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The Position of American orientalists on the Israel-Palestine conflict in the 21st century

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Amerikan Orientalistlərinin 21-ci əsr İsrail-Fələstin münaqişəsinə mövqeyi

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INTRODUCTION.

Relevance of the topic and degree of research coverage

The Israel-Palestine conflict continues to be one of the most important and controversial topics in world politics. It shapes how the world talks about justice, security, and identity. The United States is an important force in shaping not only the trajectory of the conflict but also how it is interpreted across the globe. While Orientalism is typically seen as a dated theory that pertains to colonial times, this thesis argues that its ideas still appear in U.S. foreign policy today. More specifically, how Palestinians are often described as irrational, menacing, or helpless is evidence of the continued influence of Orientalist ideas.

Scholars like Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi, and Lisa Hajjar have explained how the West bypasses or sabotages the Palestinian political voice. On the other hand, American Orientalist intellectuals like Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes have presented Islam and the Middle East in such a way that serves legitimate American interests. However, until now, little research has looked at how precisely these Orientalist concepts are constructed into the official policy language—such as speeches, think tank reports, and government documents.

Research gap and justification

While Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) has been a foundational book of critical theory and postcolonial studies, some writers argue that Orientalism as a paradigm is out of date in today's globalized and hybridized world. Writers like Robert Irwin (2006) and Daniel Martin Varisco (2007) feel that Orientalism reduces complexity to uniformity in Western scholarship or has been overused so much that it loses some of its original sharpness. Despite these reservations, this thesis believes that Orientalist patterns of thought are wedded to U.S. foreign policy language, specifically about the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Most recent scholarship either talks about Orientalism abstractly or deals with the political history of US Middle East policy. Yet, there remains a manifest failure of contact between contemporary American foreign policy discourse—especially presidential rhetoric, National Security Strategies, and think tank publications—and persistent Orientalist attitudes. Few have worked hard to trace how these Orientalist inclinations continue to resurface in discussing Palestinian political agency and Israeli legitimacy.

By bringing together critical theory and close analysis of official U.S. documents and speeches, this study aims to bridge the gap between academic ideas and the real political language used in policymaking. It shows that Orientalist ways of thinking not only still exist,

but also actively shape how political rights, legitimacy, and security are framed when it comes to the Israel-Palestine conflict. While American policymakers do not take ideas from Orientalist thinkers per se, the ways of thinking that Orientalism introduced into intellectual and political analyses have become so deeply ingrained that they continue to shape foreign policy language without anyone even noticing. This thesis therefore argues that Orientalism remains an important instrument for analyzing international relations and U.S. foreign policy during the 21st century.

Purpose and objectives of the research

The main purpose of this thesis is to explore the broader context in which American Orientalist scholars have helped shape how U.S. foreign policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict is understood and explained. Rather than claiming that these thinkers directly influenced policymakers, the study focuses on how their ideas have contributed to the larger narratives and ways of thinking that continue to guide U.S. policy on the issue.

The precise objectives of this research are:

- To compare Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes, two leading intellectuals of American Orientalist thinking, to the way they represent Islam, Arab politics, and the conflict over Israel and Palestine in their academic writings.
- To analyze how Orientalist ideas—not necessarily direct allusions to academic scholars—are expressed in U.S. foreign policy lexicon, especially in presidential speeches, National Security Strategy documents, and congressional hearings on the Israel-Palestine issue.
- In an effort to explore the role of influential American think tanks (such as the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Hudson Institute) and government agencies (such as the U.S. Department of State and the Congressional Research Service) in spreading discussion that perpetuates Orientalist thought as ongoing within policymaking.
- To explore how Palestinians are represented in this discourse, particularly during moments of conflict, and how they are likely to be constructed as threats to peace, security, and stability.
- To understand how Orientalist ideas played a role in shaping important U.S. decisions, especially when the U.S. recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017 and in how it reacted to the Gaza conflicts in 2014, 2021, and 2023.

- To think about the bigger effects of Orientalist thinking still being part of U.S. foreign policy, particularly how it makes Palestinian rights seem less certain and helps keep Western political influence strong.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 situates the research theoretically and conceptually within the broader tradition of Orientalism and international political discourse. Chapter 1 begins with a critique of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism and his understanding of the "Other" in general and how Western intellectual traditions have traditionally depicted the East as inferior, irrational, and in need of domination. The chapter then turns to the work of celebrated American Orientalist scholars Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes and weighs their work in the field of studying Islam and America against American scholarship in these fields. Their judgments are compared to counter-narratives from critique scholars such as Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi, and Lisa Hajjar. The chapter then goes on to discuss the way Orientalist discourses situate themselves within institutions in the guise of U.S. think tanks and government institutions such as the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the U.S. State Department, and the Congressional Research Service. Synthesizing theoretical critique with institutional critique, this chapter lays the ground for the discourse analysis that follows.

Chapter 2 presents the descriptive qualitative methodology adopted in the current study to outline how Orientalist narratives form U.S. foreign policy discourse on the Israel-Palestine issue. It provides details of the use of discourse analysis in examining official texts, presidential addresses, and think tank reports. The chapter outlines the selection of two case studies—Trump's 2017 Jerusalem declaration and U.S. responses to Gaza clashes in 2014, 2021, and 2023—to be the foundations for identifying Orientalist themes. It also mentions the limitations of the study, e.g., restricted access to internal decision-making and need to take into account likely bias in the media and institution sources.

Chapter 3 comprises three interconnected parts, each covering a specific space of U.S. foreign policy discourse where Orientalist narratives are most relevant.

The first section explores how Orientalist reason dictates the general tone and organizational pattern of U.S. foreign policy discourse on the Israel-Palestine conflict. It represents repeated images in which Palestinians are defined as irrational, violent, or incapable of legitimate political action, and Israel is rational, democratic, and consistent with Western values. These patterns are particularly found in presidential speeches, National Security Strategy documents, and U.S. comments. Department of State, where Palestinians are

continuously constructed as security or humanitarian needs, not political rights or historical justice. This paragraph demonstrates how Orientalist dualities such as civilized and uncivilized and order and chaos are invoked to rationalize U.S. alignment with Israel by silencing Palestinian voices.

The second section covers the U.S. move to declare Jerusalem Israel's capital, which was revealed by the Trump administration in December 2017. This is a case of a major policy change for which Orientalist argumentation is utilized to legitimize it. White House and State Department official speeches are analyzed with think tank writing and media responses to reveal Palestinians being erased or established as enemy figures in dominant discourse. The argument in favor of this decision is overwhelmingly reliant on threads of religious fate, the timelessness of Jewish rights, and the unreliability of Palestinian players, all of which underpin a distorted narrative based on Orientalist assumptions.

The final part looks at how the United States responded to the Gaza conflicts in 2014, 2021, and 2023, paying close attention to the way narratives around violence and victimhood were constructed. This section examines official speeches, press briefings, and publications by the Congressional Research Service to show how U.S. officials typically presented Israeli military operations as acts of self-defense. In contrast, Palestinian resistance was often described in terms that suggested chaos or terrorism. These discourse patterns reproduce deeper Orientalist assumptions that represent Israeli power as legitimate and Palestinian struggle as irrational or illegitimate. The unequal treatment of civilian casualties, international law, and ceasefire negotiations further illustrate the ideology hierarchy of Orientalist speech. The section below explains these kinds of stories are not the exclusive domain of one administration or policy event but continue to frame U.S. foreign policy speeches in different political climates and throughout history.

