing the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a study dissected President Biden's speech to unravel its rhetorical elements, linguistic nuances, and the implicit impact on the Israel-Palestine conflict. The analysis discerned President Biden's articulated stance, showcasing a nuanced support for Israel while advocating a pursuit of equitable solutions for both sides involved. This investigation underscored the pivotal role of political rhetoric wielded by world leaders in navigating intricate conflicts. This research aimed to shed light on how President Biden's discourse shaped global perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Anchored in scholarly discourse and employing rigorous analysis, this study elucidated the significance of leader-speak in influencing global perspectives, especially within the context of this complex geopolitical impasse.

*Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Israel-Palestine Conflict; Global Perceptions; Joe Biden Speech; Political Rhetoric*

## 1. Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long occupied a central position in global geopolitical discourse, not only as a protracted territorial and humanitarian crisis but also as a symbolic arena in which global power, morality, and legitimacy are continuously negotiated. Among the many actors shaping international interpretations of this conflict, the rhetoric of United States presidents is particularly influential. As the head of a global hegemon, the U.S. President's discourse plays a decisive role in shaping domestic public opinion, guiding diplomatic alignments, and constructing moral narratives that legitimize specific policy choices on the international stage (Putra, 2024; (Naaz, 2024) . Consequently, presidential rhetoric during moments of acute crisis is not merely communicative but constitutive, actively producing ideological meanings with far-reaching political consequences.

This study is motivated by a critical problem that remains insufficiently addressed in existing scholarship: how crisis-time presidential rhetoric functions as a discursive mechanism for legitimizing asymmetric power relations in foreign policy, particularly in conflicts marked by profound moral and humanitarian contestation. Following the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023, President Joe Biden delivered a series of statements that rapidly framed the conflict in morally charged terms. These discursive interventions emerged at a moment of heightened global scrutiny, intense humanitarian suffering, and accelerating political polarization. The urgency of this context makes Biden's post-October 7 rhetoric a crucial site for examining how language constructs moral hierarchies, defines legitimate and illegitimate actors, and stabilizes unequal political commitments under conditions of crisis (Hobbs et al., 2025; Shar et al., 2024).

Existing research on U.S. presidential discourse toward the Middle East demonstrates that such rhetoric consistently embeds ideological assumptions, strategic moral positioning, and legitimation practices (Druckman et al., 2024). Studies have identified recurring discursive patterns such as positive self-representation, negative other-representation, and binary moral framing that reinforce an "us versus them" worldview (Mukhortov & Zhovner, 2019). Analyses of earlier administrations, including Obama's, further reveal how appeals to universal values such as "peace," "security," and "democracy" often obscure underlying hegemonic interests (Akbar & Abbas, 2019). More recent scholarship on Biden's communication highlights the interaction between presidential

rhetoric and media framing in shaping global interpretations of U.S. foreign policy (Sokolshchik, 2024).

However, despite this substantial body of literature, a critical gap remains. Most existing studies focus either on long-term rhetorical trends, media representations, or isolated policy statements, without offering a systematic, discourse-oriented analysis of Biden's crisis rhetoric following October 7, 2023 (El Damanhoury et al., 2025). What is notably absent is an in-depth examination of how Biden's language during this specific crisis constructs moral identities, frames the legitimacy of conflict actors, and discursively justifies asymmetric U.S. policy orientations toward Israel and Palestine. This gap is particularly significant because crisis discourse differs fundamentally from routine political communication: it demands rapid moral positioning, compresses complex realities into simplified narratives, and amplifies the power of language to normalize inequality under the guise of urgency and security.

This study addresses that gap by offering a focused Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Biden's post-October seven rhetoric, emphasizing how moral framing operates as a tool of political legitimation. The post October 7 context is distinct not only due to the scale of violence but also because it generated a volatile rhetorical environment marked by heightened emotional appeal, moral absolutism, and accelerated policy justification. Analyzing this discourse, therefore, provides a unique opportunity to understand how legitimacy is constructed and negotiated at the intersection of political authority, humanitarian concern, and ideological alignment.

Methodologically, the study adopts Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which enables a systematic linkage between micro-linguistic features (text), discursive practices (production and consumption), and broader socio-political structures (Chandra & Yuliani, 2024; Christina Purwanti et al., 2025). While CDA is effective in exposing how power and ideology are embedded in language, this study extends its analytical scope by critically engaging with the broader socio-political implications of Biden's moral framing strategies. This integrative approach allows the analysis to move beyond textual description toward an interpretation of how discourse contributes to the reproduction of unequal power relations in international politics.

Within this framework, the study advances an exploratory proposition: Biden's post-October seven rhetoric employs moral framing to legitimize a discursive asymmetry, in which Israel is consistently positioned as a morally legitimate ally requiring immediate protection, while Palestinian identity is increasingly depoliticized and framed

primarily in humanitarian rather than political terms. Rather than asserting a causal claim, this proposition functions as an analytical guide for examining how rhetorical strategies contribute to the normalization of unequal political commitments under crisis conditions.

Accordingly, the central research question guiding this study is how Joe Biden's rhetoric after October 7, 2023, discursively constructs the identities of key actors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and legitimizes the asymmetrical orientation of U.S. foreign policy toward both sides. This study contributes to the literature in three key ways. First, it provides a context-specific analysis of Biden's crisis rhetoric, addressing a temporal and analytical gap in existing scholarship. Second, it advances CDA research by foregrounding moral framing as a central mechanism of foreign policy legitimation during geopolitical crises. Third, it offers broader theoretical insight into how humanitarian discourse can simultaneously express concern while depoliticizing structural inequality, thereby reinforcing asymmetric power relations. Through these contributions, the study enhances understanding of the discursive foundations of U.S. foreign policy in times of crisis and underscores the critical role of language in shaping global political realities.

## 2. Research Methods
## 2. 1. Research Approach and Theoretical Framework

This research adopts an interpretive qualitative approach based on Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Busetto et al., 2020). This framework was chosen specifically because its three-layered structure allows for a critical and comprehensive examination of how power relations, ideology, and policy legitimacy are embedded in political language. By moving beyond mere textual description, CDA allows for the interpretation of multi-layered meanings in political speech, linking micro-linguistic features to macro-socio-political implications. (Rouabhia, 2024). Consequently, this research prioritizes critical analysis aimed at uncovering the discursive mechanisms of legitimacy, rather than a purely descriptive account of presidential discourse (Parta et al., 2025).

## 2. 2. Corpus Selection and Justification

The research corpus consists of five official speeches delivered by President Biden concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between October 7 and December 31, 2023. This period, immediately following the October 7 attacks, was chosen not simply because it exhibited high rhetorical intensity, but because it represents the critical, initial phase of the US administration's rhetorical response. This time frame is justified as

the period during which the most significant discursive shifts, innovations, and immediate legitimation strategies were forged and consolidated. Rather than suggesting patterns stabilized later, the research posits that the foundational discursive architecture for the administration's long-term policy rhetoric was constructed during these initial three months. Limiting the analysis to this high-stakes, crisis-driven period ensures a focused and deep investigation into the rhetoric of immediate legitimation under acute pressure. While interviews and informal statements were excluded, this decision was a strategic choice made to prioritize consistency, institutional weight, and pre-planned policy rhetoric. The formal, official nature of speeches delivered from the White House ensures that the analysis captures the administration's most considered and high-impact policy positioning. All primary data was sourced from the official White House website (https://www.whitehouse.gov/) to guarantee authenticity. The selection of speeches utilized a purposeful sampling technique based on clear and strict criteria:

1. Explicitness and Substantiality: The speech texts must explicitly and substantially address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, dedicating a significant portion of their content to defining the crisis, establishing the identities of actors, or outlining US policy.
2. Public Availability: The full official transcripts must be publicly available on the White House website.
3. Genre Diversity within Official Discourse: The corpus must encompass a range of high-stakes political communication genres (national addresses, formal statements, and major press conference statements) to allow for the examination of rhetorical strategies across various formal communication contexts.

## 2. 3. Analysis and Operationalization Framework

Fairclough's three-dimensional model is systematically operationalized to guide the analytical process, ensuring a direct and traceable link between the theoretical framework and the data analysis.

**Table 1.** Analytical Dimensions and Their Corresponding Focus and Goals in the CDA Framework

| Dimension | Focus of Analysis | Analytical Goal |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Textual Analysis | Micro-linguistic features: Pronoun usage, transitivity patterns (agency | To establish the empirical foundation by identifying the specific linguistic features (codes like 'lexical |

| Dimension | Focus of Analysis | Analytical Goal |
|---|---|---|
| | attribution), modality, evaluative diction (moral evaluation, victim-perpetrator dichotomy), and metaphorical framing. | legitimacy') used to construct identities and legitimize policy. |
| Analysis of Discursive Practices | Production, Distribution, and Intertextuality: How speeches are disseminated and how the discourse interacts with other texts. This examines the recontextualization of existing narratives (e.g., US foreign policy norms, the "war on terror" discourse) and statements from allies. | To interpret how the texts are produced, consumed, and positioned within the immediate political and media context, revealing the intertextual links that shape meaning. |
| Analysis of Social Practices | Broader Socio-political Structures: Situating the discursive strategies within the context of US foreign policy, geopolitical dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and interactions with international alliances. | To connect the textual patterns to the macrostructures of ideology and legitimacy, addressing the core research question of how US policy is discursively legitimized within the global arena. |

This progression follows a recursive analytical logic, where initial textual coding informs the interpretation of discursive and social practices,

with insights from the higher levels continually providing input for refining the coding and interpretation at the lower levels.

## 2. 4.  Coding Procedures and Reliability

Data management and coding were conducted using NVivo 12 to ensure systematic organization, transparency, and analytical traceability. The coding process unfolded through a progressive interpretive logic beginning with open coding, where textual segments were annotated line by line to identify initial linguistic and rhetorical features related to identity construction and legitimation. These codes emerged inductively and were refined through iterative reading. The analysis then moved into axial coding, in which related codes were clustered into broader conceptual categories. At this stage, linguistic features such as recurrent use of passive voice or evaluative diction were explicitly linked to emergent thematic categories, including depoliticization of Palestine, moral exceptionalism of the United States, and the legitimization of Israel's political agency. The final stage, selective coding, integrated these categories into an overarching discursive strategy that aligns directly with Fairclough's three-dimensional model, ensuring that the coding structure corresponds with the theoretical framework guiding the study.

The reliability of the analysis was reinforced through the development of a comprehensive codebook containing operational definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and illustrative textual examples. To further strengthen methodological rigor, two independent coders, both formally trained in discourse analysis and Middle Eastern political communication, were engaged to code 20% of the dataset. The intercoder reliability test yielded a Cohen's Kappa (κ) of 0.81, indicating a strong level of agreement. Any discrepancies in coding were addressed through structured consensus meetings in which coders revisited contested segments, refined code definitions, and ensured consistency in interpretive judgment across the full corpus.

## 2. 5.  Validity, Reflexivity, and Ethical Considerations

Validity was enhanced through systematic triangulation. The discursive patterns identified in Biden's speeches were compared with established scholarly literature on US foreign policy rhetoric and with contemporaneous international media reports from sources such as BBC, Al Jazeera, and Reuters. This verification process strengthened external validity by ensuring that the findings were not artifacts of isolated textual analysis but instead reflected broader geopolitical narratives and policy discourses circulating during the same period.