Research question and hypothesis

This research looks at how Orientalist scholars in the United States have shaped the way U.S. foreign policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict is framed in the 21st century. The main research question guiding this study is: In what context do Orientalist scholars in the United States construct and explain U.S. foreign policy towards the Israel-Palestine conflict? The assumption on which this research is based is that Orientalist perspectives—especially those developed by scholars like Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes—not only describe the Middle East but actually influence how U.S. decisionmakers frame it and justify their actions to others as well. The hypothesis is that these scholars help frame U.S. foreign policy through

narratives built around civilization and security—where Israel is shown as rational and in line with Western values, while Palestinians are often portrayed as irrational, threatening, or not ready for political responsibility. These ideas are then picked up and repeated in official U.S. language, including presidential speeches, national security documents, and publications from major think tanks.

CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Orientalism, first introduced by Edward Said, has played a major role in shaping how the West views and talks about the East—especially when it comes to Islam and Arab identity. In the case of the Israel-Palestine conflict, these ideas haven't just stayed within academic books or literature; they've also influenced how American scholars, politicians, and institutions talk about the region and its people. Scholars like Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes played a major role in bringing Orientalist ideas into the way the U.S. thinks and talks about foreign policy. In their writings, Palestinians were often portrayed as irrational, threatening, or not mature enough for serious political participation. And such views were not only put forward by individual scholars, but were also taken up and propagated by influential institutions, including think tanks and governmental institutions. That makes it worth looking at where such views came from and how they've influenced the discourse of U.S. politics—especially as they still influence the way Palestinians are portrayed today in ways that are often simplistic, unfair, or one-sided.

1.1. Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) and the concept of the "Other"

In the book Orientalism (1978), Edward Said's theory of Orientalism was constructed as a method of resistance against dominant Western understandings that for centuries depicted the East as backward, exotic, and requiring Western direction. These understandings were not innocuous misconceptions — they were intricately linked with systems of colonial power and control (Said, 1978).

Of the most significant ideas in Orientalism is the one about the "Other"- how the West constructed the East as essentially other and less than. According to Said (1978), this "Othering" allowed colonialists to justify their dominance by depicting Middle Eastern civilizations as irrational, erratic, and violent. These were not objective or even true descriptions, but rather constructions based on the fears, fantasies, and desires of the West.

Said (1978) argued that terms like "East" and "West" are ideological rather than objective terms, themselves creations and smelteries born of political and cultural forces. To be more accurate, the East was always envisioned through the romanticized, fantasized screen by which most Westerners remembered, wrote, or learned it. Literacy, written histories, and scholarship were all vehicles for spreading the fantasized perception of the East. A clear example of this is found in Benjamin Disraeli's novel Tancred, where he writes that "*the East is a career.*" This phrase reflects how the Orient was viewed not as a place with its agency, but as a region to be explored, ruled, and used for Western interests (Said, 1978, pp. 4–9).

This is the kind of strategy put forward by writers like Rashid Khalidi and Lisa Hajjar. Khalidi (2013), paraphrasing US diplomatic language, holds that US policymakers have habitually described Palestinians neither as political subjects with legitimate rights, but as peace enemies whose plans must be foiled. He contends that words like "peace" and "security" are used in such empty definitions that they normalize and take for granted Israeli interests, gagging Palestinian voices. This supports Said's (1978) argument that the East is understood not as it truly is, but through a Western lens shaped by idealized or pragmatic interests.

Legally, Lisa Hajjar (2005) discusses how Israeli military courts in the occupied Palestinian territories treat Palestinians. She explains how the courts operate on assumption-based assumptions presuming Palestinians to be inherently threatening. In her research, she finds that suspicion comes before evidence, i.e., individuals are being judged based on stereotypes rather than facts. This process restricts individual agency and reinforces general narratives that portray Palestinians as a constant threat.

Yet, not everybody shares such an impression. To Bernard Lewis (1993), Western experts establish the Islamic world according to real cultural and historical conditions, rather than imagination. To Lewis, the belief that the Orient is a product of Western invention dismisses the fundamental problems in Middle Eastern society, which are responsible for Middle Eastern political problems and resistance to democratic reform.

Said also examines how individual constructions of the East aid the discussion as a whole. A passionate example is that of French writer Gustave Flaubert writing about Egyptian woman Kuchuk Hanem. She never has the opportunity to speak for herself in his writings; instead, she is objectified and described from solely Flaubert's viewpoint. Said refers to this example to comment on a recurring trend in Orientalist literature: the East is being described but not typically afforded the opportunity to speak for itself (Said, 1978, pp. 186–190).

One of the most powerful arguments made by Said in his analysis is that much of what the West "knows" about the East is based on books, not actual experience. Unlike Europe's knowledge of the ancient Greeks or Romans, where they had buildings and physical artifacts, the East existed largely by means of books, accounts of travelers, and scholarly treatises. This allowed Western scholars and authors to write the book—decide what was true, and how the East was to be described.

Conversely, Lewis argues that Western perceptions of the Middle East are not imaginary constructs but actual representations of verifiable and real political and social realities. For instance, he argues that the frequent collapse of democratic political institutions in Muslim

countries is not something that historians invent but a representation of real lived political realities (Lewis, 2003, p. 35). Moreover, Pipes (2007) blames Said for creating what he called a *"climate of fear"* among universities to discourage frank criticism of Islamic societies. For both Pipes and Lewis, Orientalist literature is not the tool of domination or distortion, but a real way of understanding an area marked by its internal contradictions.

Said is also interested in how Islam has been presented in these descriptions. Following the rapid expansion of Islamic empires after the death of Prophet Muhammad, European writers were inclined to respond with fear and hostility. Islam was colored in a bad light—termed in ways like plague, evil, or deviance. These pictures found themselves carried through Crusader texts and 19th-century travelers' tales, which would conventionally depict Muslims as illogical and threatening. Even contemporary scholars, though seeming to be neutral, tend to follow this pattern of discussing not the actual Orient, but rather a representation of it tailored to Western demands.

Rashid Khalidi (2013) repeats Said's thesis by describing how stories concerning American diplomacy and media consistently describe Palestinians and broader Islamic identities as inherently threatening regardless of their actual behavior. Lisa Hajjar (2005) adds that such accounts don't remain at the level of discourse—they are scripted into legal codes that assume Arab-Muslim identities as deviant or threatening. On the contrary, Bernard Lewis (1990) denies that such representations arise from Western imagination. He claims the perception that Islam-West conflict arises from real ideology differences, rather than misrepresentation. Muslim intolerance of the West, for Lewis, reflects a deeper rejection of civilizations grounds. Daniel Pipes (2001) also agrees, linking Western fears of Islam as no mad phobia, but in response to what he believes are Islamic movement political agendas.

Additionally, Said refers to intellectuals like Bernard Lewis, who moved from British to American intellectual circles. This move, according to Said, was not geographical alone—it was the extension and continuation of Orientalist thought to the other side of the Atlantic. He argues that American Orientalism became ever more entangled in the Cold War mindset, national security interests, and an intimate political affinity with Israel. These forces poured into Orientalist explanations a fresh, more geopolitically inflected flavor. Lewis is particularly criticized for making ideologically driven arguments dressed up as if they were objective academic analysis. One such example Given by Said is from Lewis's essay Islamic Concepts of Revolution, where Lewis defines the Arabic word thawra (revolution) as not a serious or concerted political movement but as a kind of sudden emotional surge—comparing it to the movement of a camel tripping from the ground.

Said views this analogy as very dismissive, implying that Lewis tries to dismiss Arab political awareness and present revolutionary activities as being irrational and unrefined (Said, 1978, pp. 315–316). Said also blames Lewis for distorting historical accounts in order to serve his case. He refers to two accounts by Lewis of the 1945 anti-imperialist demonstrations in Cairo. In them, Lewis makes minor adjustments to evidence in order to authenticate his claim that Islamic societies are inherently anti-Semitic. By doing so, asserts Said, Lewis reduces complex political movements to emotive mob activity, characterizing Islam as an essentialized, fixed system of belief incapable of accepting modern thought or democratic values. What may seem to be objective historical writing, Said argues, is actually fulfilling a specific ideological agenda—posed as scholarship but based on prejudice (Said, 1978, pp. 317–320).

Said (1979) critiques Western liberalism and Zionist ideology for converging to produce a ruling narrative that dis-empowers Palestinian presence, agency, and voice. As Said puts it:

> *"The identification of Zionism and liberalism in the West meant that insofar as he had been displaced and dispossessed in Palestine, the Arab had become a nonperson as much because the Zionist had himself become the only person in Palestine as because the Arab's negative personality (Oriental, decadent, inferior) had intensified"* (Said, 1979, p. 57).

This reveals how Palestinians are not only physically displaced but also symbolically erased by a doubled process of ideological exclusion and Orientalist projection.

Rashid Khalidi agrees with Edward Said's assertion, Khalidi (1997) writes about how Zionist discourse—most times supported by Western powers—has always depicted Palestine as a territory that is unoccupied by a native population. It was, he argues, employed to erase Palestinian presence and rights on the land. He claims that *"in the early days of the Zionist movement, many of its European supporters—and others—believed that Palestine was empty and sparsely cultivated,"* and that *"widely propagated by some of the movement's leading thinkers and writers"* (Khalidi, 1997, pp. 100–101). But Bernard Lewis provides a contrasting viewpoint. Lewis (1982) criticizes Said for politicizing Middle East studies. According to Lewis, it was indeed Orientalist intellectuals, and not politically motivated in an aim to marginalize and dominate, who were incited by actual intellectual interest in what languages, cultures, and religions dominated in the Middle East. This is what he says precisely, *"The Orientalists… devoted their lives to trying to understand the language, the literature, the civilization, and the religion of the Middle Eastern peoples"* (Lewis, 1982, p. 5). Lewis

contends that Said's criticism unfairly underestimates Orientalist scholarship and distorts their motivations.

Said notes:

> *"Thus it is legitimate and acceptable to be for Israel and against the Palestinians. The more active principle stemming from this axiom is that you will very often find articles by Israelis about Israel in public circulation, but very rarely articles by Arabs about themselves"* (Said, 1979, p. 59).

The Western media environment, particularly in the United States, magnifies Israeli perspectives while serially marginalizing Palestinian voices. Said uses an example to demonstrate how, in the 1973 war, The New York Times had published an Israeli lawyer's opinion, followed by what was called Arab opinion written by a former U.S. ambassador to Syria, showing how Arabs are allowed to be heard only through mediators (Said, 1979, pp. 59–60).

He draws a very strong analogy to colonial dynamics of representation, likening, *"It would be exactly like sending a white 'black affairs' officer to tell a visiting Western intellectual what the South African black majority really was, really wanted, really felt"* (Said, 1979, p. 61). Palestinians cannot represent themselves and are represented through Israeli or Western discourse. This is just one example in a broader pattern in which, as he formulates it, *"Zionism always undertakes to speak for Palestine and the Palestinians; this has always meant a blocking operation, by which the Palestinian cannot be heard from (or represent himself) directly on the world stage"* (Said, 1979, p. 67).

This is also the view of Rashid Khalidi, according to whom Palestinian identity is shaped mostly in Israeli or American debate and not Palestinian debate. Palestinians have thus been denied their political subject status (Khalidi, 2013, pp. 12, 23). Lisa Hajjar gives this argument a legal context by illustrating how Palestinian voices are silenced structurally in Israeli courts and within the larger legal system, where they are habitually viewed as inherently suspect or threatening (Hajjar, 2005, p. 9). Bernard Lewis counters this by asserting that silencing Arab voices is largely the result of internal authoritarian regimes, not Western exclusion (Lewis, 1993, p. 167). Daniel Pipes is even more emphatic in maintaining that Western academia and media are pro-Palestinian—opposing Said's Orientalist attacks directly (Pipes, 2001). These widely variant readings define the terms of the broader argument regarding who gets to define Palestinian identity and control its political future.

As evidence to support his assertion, Said quotes Western intellectuals like Saul Bellow and Stephen Spender who visited and relied on Israeli *"Arab experts"* to learn about Palestinian existence in occupation. Their findings validate Orientalist paradigms by confirming Palestinian reality only when presented filtered through Israeli discourse (Said, 1979, pp. 60–61). Said also denounces hegemonic American media consensus for suppressing voices of opposition. He describes how The Sunday Times published in 1977 a report of Israeli torture of Palestinians—a report that was essentially blacked out in the U.S. press, only being picked up by The Boston Globe (Said, 1979, p. 64).

Said warns against the danger of viewing Palestinians as mere obstacles, claiming,

> "*Much of the despair and pessimism that one feels at the whole Palestinian-Zionist conflict is each side's failure in a sense to reckon with the existential power and presence of another people… and worse, to pretend that the Other is a temporary nuisance"* (Said, 1979, p. 75).

This is the core of Orientalist thinking—the presumption that the Other will eventually dissipate or be assimilated into the will of the ruling authority.

1.2. Reproducing the "Other": key American orientalist scholars and their influence (Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes)

After introducing Edward Said's powerful critique of Orientalism and his explanation of how the idea of the "Other" shapes how the West sees the East, this section looks at several American scholars who have continued or reshaped these ideas. Said believed that Orientalism was not just an academic subject, but a way of thinking that influences how the West has viewed—and still views—the East (Said, 1978).

This section looks at the ideas of Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes. Although their styles are different, both often describe the Islamic world as resistant to change, leaning toward authoritarian rule, and not fitting well with Western values. Highlighting the core arguments in their work helps to establish a foundation for the next chapters, which analyze how such representations appear in U.S. policy discourse on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Both Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes have written frequently about the "Middle East," but neither of them clearly says where the region begins or ends. In his work, Lewis tends to treat the Middle East more as a cultural and historical space shaped by Islam's long relationship with the West, rather than as a specific place with set borders. Pipes, who is still active today, also sees the Middle East as the heart of the Islamic world, paying close attention to its religious

and political role. Even though he often refers to countries like Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, he doesn't define the region in strict geographical terms. Instead, he presents it as a symbolic space where religion, politics, and identity are closely tied together.

One of the most prominent voices among American Orientalist thinkers, Bernard Lewis had a significant impact on how the West came to view Islam and the Middle East—especially after the 9/11 attacks. His works didn't just describe Islam as different from the West, they helped shape the very policies that guided U.S. engagement in the region.

In *The Crisis of Islam* (2003), Bernard Lewis described the tension between Islam and the West as a deep-rooted clash between civilizations that has developed over centuries. He did not focus much on political or historical reasons like colonialism or foreign intervention. Instead, he claimed that hostility toward the West came mainly from religion and culture. *"For bin Ladin and those who follow him,"* Lewis wrote, *"this is a religious war, a war for Islam against infidels, and therefore, inevitably, against the United States"* (Lewis, 2003, Introduction). This view suggested that violence against the West came not from specific political events, but from a deeper cultural clash.