Reflexivity played a central role in maintaining analytical transparency. The researchers acknowledged their positionality as Indonesian academics studying US political rhetoric and recognized that cultural distance and ideological predispositions could shape interpretation. To mitigate such risks, reflexive memos were maintained continuously throughout the coding and interpretive phases. These memos documented the researchers' initial assumptions and how they changed over time, key interpretive decisions made in ambiguous cases, challenges in categorizing certain discursive segments, and ongoing critical reflections regarding potential biases. This sustained self-interrogation ensured a more disciplined, conscious engagement with the data and strengthened the study's epistemological integrity.

## 2. 6.   Limitations and Generalizability

Despite its methodological rigor, the study acknowledges limitations that constrain generalizability. The relatively small corpus and the exclusion of informal or spontaneous genres, such as interviews and unscripted remarks, limit the scope of rhetorical variation captured. However, the deliberate focus on formal, high-stakes policy discourse provides an analytically coherent and institutionally significant dataset, especially given the critical geopolitical conditions immediately following the October 7 attacks. Concentrating on these official texts allows the research to prioritize depth of analysis and theoretical grounding, offering a focused examination of how presidential rhetoric functions to legitimize power, construct moral hierarchies, and shape foreign policy narratives during a rapidly evolving international crisis.
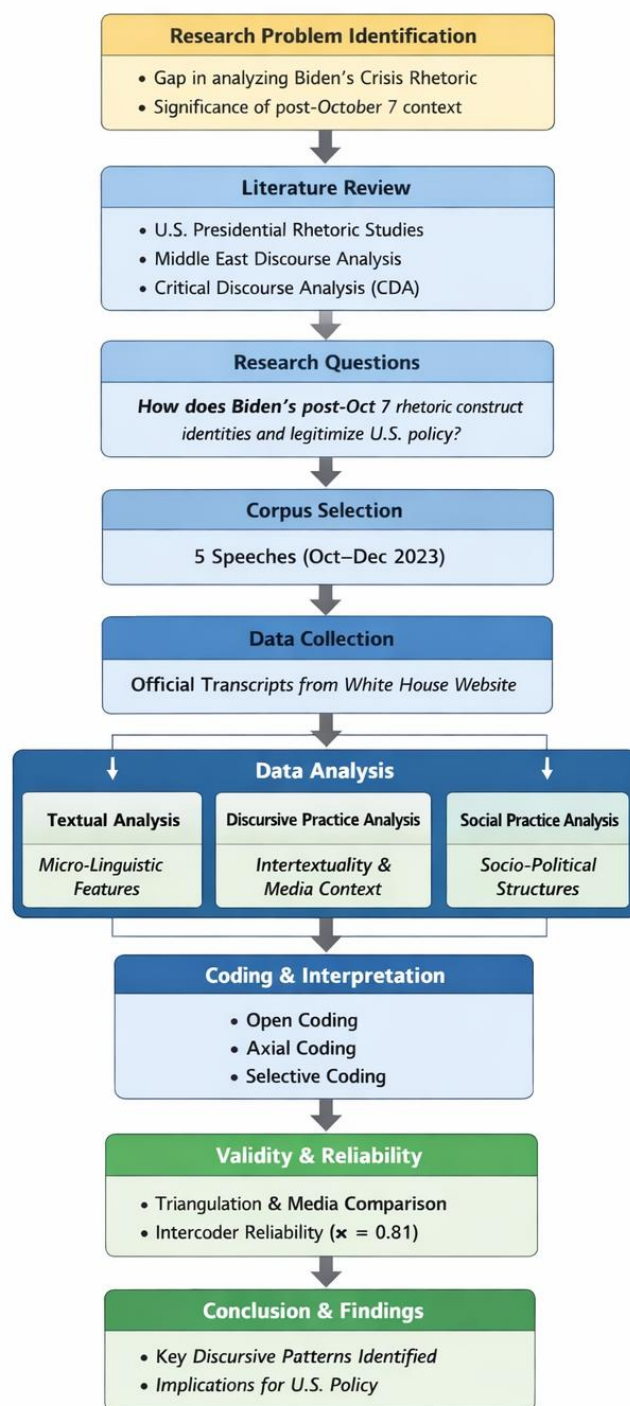
**Research Problem Identification**

- Gap in analyzing Biden's Crisis Rhetoric
- Significance of post-*October 7* context

**Literature Review**

- U.S. Presidential Rhetoric Studies
- Middle East Discourse Analysis
- Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

**Research Questions**

*How does Biden's post-Oct 7 rhetoric construct identities and legitimize U.S. policy?*

**Corpus Selection**

5 Speeches (Oct–Dec 2023)

**Data Collection**

*Official Transcripts from White House Website*

**Data Analysis**

| Textual Analysis | Discursive Practice Analysis | Social Practice Analysis |
|---|---|---|
| *Micro-Linguistic Features* | *Intertextuality & Media Context* | *Socio-Political Structures* |

**Coding & Interpretation**

- Open Coding
- Axial Coding
- Selective Coding

**Validity & Reliability**

- Triangulation & Media Comparison
- Intercoder Reliability ($\varkappa = 0.81$)

**Conclusion & Findings**

- *Key Discursive Patterns Identified*
- *Implications for U.S. Policy*

**Figure 1**. Research Flow Diagram of the Critical Discourse Analysis of Biden's Post–October 7 Rhetoric

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## 3. Results

This diagram is designed to visualize a multi-level process of critical discourse analysis, illustrating how meaning is constructed, normalized, and reproduced across interconnected discursive layers. Beginning with the Textual Level, the diagram traces how linguistic choices, textual structures, and evaluative lexicon contribute to the formation of a Moral Hierarchy, which is subsequently operationalized through Discursive Practice. This process extends into Selective Humanitarianism, where humanitarian concern is framed in partial and depoliticized terms, and ultimately culminates in Social Practice, where broader power relations, hegemonic legitimacy, and geopolitical asymmetries are reproduced. The visual representation aims to facilitate a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the causal and hierarchical relationships among these analytical levels.



**Figure 2.** Discursive Flow from Textual Construction to Social Practice.

This figure illustrates five interconnected analytical levels: Textual Level, Moral Hierarchy, Discursive Practice, Selective Humanitarianism, and Social Practice. Each level represents a stage in the transformation of meaning, from linguistic construction within texts to broader social effects, including the reproduction of power relations, dominant legitimacy, and selective humanitarian framing within social practice.

## 3.1. Textual Level: Linguistic Mechanisms of Moral Dichotomy

At the textual level, Biden's post–October 7 rhetoric exhibits a pronounced asymmetry in both pronoun deployment and lexical framing. Across the analyzed corpus, the pronoun "we" occurs 112 times and is predominantly associated with Israel, U.S. allies, and abstract democratic values, thereby constructing a cohesive moral collective grounded in shared norms and strategic alignment. In contrast, the pronoun "they" appears 72 times and is used almost exclusively in reference to Hamas or "terrorists." This distribution produces a clear moral demarcation that separates a legitimate and virtuous in-group from an illegitimate and violent out-group. For example, in his October 10, 2023, address, the statement "We support Israel. And we will make sure they have what they need to protect their people" discursively fuses U.S. and Israeli identities into a singular moral and political entity. Conversely, the formulation "They slaughtered the family in cold blood" constructs Hamas as inherently barbaric, stripping the actor of political rationality and moral legitimacy. The persistence of this pronoun pattern across multiple speeches suggests the presence of a relatively stable ideological framework through which the conflict is consistently moralized.

At the textual level, Biden's rhetoric constructs a moral dichotomy through asymmetric lexical choices, whereby Hamas is consistently represented through delegitimizing and dehumanizing labels, while Israel is framed using positively evaluative terms associated with democracy and moral legitimacy. Palestinians, by contrast, are predominantly positioned within a humanitarian register rather than as political actors.

**Table 2.** Comparative Representation of Actors in Biden's Rhetoric

| Actor | Dominant Lexical Choices | Discursive Function | Ideological Impact |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hamas | *evil, barbarian, terrorist, monster* | Negative Other-Representation | Political delegitimation and justification of violence |
| Israel | *ally, friend, democracy, shield* | Positive Self-Representation | Naturalization of self-defense and strategic alliance |
| Palestinians | *innocent civilians, families* | Humanitarian Framing | Depoliticization and erasure of political agency |

This table highlights a clear representational asymmetry: Israel is constructed as a morally legitimate political actor, whereas Palestinians are primarily framed as humanitarian objects rather than political subjects. Lexical choices further reinforce this dichotomous framing. Terms such as evil (nine occurrences), barbarian (six), and terrorist (eleven) are systematically attributed to Hamas, whereas Israel is described using positively evaluative labels, including ally, friend, and democracy. Palestinian subjects, by contrast, are most frequently represented as innocent civilians or families (fifteen occurrences), rather than as political actors. This discursive configuration situates Palestinians primarily within a humanitarian register, positioning them as recipients of protection and aid rather than as agents embedded in a political and historical struggle. Notably, references to humanitarian concerns intensify in speeches delivered on November 1 and December 31, coinciding with heightened international criticism of Israel's military operations. This temporal clustering suggests a discursive recalibration that responds to shifting diplomatic pressures rather than a fundamental reconfiguration of the underlying moral narrative.

At the same time, these linguistic patterns warrant cautious interpretation. Although the frequent association of "we" with Israel signals a strong ideological alignment, it also reflects the pragmatic demands of presidential communication. In domestic contexts, the inclusive pronoun functions to consolidate national unity and reaffirm longstanding alliances; in international forums, it serves to project the United States as a principled and reliable actor committed to democratic values. Pronoun usage thus operates at the intersection of ideology and strategy, shaped by audience expectations, communicative goals, and the geopolitical exigencies of crisis management.

A comparable duality is evident in the expanded use of humanitarian language, such as civilians, aid corridors, and innocent lives, during November and December 2023. While this rhetorical shift aligns with increasing global scrutiny, qualitative examination indicates that it also reflects internal tensions within the U.S. administration. These tensions emerge from the need to reconcile unwavering strategic support for Israel with mounting pressure from progressive domestic constituencies and international actors advocating restraint and humanitarian accountability. In this sense, humanitarian discourse functions not solely as a tactical response but as a site of moral and political negotiation within U.S. foreign policy rhetoric.

Viewed through Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, these dynamics unfold across multiple analytical levels. At the textual level,

linguistic resources, such as pronouns, evaluative diction, and metaphors, such as shield or monster, construct a moralized narrative that legitimizes U.S.-Israeli solidarity while delegitimizing Hamas as a political actor. At the level of discursive practice, Biden's rhetoric demonstrates adaptive modulation in response to audience and communicative context: domestic addresses emphasize unity and alliance loyalty, whereas international statements adopt a more restrained tone to preserve U.S. credibility as a humanitarian and diplomatic actor. These shifts illustrate how discourse production and circulation are shaped by evolving geopolitical constraints.

The social practice dimension remains more tentative, as fully tracing the relationship between presidential rhetoric and broader foreign policy structures requires longitudinal and multi-actor analysis beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that Biden's post-October seven discourse contributes to the reproduction of entrenched U.S. foreign policy orientations and influences international perceptions of American legitimacy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Further research at this level would offer deeper insight into how crisis rhetoric interacts with geopolitical realities and global public opinion over time.