Lewis also portrayed Muslim societies as driven by emotions rather than reason. *"To humiliation was added frustration... After humiliation and frustration came a third component… contempt"* (Lewis, 2003, p. 33), he explained. This kind of language made Muslim anger seem irrational, instead of grounded in real grievances. When discussing jihad, Lewis focused mainly on its violent aspects. He wrote that *"for most of the fourteen centuries of recorded Muslim history, jihad was most commonly interpreted to mean armed struggle for the defense or advancement of Muslim power"* (Lewis, 2003, p. 72). This interpretation ignored more peaceful meanings of the term and supported the idea that Islam is especially warlike. For instance, organizations like the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) offer a broader understanding of jihad. According to UNAOC, jihad refers to the obligation on all Muslims—both individuals and communities—to fulfill God's will by leading a virtuous life and promoting Islam through peaceful means such as preaching, education, and writing. It also includes the right, and indeed the duty, to defend the community against aggression.

He also argued that Muslim countries failed to modernize because of their own internal problems, not because of outside influence. *"The record, with the exception of Turkey, is one of almost unrelieved failure"* (Lewis, 2003, p. 156), Lewis claimed. He said that democratic institutions *"almost invariably ended in corrupt tyrannies"* (Lewis, 2003, p. 156). By blaming

Muslim societies themselves, he ignored the impact of colonialism and Western support for dictators.

These ideas appear throughout Lewis's other works as well. In "*Islam and the West"* (1993), he portrayed the Muslim world as being caught in a long-standing rivalry with the West. For instance, he wrote: *"Traditional Muslim scholars did not normally undertake the study of Christian or Jewish thought or history, and they could see no honorable reason why Christians or Jews should study Islam"* (Lewis, 1993, p. 105). Statements like this portrayed Muslims as intellectually isolated, reinforcing the common stereotype of a *"closed Islamic mind."*

Lewis was also very critical of those who challenged Orientalist ideas. He claimed that calling Orientalism a problem was a misuse of language and even said it reflected a larger distortion of truth (Lewis, 1993, p. 101). Rather than responding directly to Edward Said's points, he dismissed his critics as being dishonest or misguided. This kind of response made it seem like the West stands for logic and truth, while the East represents emotion and confusion.

In *Faith and Power: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (2010), Lewis painted a picture of Islam and the West as two very different worlds—especially when it came to how religion and politics interact. He began by referring to a well-known passage in the New Testament, where Jesus says, *"Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."* Lewis saw this as the foundation of a Christian tradition that separates church and state. Islam, on the other hand, was described very differently. According to Lewis, the idea of separating religion from the state *"would have been meaningless"* in early Islamic history. From the beginning, he argued, Islam united spiritual and political power in the figure of the Prophet Muhammad—who was not just a religious leader, but also a head of state, a military commander, and a lawgiver (Lewis, 2010, pp. 27–31).

This became one of the core Orientalist threads in his argument: that Islam is inherently theocratic, while the West has learned to divide religion and government. He even claimed that common Western concepts like "church" and "state," "sacred" and "secular," do not really translate into classical Arabic, because the concepts themselves did not exist in Islamic thought—at least not until Western influence brought them in (Lewis, 2010, pp. 38–41).

He also emphasized that even resistance to colonial rule was often framed in religious rather than national terms. Figures such as Shamil[1] in the Caucasus or Ahmed Barelvi[2] in India were presented as religious leaders mobilizing people under the banner of Islam, not nationalism (Lewis, 2010, pp. 121–125). However, this interpretation is Orientalist, as it tends to disregard the political and anti-colonial agendas of such movements. While their resistance was framed in religious terms, it clearly had the effort to question and resist imperial rule involved as well.

What made Bernard Lewis's work especially influential was that it didn't just stay within the walls of academia—it reached the ears of policymakers. His arguments gained real traction among U.S. neoconservatives, especially after 9/11, when his emphasis on ideology as the root cause of terrorism helped shape the narratives that justified the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and other American interventions in the Middle East. As Edward Said pointed out in Orientalism, scholars like Lewis often give political agendas a sense of authority by making them seem like objective, expert knowledge.

These ways of thinking are also clear in the work of Daniel Pipes, another important figure in American Orientalist thought. In his 2007 review of Edward Said's Orientalism, Pipes strongly defended traditional Orientalist scholarship. Instead of engaging directly with Said's arguments, he claimed that Said had created *"a climate of fear"* in academic spaces (Pipes, 2007). According to Daniel Pipes (2007), Said's book caused *"lasting damage"* by lowering the quality of research and making young scholars *"afraid to say anything positive about the West or critical about Islam."*

Pipes denied that Orientalism was politically motivated or racist. He described Said's work as more ideological than scholarly and presented himself as someone defending free academic discussion. But at the same time, he still suggested that only Western scholars could truly give objective and reliable knowledge about the Muslim world (Pipes, 2007).

Pipes often described Arabs and Muslims as overly sensitive and too ready to believe in conspiracies. He argued that because of Said's influence, it had become *"virtually impossible"*

[1] Imam Shamil (1797–1871) was a Dagestani Avar leader and third Imam of the Caucasian Imamate. He is best known for leading a steadfast resistance to Russian imperial expansion in the North Caucasus during the 19th century. Between 1834 and 1859, he united several North Caucasian tribes into the Islamic fold and led a long jihad to gain independence for the region.

[2] Ahmad Barelvi (1786–1831) was a Muslim reformer and Indian leader who initiated a jihad movement in the early 19th century with the aim of creating Islamic rule and opposing British colonialism and the growing Sikh Empire in North India. Like Imam Shamil in the Caucasus, Barelvi's struggle is often used as an example of how anti-colonial resistance in many Muslim societies was shaped primarily through religious frameworks, rather than emerging from modern nationalist ideas.

to write critically about Islam without being accused of bias (Pipes, 2007). By saying this, he made it seem like criticism of Orientalism was a form of censorship. But he ignored the power imbalance that Said had pointed out. Instead, he claimed that the real danger to academic freedom came from political correctness—not from Western bias.

Pipes also pushed back against the idea that Western dominance was built on Orientalist ideology. Instead, he said it came from real advantages—like better technology, stronger economies, and more powerful armies in the 19th and early 20th centuries. From his perspective, Said overlooked these facts and offered an incomplete view of history. Pipes believed Orientalism wasn't about racism or superiority—it was simply a reaction to global power dynamics at the time (Pipes, 2007).

In the end, Pipes (2007) argued that Said fell into the same trap he criticized: being stuck in the past. He said that Western scholarship had changed a lot since the 19th century and now treated non-Western cultures with more respect and fairness. In his view, the version of Orientalism that Said described no longer existed.

Still, by casting Said as someone who silenced honest scholars and painted Western academics as victims of political bias, Pipes kept the old Orientalist story alive. He repeated the idea that the West is logical and open-minded, while the East is too emotional and defensive. So, even though he rejected the label of Orientalist, Pipes continued to promote the same dividing lines between "us" and "them" that Said was trying to break down.

You can also see Orientalist thinking in Daniel Pipes's book *The Long Shadow: Culture and Politics in the Middle East* (1989). For instance, Pipes says *that "Muslims had a harder time with twentieth-century life"* (Pipes, 1989, p. 27). This kind of broad statement makes it sound like Muslim societies naturally struggle with modernity, reinforcing the stereotype that they're behind the times or unable to adapt.