**Table 3.** Lexical choices are systematically employed to reinforce the moral binary

| Group | Applied Terms (Frequency) | Rhetorical Function |
|---|---|---|
| Hamas | evil (9), barbarian (6), terrorist (11), monster | Negative Other-Representation: Justifies military action and depoliticizes the group, denying legitimacy. |
| Israel | ally, friend, democracy, shield (metaphor) | Positive Self-Representation: Naturalizes their right to self-defense and moralizes the geopolitical alliance. |
| Palestinians | innocent civilians (15), families, innocent lives | Humanitarian Framing: Positions them as passive recipients of aid, separating them from the political conflict. |

The consistent application of terms like evil and barbarian to Hamas mirrors the post 9/11 rhetoric of "*good vs. evil*". Indicating an

ideological inheritance that normalizes the use of forceful counterterrorism measures. Overall, while the results demonstrate consistent linguistic patterns, this analysis needs to be further expanded by considering the broader socio-political context. Interpretations of word frequency and discourse shifts need to be linked to external factors such as diplomatic pressure, different audiences, and changes in US foreign policy. While analysis of textual dimensions and discursive practices can illustrate how Biden frames US foreign policy, analysis of social practices needs to be further developed to explore the political and social implications of this discourse.

## 3.2. Discursive Practice: Strategic Ambivalence and Contextual Adaptation

At the level of discursive practice, Biden's rhetoric demonstrates strong intertextual continuity with established traditions of U.S. presidential discourse. Recurrent references to democracy, freedom, and moral leadership resonate with rhetorical frameworks employed by earlier administrations, particularly those of George W. Bush in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and Barack Obama during interventions framed as morally necessary (Bush, 2001; Obama, 2014). Biden's invocation of categories such as evil and innocence, for instance, closely mirrors Bush's post-9/11 construction of a moral binary between "good" and "evil," indicating ideological inheritance rather than substantive rhetorical innovation. Through this continuity, Biden's discourse situates the October 7 attacks within a familiar moral template that has historically been used to justify U.S. military engagement.

Intertextuality is further evident in the reactivation of established policy frameworks, including the right to self-defense, shared democratic values, and the broader logic of the war on terror. By drawing upon these recognizable discursive resources, Biden's rhetoric normalizes Israel's military response as consistent with U.S. counterterrorism practices. This interdiscursive alignment allows asymmetrical power relations to be legitimized through reference to familiar and widely institutionalized narratives, thereby reducing the need for explicit justification of policy choices in the present crisis.

Genre-specific variation further illustrates strategic adaptation within a stable discursive structure. In ceremonial and nationally televised addresses, such as the October 10 speech, Biden adopts a solemn and moralizing register that foregrounds collective responsibility, ethical obligation, and alliance fidelity. In contrast, addresses oriented toward domestic audiences, including the November 1 speech, place greater emphasis on empathy, highlighting civilian suffering and humanitarian

concern. Despite these tonal shifts, however, the underlying discursive boundaries remain intact. Palestinian subjects are consistently referenced through depoliticized humanitarian categories civilians, children, or families rather than as political actors with claims to agency or self-determination. While additional variation might emerge in interviews or unscripted remarks, the formal speeches examined in this study reveal a coherent and internally consistent rhetorical architecture.

A moment of discursive tension becomes particularly visible in the October 20 address, in which Biden states that "humanitarian corridors must remain open to assist Palestinian civilians." This formulation constitutes a limited counter-discursive gesture insofar as it explicitly acknowledges Palestinian suffering. Nevertheless, it appears within the same speech in which Hamas is characterized using dehumanizing metaphors, such as monstrous, thereby preserving the dominant moral-political binary. Although references to humanitarian concerns increase notably after November 1 coinciding with intensified international criticism of Israel's military actions their discursive function remains constrained. Rather than reconfiguring the political framing of the conflict, humanitarian language operates primarily to manage perceptions of U.S. complicity and moral responsibility, while sustaining a discourse that positions Palestinians as passive recipients of aid rather than as political subjects embedded within an asymmetrical conflict structure.

**Table 4.** Temporal Shift in President Biden's Post-October 7th Rhetoric: Dominant Discursive Frames and Functions

| Time Period | Dominant Rhetoric | Discursive Function |
|---|---|---|
| Oct 7 - Oct 31 | Pronoun Polarity, Moral Condemnation (Focus on Israel's defense) | Establishes ideological alignment and justifies immediate response. |
| Nov 1 - Dec 31 | Increased Humanitarian Terms (e.g., Nov 1: "Every innocent life matters, Israeli and Palestinian alike.") | Dual Function: 1) Strategic Audience Management: A reactive response to global pressure and progressive domestic demands. 2) Internal Negotiation: Represents a real moral-political tension within the administration, easing ideological rigidity without structural change. |

This humanitarian discourse functions as a limited counter-discursive gesture, exemplified by formulations such as "humanitarian corridors must remain open," yet it remains embedded within a fundamentally depoliticizing framework that positions Palestinians primarily as passive recipients of aid rather than as political agents. Within this broader pattern of discursive ambivalence, Biden's rhetoric does not constitute a rupture from earlier presidential crisis discourse but rather represents a strategic recalibration shaped by contemporary geopolitical pressures. Unlike George W. Bush's post–9/11 rhetoric, which relied on an explicit and uncompromising "good versus evil" dichotomy, or Barack Obama's cosmopolitan articulation of "just war" grounded in multilateral norms and procedural legitimacy, Biden employs what may be characterized as a form of soft moral securitization. This approach combines firm security-oriented justifications and moral condemnation of Hamas with a controlled, carefully bounded expression of humanitarian empathy toward Palestinian civilians.