He also claims that *"Judaism and Christianity appear far more closely linked to each other than either is to Islam. […] In contrast, Islam seems alien"* (Pipes, 1989, p. 27). This paints Islam as something foreign and unfamiliar, even though it shares many beliefs and values with Judaism and Christianity. It creates a divide between the West and Islam, as if the first two belong together and Islam doesn't.

Pipes also raises alarm about Muslims in the U.S., claiming that many Muslim organizations secretly support creating an Islamic state in America (Pipes, 1989, pp. 195–196). He warns that their polite public image hides a deeper plan to change American society using

Islamic law (Pipes, 1989, pp. 199–201). This kind of framing fuels fear and suspicion, suggesting that Muslims are quietly working against American values.

Pipes's ideas contribute to a bigger fear-based narrative—one that sees Islam not just as different, but as dangerous. Like Bernard Lewis, he presents Islam as a kind of rival civilization, where Muslims are either extremists or people who need to be watched and managed by the West.

In his book "In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power " (1983), Daniel Pipes presents a familiar Orientalist view by describing Islam as more than just a religion—he sees it as something that completely shapes every part of a Muslim's life, leaving little room for separation between faith and politics. He writes, *"Islam is not just one aspect of life, like politics or economics; it is life itself, complete and indivisible"* (Pipes, 1983, p. 113). This kind of framing makes it seem like Muslim societies are naturally theocratic—where religion and politics can't be separated.

Pipes also describes Islamic revival movements as emotional reactions to decline, saying, *"Islamic civilization today is in decline and its adherents respond by trying to recapture past glories"* (Pipes, 1983, p. 24). This paints Muslims as stuck in the past, driven by nostalgia, rather than as thoughtful or strategic actors in today's world.

When it comes to secularism, Pipes claims that it's *"a Western import and still foreign to most Muslims,"* and that *"Islam supplies the ideal ideology for political activity"* (Pipes, 1983, p. 57). Statements like this ignore the diversity of Muslim-majority societies and treat Islam as a fixed, unchanging way of life that's inherently at odds with modern ideas.

He pushes this further by saying things like *"Islamic values obstruct progress"* (Pipes, 1983, p. 101) and that *"repression and intolerance stem from Islamic teachings themselves"* (Pipes, 1983, p. 142). These claims suggest that Islam itself is the main reason for political and social problems in Muslim countries, rather than looking at things like colonialism, inequality, or external influence.

Overall, both Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes continue to shape how the U.S. understands the Middle East and Islam. Their ideas don't just stay in academic books—they influence media, think tanks, and foreign policy. This shows how deeply Orientalist thinking is still woven into Western political culture.

1.3. Constructing the "Other" in U.S. foreign policy discourse

This section is a continuation of the theories outlined earlier. It discusses how Orientalist thinking has affected the discourse of U.S. foreign policy. Scholars and ideologues like Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes constructed the Muslim "Other" in academic and ideological terms. This section illustrates how similar thinking is mirrored in political speeches and official statements—especially with regards to the Israel-Palestine issue.

The 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS), released under President George W. Bush (2001-2009) after the 9/11 attacks, clearly shows how Orientalist ideas influenced U.S. foreign policy language. Even though Islam is never directly mentioned, the NSS draws a strong line between "freedom-loving" societies and "tyrannical regimes," reflecting the kind of division Edward Said (1978) described between a "rational West" and an "irrational East," and echoing Bernard Lewis's (2003) view of Islamic societies as resistant to modernization.

One of the main features of the NSS is how it justifies preemptive war, warning that *"rogue states and their terrorist clients"* must be stopped before they can use weapons of mass destruction (NSS, 2002, p. 15). The term "rogue states" mainly refers to Muslim-majority countries like Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, supporting Daniel Pipes's (1983) framing of political Islam as a natural threat to the West.

The NSS also embodies the United States as a generous power which is extending democracy and open markets: *"The United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe"* (NSS, 2002). This is a copy of the classical colonial notion of a "civilizing mission" as described by Said (1978) and criticized by Rashid Khalidi (2020).

When it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the NSS claims to be neutral but makes Palestinian statehood dependent on conditions: *"If Palestinians embrace democracy, the rule of law, and firmly reject terror, they can count on American support"* (NSS, 2002, p. 9). As Lisa Hajjar (2021) points out, framing Palestinian rights as something they have to earn limits their political agency. At the same time, Israel is presented as a functioning democracy, and most of the responsibility for achieving peace is placed on the Palestinians (NSS, 2002, p. 9).

During his Jerusalem speech in 2008, President George W. Bush reasserted U.S. dedication to a two-state solution with Israel and Palestine coexisting peacefully and securely as neighbors. This dedication came, however, with many conditions. Bush made a point that the Palestinians would become a state only if they bettered their economy, security, and

governance: *"The Palestinians need to build their economy and their political and security institutions. And to do that, they need the help of Israel, the area, and the world"* (Bush, 2008). By presenting Palestinian political legitimacy as something they had to earn through reforms and external help, Bush reflected Orientalist ideas that non-Western societies need guidance to succeed—an idea discussed by Edward Said (1978) and also seen in Daniel Pipes' portrayal of political Islam as lacking democratic traditions (Pipes, 1983).

Bush's speech also made the contrast between Israel and Palestine very clear. Israel was shown as a strong and stable democracy, while Palestine was described as weak and dependent, echoing Bernard Lewis's idea that Middle Eastern societies struggle with governance and modern political systems (Lewis, 2003). Although Bush characterized that *"both sides would have to make difficult choices,"* the majority of the responsibility fell on the Palestinians, i.e., they were required to *"confront terrorists and dismantle terrorist infrastructure"* (Bush, 2008). Such speechifying rhetoric validates Lisa Hajjar's (2021) statement that Western discourse usually limits Palestinian political identity as being primarily security-oriented.

Compared to the Bush administration, President Barack Obama's (2009-2017) 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) takes on a different tone and focus. The clear divisions seen in the 2002 NSS—like good versus evil and freedom versus terror—are softened, and instead, there is more attention on working with other countries, building strong institutions, and promoting mutual respect*: "No one nation—no matter how powerful—can meet global challenges alone"* (NSS, 2010, p. 1). This new discourse seems to depart from the bare Orientalist binaries faulted by Edward Said (1978) and the civilizational framing set out by Bernard Lewis (2003), suggesting a more diplomatic and inclusive tone instead.

When addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the 2010 NSS reiterates a two-state solution: *"We support the goal of a two-state solution that ensures Israel's security and Palestinians' aspirations for a viable state of their own"* (NSS, 2010, p. 24). Even this language is less skewed than Bush's policy, which attached Palestinian statehood greatly to their conduct, as it continues to prioritize Israel's security. As Lisa Hajjar (2021) explains, this formulation places Palestinian political rights on the back burner and depends on satisfying external conditions.

In spite of the fact that the Obama presidency changed the tone and style of American foreign policy, the Orientalist way of thinking behind it did not change. To move from explicit divisions to more diplomatic rhetoric did not change the essential belief in American exceptionalism or the assumption that Palestinian rights are conditional. This ongoing trend

serves to support the main argument of this paper: Orientalist thinking still has a profound influence on U.S. policy in regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict today but in a more subtle and guarded way.

President Barack Obama's 2013 speech in Jerusalem tries to present U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a more empathetic and hopeful way. Although the speech moves away from the sharp divisions used in earlier U.S. language, traditional Orientalist ideas still remain. These ideas continue to highlight American leadership, support for Israeli legitimacy, and present Palestinian rights as conditional.

Obama makes the Jewish experience of suffering a human experience, that *it "contains within it the universal human experience"* (Obama, 2013). What sounds sympathetic is subtly giving privilege to the Zionist narrative and giving less space to Palestinian voices, a trend already criticized by Edward Said (1978). Obama, in honoring Zionism as a triumph of freedom in its most purest form, downplays the colonial character of Palestinian displacement, a trend Rashid Khalidi (2020) has pointed out.

Though less combative, Obama's rhetoric still revolves around security. Obama reiterates America's *"unshakeable"* commitment to Israel (Obama, 2013), replicating ideas that were already used in Bush's 2002 NSS and Obama's 2010 NSS. This aligns with Daniel Pipes's (1983) assertion that Muslim countries need Western protection to remain secure.

Obama makes Palestinian statehood contingent on certain conditions, such as the acceptance of Israel as a Jewish state and of "real borders" (Obama, 2013). Such an argumentative strategy treats Palestinian sovereignty as something to be achieved, rather than a right, consistent with the Orientalist discourse that Khalidi (2020) criticized.

The focus now shifts to the Trump administration (2017-2021) to examine how U.S. foreign policy rhetoric about the Israel-Palestine conflict perpetuated or broke with earlier Orientalist patterns. The discussion looks at two particular moments: Trump's 2017 Jerusalem recognition speech, and a 2020 statement following the signing of the Abraham Accords.

The Trump presidency brought a sudden shift in the way U.S. foreign policy talked about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially with President Donald Trump's 2017 speech recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Even though Trump spoke about peace and respect for all religions, his speech still followed Orientalist thinking by placing most of the responsibility for achieving peace on Palestinians and the wider Middle East, while giving full and unconditional support to Israeli sovereignty.

Trump started his speech with the fact that earlier diplomatic efforts had turned out to be useless and fruitless: *"We cannot solve our problems by making the same failed assumptions and repeating the same failed strategies of the past"* (Trump, 2017). Such a statement paved the way for the more one-way use of American power and abandoned the multilateral line preferred in the Obama times.

Maybe the strongest moment of the speech was when Trump stated: *"Today, we finally acknowledge the obvious: that Jerusalem is Israel's capital"* (Trump, 2017). By describing this move as nothing more than a "recognition of reality," Trump overrode decades of international consensus and Palestinian insistence, which serves to support Edward Said's (1978) contention that Orientalist thinking tends to nullify the legitimacy of non-Western discourse.

Although Trump did utter peace, he spoke of Israel as a full, independent nation with the right of self-determination, whereas Palestinians were merely spoken of as needing reforms and promises for the future, rather than as possessing inherent rights. This uneven wording is to how Bernard Lewis (2003) and Daniel Pipes (1983) depicted Middle Eastern societies—as being politically underdeveloped and needing Western guidance.

Trump's speech also invoked civilizational binary oppositions, calling on *"civilized nations"* to opt for *"reasoned debate—not violence"* (Trump, 2017). By invoking the Middle East as a place of *"bloodshed, ignorance, and terror,"* Trump deployed age-old Orientalist stereotypes that place the West as rational and peaceful, and the East as violent and retrograde (Said, 1978; Hajjar, 2021).

US President Joe Biden's (2021-2025) public statements during and after the 2021 Gaza war painted a change of tone, less human rights-oriented and more diplomatic. But while the tone softened, Orientalist ideas persisted, only better diplomatically packaged. In the statement after the May 2021 ceasefire, Biden said: *"Israel has a right to defend itself against indiscriminate rocket attacks from Hamas"* (Biden, 2021). This resonated with the prevailing U.S. view that locates Israel as a rational democracy and suggests Palestinian movements as sources of violence and instability. While Biden was worried about Palestinian suffering, he framed it mostly as a humanitarian concern, rather than as a political injustice—a phenomenon denounced by Edward Said (1978) in which the "Other" is seen as a victim who needs Western sympathy instead of political rights.

Biden's statement that *"Palestinians and Israelis equally deserve to live safely and securely"* (Biden, 2021) also treated rights more as moral hopes rather than clear political rights.

As Rashid Khalidi (2020) explains, when Palestinian statehood is framed only as an aspiration and not as a basic right, it helps keep existing inequalities in place.

Biden's emphasis on *"quiet and relentless diplomacy"* (Biden, 2021) showed a move back to working with others compared to Trump's more one-sided approach. However, it still suggested that real progress would have to be led by the West. This continues the Orientalist idea, discussed by Daniel Pipes (1983) and Bernard Lewis (2003), that the Middle East cannot move forward politically without outside help.

During his 2022 Independence Day speech celebrating Israel, Biden reiterated America's solid commitment to the security of Israel and support for a two-state solution. Though his words were more balanced compared to Trump's explicitly one-sided policy, that Israeli security still took precedence over Palestinian political rights means that old asymmetry endures, according to Lisa Hajjar (2021).

Biden's speech articulates a new form of "civil Orientalism"—using softer, more courteous language, yet keeping the same United States and Israel in moral and political mid-position. In comparison to Bush's focus on security, Obama's softer voice, and Trump's pugnacious strategy, Biden's manner reintroduces diplomatic manners but does not depart from the deeply rooted Orientalist thinking that still prevails U.S. foreign policy.

Donald Trump's return to power in 2025 brought a strong comeback of unilateral and neocolonial language in U.S. foreign policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict. In a February 2025 press conference with Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump made the Orientalist and civilizational themes from his first presidency even stronger, especially when talking about the situation in Gaza. In a very bold statement, Trump said: *"The US will take over the Gaza Strip and we will do a job with it too"* (Trump, 2025). This openly neocolonial idea portrayed U.S. intervention as something positive and necessary, while completely ignoring Palestinian sovereignty. His proposal to move Palestinians out of Gaza—saying *"They instead can occupy all of a beautiful area with homes and safety"*—repeated old colonial ideas that tried to make forced displacement look like a generous act. This way of speaking treated Palestinians not as political actors with rights, but as helpless victims, a pattern strongly criticized by Edward Said (1978) and Rashid Khalidi (2020).

Trump's speech also leaned heavily on the old chaos versus order idea. He said*: "We cannot let terror rule Gaza anymore"* and promised to *"send in a team to stabilize and rebuild"* (Trump, 2025). This kind of language repeated Orientalist stereotypes, where Palestinians were shown as a source of chaos, and American action was described as saving and rebuilding—a

narrative similar to how Bernard Lewis (2003) presented the East as needing Western modernization.

At no point during his speech was Palestinian political agency referenced, Trump praised Arab leaders who fell in line with U.S. and Israeli goals but said absolutely nothing about Palestinian leadership or aspirations. His removal of the U.S. from the UN Human Rights Council and defunding of UNRWA—blaming it for *"funneling money to Hamas"*—also undercut international efforts at protecting Palestinian rights and added legitimacy to Lisa Hajjar's (2021) argument about how humanitarian aid is falsely framed as funding terrorism.

Trump also spoke about a return to a so-called era of "optimism" led by America and Israel: *"Together, America and Israel will renew the optimism that shined so brightly just four years ago"* (Trump, 2025). In this vision, Palestinians were completely left out, showing that peace was imagined as something to be achieved without them—or even at their expense.