Such ambivalence is not accidental but functional. It enables the administration to sustain unequivocal strategic support for Israel while simultaneously responding to intensified international scrutiny, managing domestic political divisions, and preserving the appearance of moral credibility on the global stage. The analytical significance of this finding lies not in the mere identification of ambivalence which has long been a feature of U.S. presidential rhetoric but in demonstrating how ambivalence operates as a stabilizing discursive mechanism. Through selective humanitarian acknowledgment, U.S. discourse is recalibrated to accommodate competing pressures without altering the foundational structure of American foreign policy orientation.
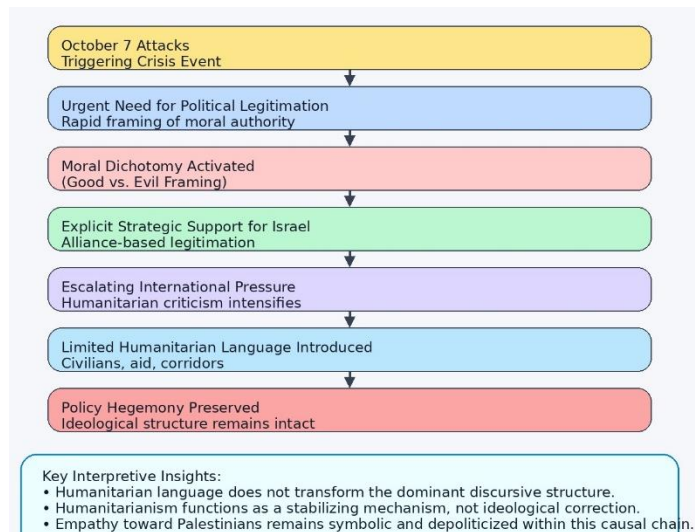
October 7 Attacks
Triggering Crisis Event

Urgent Need for Political Legitimation
Rapid framing of moral authority

Moral Dichotomy Activated
(Good vs. Evil Framing)

Explicit Strategic Support for Israel
Alliance-based legitimation

Escalating International Pressure
Humanitarian criticism intensifies

Limited Humanitarian Language Introduced
Civilians, aid, corridors

Policy Hegemony Preserved
Ideological structure remains intact

Key Interpretive Insights:
• Humanitarian language does not transform the dominant discursive structure.
• Humanitarianism functions as a stabilizing mechanism, not ideological correction.
• Empathy toward Palestinians remains symbolic and depoliticized within this causal chain.

**Figure 3.** Flow of Findings: Discursive Cause-Effect Structure

Figure 3 illustrates the causal discursive sequence identified in this study, demonstrating how moral polarization and selective humanitarianism function to stabilize U.S. policy hegemony rather than transform it.

### 3.3. Social Practice: Reproduction of Ideology and Legitimation of Hegemony

At the level of social practice, the analysis indicates that Biden's rhetoric reproduces entrenched ideological patterns within U.S. foreign policy discourse, wherein Israel is constructed as a threatened moral democracy and Palestine is framed primarily as a humanitarian concern rather than as a political subject (Ghazal et al., 2025). This dynamic reflects Fairclough's (2013) conception of discourse as a site of ideological struggle, where linguistic representations simultaneously legitimize policy choices and reproduce asymmetrical power relations.

Through selective invocations of ostensibly universal values such as justice, humanity, and peace, Biden constructs a discourse of moral leadership that obscures material and structural asymmetries embedded in U.S. foreign policy. Recurrent legitimations of Israel's military actions, combined with conditional and temporally bounded expressions of empathy toward Palestinians, exemplify what Van Dijk (2006) identifies as positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Notably, while Biden introduces limited humanitarian acknowledgments absent in more rigidly securitized discourses, these gestures function less as challenges to dominant ideology than as mitigations that soften its outward appearance without disrupting its structural foundations.

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Quantitative analysis further supports this interpretation. Pro-Israel legitimacy frames such as self-defense and shared democratic values appear in 41 coded instances, whereas references to humanitarian concern for Palestinians occur in only 17 instances, the majority of which emerge after November 1. This imbalance underscores the discursive dominance of moral-legal justification over humanitarian empathy. Such selective recognition reinforces patterns identified by Khemaissia and Djeddi (2025) in U.S. media discourse, where Palestine is frequently reduced to a humanitarian object devoid of political voice or agency.

**Synthesis: Discursive Ambivalence and Ideological Continuity**

When examined across textual, discursive, and social dimensions, Biden's post–October 7 rhetoric reveals a configuration marked by both continuity and controlled ambivalence. Continuity is evident in the reproduction of moral binaries, alliance-centered narratives, and strategic legitimations consistent with long-standing U.S. foreign policy discourse. Ambivalence emerges through the incorporation of humanitarian language, which, while ostensibly inclusive, ultimately operates to depoliticize Palestinian identity rather than reframe the conflict's political asymmetries.

In contrast to the explicitly unilateral and ideologically rigid framing characteristic of the Trump administration (Shah et al., 2021), Biden's discourse contains an internal contradiction in which moral condemnation of Hamas coexists with limited appeals to humanitarian compassion. This discursive hybridity suggests that post–October 7 U.S. presidential rhetoric operates through a dual logic: moral polarization coupled with selective humanitarianism. Taken together, these findings indicate that Biden's rhetoric does not merely reflect U.S. foreign policy positions but actively participates in constructing the conditions under which those positions are rendered ideologically acceptable. His speeches function as discursive instruments through which hegemony is maintained and asymmetrical power relations are legitimized under the universalizing language of morality and humanitarian concern.