Compared to Bush's security-focused language, Obama's more cautious multilateralism, and Trump's own earlier 2017 unilateralism, Trump's 2025 discourse moved even further into open neocolonial thinking. This shows that under certain political conditions, Orientalist ideas not only survive but become even stronger, fully supporting the main argument of this thesis.

1.4. Institutionalizing the "Other": the role of think tanks and government agencies

While early criticism of Orientalism more often focused on the manner the East was constituted in literature and scholarship (Said, 1978), Orientalist ideas have increasingly made their way into more traditional settings in recent years. Today, think tanks and policy institutes are some of the prominent institutions through which these thoughts find their way into actual policy decisions.

As Abelson (2006) puts it, American think tanks directly and indirectly affect policy by setting priorities, advising leaders, and framing public debates. Organizations like the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) have been particularly influential in setting Middle Eastern agendas mainly from American security and geopolitical interest angle.

Bardauskaite (2021) explains that these think tanks are not just describing the Middle East — they are actively shaping it as a place of instability, conflict, and strategic value for the United States. By doing so, they make instability seem natural for the region and make ongoing U.S. involvement appear logical and necessary.

Richard N. Haass also mentions the important place of think tanks as *"reservoirs of expertise"* and *"idea generators"* that shape the way policy discussions take place (Haass, p. 1). With their influence, they can shape what policymakers and even the public understand regarding the region.

The fact that such Orientalist scholars as Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes are present at these institutions strengthens these biases. Their activities—most notably Pipes's work at the Middle East Forum and his lectures at the American Enterprise Institute—continue to frame Islamism and Arab culture as incompatible with Western values.

Critical discourse analysis of those think tank papers that have high levels of impact reveals internalization of such frames. An example is WINEP's report by Ehud Yaari published in 2024, titled "How Hamas Is Trying to Shape the 'Day After' in Gaza." The report presents Hamas as a manupilative actor who seeks to reoccupy its position within the paradigm of political participation. For instance, Yaari cites Hamas to the effect that it *"agreed to abandon civilian rule—but only in the hope of returning to its military control, expanding its tunnel network, and recruiting fresh fighters,"* language that frames the group's participation in the government as a calculated move toward continued militancy.

Additionally, Yaari argues that *"to preempt the implementation of this Hamas plan for the 'day after,' the United States and other Western nations can caution Arab states, the PA, and other Palestinian actors against supporting the group's political return."* This phrasing casts the U.S. and its allies as prudent decision-makers who need to prevent a dangerous return of a radical group.

This strategic rhetoric builds Hamas—and Palestinian political forces more broadly—not only as adversaries but as necessary figures of the "Other." Hamas is portrayed as irrational, cunning, and ever-threatening, in constant need of monitoring and exclusion from legitimate political circles. The "resurrection," "tunnels," "terrorist proxies," and "manipulation" lexicon is a symbolic repertoire that positions Palestinian agency on subversive terms by necessity. The United States and regional allies, on the other hand, are represented as rational actors, charged with containing and governing the wayward "Other."

CSIS's May 2024 roundtable, "Where Does the U.S. Go From Here—Gaza: The Human Toll," reinforces the same discursive approaches. U.S. Ambassador David Satterfield, one of the principal U.S. policymakers who participated in and was present at the affair, described Hamas not only as a terror group but as a "terrorist military" based in Gaza *"in, under, around not only civilian infrastructure but humanitarian infrastructure as well."* This kind of

description of Hamas as a dual and covert threat is imaginable only as a cover for a legitimization of sweeping and indiscriminate security actions under the banner of anti-terrorism.

Furthermore, CSIS analysts emphasized Hamas's rootedness in Palestinian society. Reporter Nick Schifrin wrote, *"You don't meet a family who is anti-Hamas or pro-Hamas… Hamas is just within the family."* The implication is the spread of threat across an entire population, which blurs distinctions between combatants and civilians. It justifies military strategies that can disregard civilian protection and implies Palestinian political culture is inherently tainted.

These institutional narratives capture the deeper Orientalist logic of defining the Palestinian as a vague, inscribed threat. As Said maintained, the "Other" in Orientalism is not just other but inexorably so. In WINEP and CSIS documents alike, Hamas is disallowed any authentic political presence and is represented instead as a subversive power masquerading behind civilian fronts. As a result, Palestinian political ambitions are not recognized as reasonable or negotiable but rather as a threat to be contained.

While the main work of think tanks is to shape public opinion and push for specific policy recommendations from outside government, there are institutionalized government apparatuses like the U.S. Department of State and Congressional Research Service (CRS) that are within the institutionalized government frameworks and work to institutionalize and legitimize the original structures designed by think tanks. These government institutions not only legitimize the stories created by influential think tanks but also incorporate them into official reports, strategic plans, and diplomatic policy.

Rhetoric from the highest-ranking United States government figures, such as Secretary of State Antony Blinken, demonstrates the way security narratives, stability, and diplomacy are constructed along the axis of civilization and anarchy, reason and fanaticism—supreme precepts of Orientalist argument. This speech, delivered by Secretary Blinken in January of 2025, was made public officially by the U.S. Department of State in its public press release database, capturing the institution's official diplomatic stance regarding the war and the Middle East integration process. In his January 2025 speech "Toward the Promise of a More Integrated Middle East," Blinken logically positions Hamas at the center of the peace fence with the U.S. and allies as the rational, peace-seeking players. He portrays Hamas as more than the practitioner of violence but the spoiler of political aspirations: *"Hamas sought to spark a regional war that would undermine this agreement, aware that it would bring huge suffering to*

civilians across the board, including the Palestinian people whose cause they claim to represent." This is an account that strips Hamas of legitimate political grievances and represents it as a force of chaos, reminding one of Said's idea of the "Other" as irrational, destructive, and always outside the circle of negotiation.

Blinken continues to explain:

> *"Now, the timing of Hamas's attack was no accident. Israel's growing integration in the region – the prospect of normalization with Saudi Arabia – posed an existential threat to Hamas's power, its ambitions to dominate the Palestinian political landscape, its raison d'être, which is the rejection of two states and the destruction of Israel."*

By contrast, U.S.-backed Israeli moves are couched in "deterrence," "strategic partnership," and "defense of democracy" rhetoric even where civilian casualty in Gaza is acknowledged. Blinken asserts, *"These deep challenges aside, Israel's efforts have come far short of addressing the enormity of need in Gaza."* This assertion has the implicit shift of responsibility and relocates the discussion within the context of failed aid supply chains, rather than structural violence. Innocent civilians are not framed as criticism of warfare strategy but as an unfortunate side effect within a broader strategic context.

Through juxtaposing an "irrational, intractable" enemy against "responsible actors" like Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the U.S., Blinken's speech reaffirms Orientalist tropes of Western political and moral dominance. The speech avoids assigning Palestinian agency outside of narratives of state governance under the umbrella of a reformed PA, fueled by U.S.-approved transitional authorities. Thus, the "Other" is once more only legible in terms of a threat to regional security or a passive recipient of externally promoted peace—a subject of management, not of political subjectivity.

This ideological talk pattern is sustained throughout the U.S. State Department's 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Israel, West Bank, and Gaza, as an administrative voice covers up the same ideological assumptions. Even though presenting a neutral human rights report seems to be done in an even-handed way, there shows up asymmetrical framing as concerns Palestinian and Israeli protagonists.

Palestinian political structures are mostly defined by Hamas, whose violations are listed in categorical terms: *"Hamas committed unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings; torture and other physical abuse of detainees; arbitrary arrests and detentions; and significant restrictions on freedom of expression and the press."* This definition abstracts Hamas

as the de facto Palestinian government in Gaza, overshadowing other political movements or civil society efforts.