**Table 5.** Discursive Mechanisms and Ideological Functions in Biden's Rhetoric (Oct–Dec 2023)

| Textual Features | Discursive Practice | Ideological Effects |
|---|---|---|
| Pronoun polarity (*we* vs. *they*) | Inclusive alignment of US–Israeli identity | Strengthening moral alliances; eliminating Palestinian institutions |

| Textual Features | Discursive Practice | Ideological Effects |
|---|---|---|
| Evaluative diction ("evil," "barbaric," "innocent family") | Emotional polarization across genres | Justifying asymmetric empathy; moralizing violence |
| Metaphors ("shield," "monster," "darkness") | A narrative of civilization rooted in the framework of the "war on terror" | Naturalizing Israel's defense; moralizing geopolitical hierarchies |
| The lexical field of humanity ("aid," "civilians," "corridor") | Reactive response to global criticism | Depoliticizing Palestine; legitimizing selective empathy |
| Intertextuality with US policy rhetoric | Recontextualizing "self-defense" and "shared values" | Reproducing hegemonic discourse; maintaining continuity of US–Israel policy |

## 3.4. Counter-Discursive Elements and Ambiguity

Although the corpus overwhelmingly reinforces a pro-Israel ideological orientation, several counter-discursive moments do appear. For instance, in the November 1st address, Biden stated, "Every innocent life matters, Israeli and Palestinian alike." This gesture momentarily disrupts the established hierarchy of empathy by extending moral consideration to Palestinians. However, the discursive impact of this assertion is quickly neutralized by the subsequent reaffirmation of Israel's right to self-defense, revealing the structural limits within which such dissenting notes can operate. The infrequency of these moments, identified only three times across the corpus, highlights their symbolic rather than transformative role in the broader rhetorical architecture.

This limited ambiguity exemplifies what Fairclough (2013) terms "ideological struggles within discourse," wherein dominant ideological formations strategically incorporate minimal elements of critique to maintain legitimacy. Biden's humanitarian references, therefore, do not constitute an ideological rupture but rather function as a recalibration of hegemony in response to intensified international scrutiny. In effect, his post-October seven rhetoric constructs a cohesive ideological narrative that both reinforces U.S.-Israel alignment and sustains moral credibility through narrowly circumscribed humanitarian discourse.

The interplay across textual, discursive, and social levels demonstrates how linguistic mechanisms such as pronoun polarity,

evaluative diction, and selective humanitarianism work to naturalize geopolitical asymmetry as a morally justified stance. While the discourse appears superficially inclusive, its underlying structure ultimately reproduces long-standing hierarchies of legitimacy within U.S. foreign policy.

## 4. Discussion
### 4.1. Moral Framing and the Construction of Legitimate Asymmetry

The findings of this study reinforce and extend existing scholarship on moral framing in U.S. presidential crisis discourse. Previous studies have demonstrated that moral language, particularly references to terror, innocence, and democracy, functions as a key ideological resource for legitimizing foreign policy actions and asymmetric power relations (van Dijk, 1998; Chilton, 2017). The present analysis confirms this pattern but reveals a more moderated configuration in Biden's post-October seven rhetoric. Rather than relying on overt demonization or absolutist binaries, Biden's discourse constructs a moral hierarchy in which Israel occupies a position of ethical legitimacy, while Palestinian suffering is acknowledged but largely depoliticized.

This finding aligns with earlier research on U.S. Middle East rhetoric that highlights the selective moralization of conflict actors. (Fareh et al., 2025). However, unlike Bush-era discourse, which framed military action through an uncompromising "good versus evil" logic, Biden's rhetoric introduces humanitarian recognition without fundamentally reconfiguring political agency. This suggests an evolution in rhetorical style rather than a transformation in ideological substance. Moral framing, in this context, does not merely justify alignment with Israel but renders that alignment ethically necessary, narrowing the discursive space for alternative interpretations that foreground Palestinian political claims.

Theoretically, this supports Fairclough's (2013) argument that discourse stabilizes power relations by constructing moral "common sense." While this study does not claim a causal relationship between discourse and policy outcomes, it demonstrates how language contributes to the normalization of geopolitical asymmetry by embedding it within a framework of ethical legitimacy. The contribution here lies in showing how moral framing operates not through exclusion alone, but through selective inclusion that depoliticizes subordinate actors.

### 4.2. Strategic Ambivalence and Hegemonic Credibility Management

Beyond moral framing, the analysis identifies strategic ambivalence as a central feature of Biden's rhetoric. This finding resonates with Wodak's (2021) theory of the "politics of justification," which emphasizes rhetorical

flexibility as a means of maintaining legitimacy under conditions of heightened scrutiny. Previous studies have often treated ambivalence as inconsistency or contradiction; however, the present findings suggest that ambivalence functions as a stabilizing mechanism that allows hegemonic discourse to adapt without structural change.

Compared to earlier administrations, Biden's rhetoric displays greater oscillation between security imperatives and humanitarian concern. This difference can be explained by contextual factors rather than ideological rupture. The post-October 7 period is characterized by intense international media attention, polarized domestic politics, and growing global skepticism toward U.S. moral authority. These conditions necessitate rhetorical strategies capable of addressing multiple audiences simultaneously. As such, ambivalence emerges not merely as a stylistic choice but as a response to structural pressures embedded in contemporary governance.

Importantly, this study diverges from research that interprets humanitarian language as evidence of ethical reorientation (Alashqar, 2024). While humanitarian references increase after November 1, their function remains constrained. They do not challenge the dominant security narrative but mitigate reputational risk and manage perceptions of U.S. complicity. This supports van Dijk's (2006) notion of positive self-representation, while extending it by showing how limited humanitarian contradiction can soften ideological rigidity without undermining it.

At the same time, caution is warranted in attributing all ambivalence to deliberate rhetorical design. The findings may also reflect genuine institutional tensions within U.S. foreign policy, where humanitarian norms and strategic commitments coexist uneasily. Acknowledging this possibility aligns with CDA's interpretive openness and guards against overly deterministic readings of political discourse.

## 4.3. Reflective Engagement and Methodological Limitations

In line with CDA's epistemological stance, this study recognizes the plausibility of alternative interpretations. While the analysis foregrounds the legitimizing function of moral and humanitarian discourse, it is possible to read Biden's humanitarian references as sincere ethical commitments rather than strategic depoliticization. Similarly, ambivalence may reflect policy incoherence rather than calculated equilibrium. Recognizing these interpretive possibilities strengthens analytical reflexivity and situates the findings within broader debates on political intention and discursive agency.

Methodologically, the study is limited by its focus on a small corpus of five formal speeches delivered during a specific crisis period. While this

enables depth and contextual sensitivity, it constrains generalizability. Differences between this study and others may therefore stem from corpus selection and analytical focus. Studies employing larger datasets, interviews, or media texts may capture greater rhetorical variation. Moreover, CDA reveals how discourse legitimizes power but cannot establish causal links between rhetoric and policy behavior. Consequently, conclusions must remain grounded in discursive, rather than behavioral, inference. Future research could address these limitations by triangulating presidential discourse with congressional debates, media framing, or public opinion data. Such multi-arena analysis would help clarify how moral legitimacy circulates across discursive fields and how it shapes broader patterns of ideological acceptance.

## 4.4. Theoretical and Empirical Implications: Reframing Moral Legitimacy in Crisis Discourse

The primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how moral framing and strategic ambivalence interact to sustain asymmetric alliances during moments of crisis. While moralized foreign policy discourse is well documented, this analysis shows how contemporary presidential rhetoric blends security logics with selective humanitarianism in a manner that stabilizes, rather than challenges, hegemonic structures. This supports and extends existing CDA scholarship by identifying *ambivalence itself* as a legitimizing resource.

Empirically, the study fills a gap in the literature by providing a crisis-specific analysis of Biden's rhetoric following October 7, 2023—a period that has received limited systematic attention. Unlike studies that focus on long-term trends or media discourse, this research captures the discursive dynamics of immediate crisis response, revealing how legitimacy is negotiated under acute pressure.

At the same time, the findings caution against claims of a new paradigm in U.S. foreign policy moralization. Rather than signaling transformation, the evidence points to ideological continuity maintained through adaptive rhetorical strategies. Further comparative research across administrations and crises is necessary to determine whether *soft moral securitization* represents a broader discursive shift or a context-specific adaptation (Parta et al., 2025).

## 4.5. Policy Implications: Toward More Transparent and Balanced Crisis Communication

Although grounded in discourse analysis, the findings carry important policy implications. First, moral framing that consistently privileges one actor risks undermining U.S. credibility as a mediator in protracted conflicts. Second, clearer differentiation between humanitarian concern

and geopolitical commitment could enhance transparency and reduce perceptions of selective empathy. Third, institutional communication guidelines that encourage the political recognition of affected populations, not only their humanitarian suffering, may contribute to more ethically coherent crisis communication. These implications do not prescribe specific policy outcomes but underscore the importance of discursive responsibility. In an era of heightened global visibility, presidential rhetoric plays a constitutive role in shaping the moral conditions under which foreign policy is accepted, contested, or resisted.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates how President Joe Biden's post–October 7, 2023, rhetoric constructs moral legitimacy around an enduringly asymmetrical geopolitical relationship. By integrating moral framing, selective humanitarianism, and strategic ambivalence, Biden's discourse presents US support for Israel not merely as a policy preference but as an ethical imperative. This analysis shows that such linguistic strategies do more than describe geopolitical events; they help naturalize unequal power relations by embedding them in a vocabulary of protection, empathy, and moral clarity. In doing so, the study contributes to broader scholarship on how political language shapes the moral imagination of international crises and stabilizes hegemonic authority in moments of heightened global scrutiny.

At the theoretical level, this research refines understandings of moral discourse as a legitimizing device in foreign policy communication. Rather than relying on overt antagonism or traditional "us versus them" binaries, Biden's rhetoric exemplifies a more diffuse moral logic that blends humanitarian concern with security imperatives and an emerging form of moral securitization. Empirically, the study offers one of the first critical discourse analyses of Biden's Israel–Palestine rhetoric during the immediate crisis period, showing how selective empathy and discursive flexibility operate to maintain credibility across diverse audiences. These insights highlight the discursive mechanisms through which political leaders frame asymmetry as morally necessary, thereby influencing how conflicts are perceived, debated, and justified.

Nonetheless, the study's scope is shaped by important methodological constraints. The analysis relies exclusively on textual data from a limited set of speeches and does not incorporate audience reception, media responses, or comparative political messaging. Without these additional perspectives, the findings cannot fully speak to the broader social or political effects of the discourse. Addressing these limitations requires a

more multimodal and comparative research design that integrates public opinion data, media framing, or cross-national analyses of moral rhetoric in crisis communication.

The implications of these findings extend beyond academic debate. By illustrating how moral language can transform deeply asymmetrical power relations into narratives of ethical responsibility, the study underscores the central role of discourse in shaping democratic accountability in foreign policy. When strategic preferences are framed as moral imperatives, the space for public scrutiny narrows, and complex political realities risk being obscured by seemingly universal ethical claims. A more transparent distinction between humanitarian concern and geopolitical commitment could improve democratic deliberation and foster more responsible crisis communication. For policymakers, understanding the legitimizing power of moral discourse may support the development of communication strategies that are both ethically grounded and internationally credible.

Future research should build on these insights by examining how different political leaders deploy moral legitimacy in crisis situations and how various publics respond to such strategies. Comparative studies across regions and political systems, as well as empirical analyses of reception and media circulation, would deepen understanding of how moral discourse travels, adapts, and gains political traction. Such research would help clarify when moral rhetoric functions as a tool of ethical engagement and when it serves to reinforce asymmetrical structures of power.

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