By contrast, Israeli abuses are predominantly presented as being done by "authorities" rather than government officials or by the army. As one example: *“Israeli authorities failed to prevent or investigate adequately settler violence in the West Bank.”* The wording keeps the violence distant from state policy and instead places it within institutional disintegration.

The Congressional Research Service is a research agency of the U.S. Library of Congress, authorizes reports to lawmakers that shape legislation and policy. These reports are likely to be strategic assumptions drawn from discursive patterns set by think tanks but, as they are directed to Congress, they carry a higher degree of official weight and policy importance. October 4, 2024 CRS report titled "Israel and Hamas Conflict In Brief: Overview, U.S. Policy, and Options for Congress" reveals deeply embedded asymmetries in line with Edward Said's theory of the constructed "Other." The report constructs the Palestinian side virtually entirely in terms of chaos, humanitarian need, and terrorism, and presents Israeli actions as defensive, strategic, and ultimately reasonable.

Early on, the text copies an unyielding duality: *"Israel has been fighting against the Palestinian Sunni Islamist organization Hamas (a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, or FTO)"* and stresses that *"over 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals (including 46 U.S. citizens in Israel) were murdered on October 7."* Palestinian deaths, more than 41,000, are contrastingly attributed to "the Hamas-run health ministry," a rhetorical device that alienates the US government from the legitimacy of the source and hesitantly casts doubt upon the accuracy of the figures. This kind of framing creates the illusion of a hierarchy of credibility, in which Israeli and American sources are taken at face value and Palestinian ones are to be doubted.

Moreover, the CRS report evinces bureaucratic Orientalism in its handling of international law. When the International Court of Justice (ICJ) determined that Israel had to *“halt its military offensive... which may inflict... conditions of life that could bring about [Palestinians'] physical destruction in whole or in part,”* the report simultaneously states that *"Israel insisted that its actions did not 'risk the destruction of the Palestinian civilian population.”* No criticism follows, nor the court's jurisdiction legitimized—once again accorded privilege to the Israeli account as reasonable and more clearly credible.

Similarly, the Biden Administration's own internal review is quoted as ruling that *“defense articles covered under NSM-20 have been used by Israeli security forces... in instances*

inconsistent with its IHL obligations." But the report is equally averse to branding Israeli assurances "not credible or reliable" or halting the provision of military assistance. This paradox is not questioned or deemed problematic. While Israel's behavior is denounced, it is nevertheless regarded by the U.S. and the broader West as a "responsible and reliable" ally. This suggests that within Western discourse, Israel is given a privileged status and held to a different standard.

This chapter has shown that Orientalist ideas, which first appeared in academic and literary writings, have been systematically built into American think tanks, government institutions, and official political language, shaping U.S. foreign policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict in the 21st century. Building on this foundation, the next chapter will move to the discussion part and directly address the research question: In what context do Orientalist scholars in the United States construct and explain U.S. foreign policy towards the Israel-Palestine conflict?

CHAPTER II. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research approach and design

This research utilized a qualitative descriptive method to examine how U.S. Orientalist scholars interpreted the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the 21st century and how this interpretation shaped U.S. foreign policy discourse and decision-making. A qualitative design was most suitable for this research because it facilitated a close reading of multiple texts, including scholarly works, policy briefs, and official government reports. As Sandelowski (2010) discussed, descriptive qualitative research was particularly useful in the areas where there had been no study previously, for it gave a simple and easy summary of people's experiences and views. As compared to other qualitative methods—such as phenomenology or ethnography—that try to interpret or explain, this one wanted to summarize what was happening and determine commonalities. Since this research asked questions like "who influenced policy? ", "what were they saying?", and "how was it reflected in official discourse?", it was well-suited to the aims of qualitative descriptive research (Neergaard et al., 2009). Another advantage of this method was that it was pragmatic and saved time and was thus a suitable choice for research that needed to be carried out on a limited time frame or with few resources (Sandelowski, 2000). Overall, this approach helped to reveal how Orientalist thinking expressed itself in U.S. foreign policy discourse.

2.2. Data collection methods

This study utilized primary and secondary data to develop an equilibrated understanding of the effect of Orientalist opinions on U.S. foreign policy. In combining the two sources, the study developed a multi-dimensional explanation of language and rationale applied in policy-making.

a. Primary data collection

The primary information included official speeches delivered by American presidents such as George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden, and National Security Strategy reports of 2002, 2010, 2017, and 2022. Messages from the American Department of State and Congressional Research Service reports focusing on U.S. policy with respect to Jerusalem and Gaza wars were also included. In addition, reports from prominent think tanks like the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) were analyzed. These reports had a tendency to reflect policy-oriented language shaped by Orientalist rhetoric. The study sought to find common narratives

and rhetorical tropes that framed Palestinians as threats or vulnerable humanitarian subjects, while consistently framing Israel as a moral and strategic ally.

b. Secondary data collection

Secondary data was used to provide theoretical background and support conclusions obtained from primary sources. Secondary data included books and peer-reviewed journals on Middle East studies, U.S. foreign policy, and Orientalism, specifically books by Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi, and Lisa Hajjar. While Said's Orientalism theory was the paradigmatic core of the research, Khalidi and Hajjar elaborated on the ways these ideas operated within U.S. legal and diplomatic discourse. The writings of Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes were viewed as main ideological texts, in light of their broad influence over U.S. policy and public opinion. Other Middle East studies historical and academic sources were consulted to provide more context and verify the research findings.

2.3. Discourse analysis framework

The study applies critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how language is used to reproduce power relations and ideological dominance within U.S. foreign policy. CDA is particularly suitable for identifying implicit structures of meaning, especially those that rely on dichotomies such as civilized/barbaric, rational/irrational, and secure/violent. These binaries are essential to Orientalist discourse and frequently appear in U.S. policy documents, where the West is portrayed as orderly and moral, and the East—as represented by Palestine or Islam—is framed as chaotic, emotional, and threatening. CDA enables the study to focus on discursive formations rather than individual word choices, allowing an assessment of broader patterns in representation, legitimation, and exclusion. The analysis pays close attention to how U.S. officials frame Palestinians not as political actors with legitimate grievances but as security challenges to be managed. Moreover, by tracing how the language of security, freedom, and democracy is selectively applied, the study uncovers the epistemological hierarchies that underpin U.S. engagement with the conflict.

2.4. Case study approach

The study used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the way language was used to maintain power relations and support certain ideologies within U.S. foreign policy. CDA was especially relevant in identifying latent levels of meaning, particularly those constructed around oppositions like civilized and barbaric, rational and irrational, or secure and violent. These oppositions were central to Orientalist thinking and often appeared in U.S. policy documents,

where the West was portrayed as organized and moral, while the East—especially Palestine or Islam—was described as disorderly, overly emotional, and dangerous. Through CDA, the study focused on larger discursive structures rather than just specific word choices. It allowed one to learn about larger trends in how individuals or groups were portrayed, how certain things were explained and justified and others excluded or unspoken.

The research was particularly careful to consider how U.S. leaders defined Palestinians—not as political agents with political ambitions or legitimate complaints, but chiefly as security concerns to be contained. In addition, by looking carefully at the differential deployment of words like "security," "freedom," and "democracy," the study revealed the tacit systems of knowledge and belief that underpinned the U.S. engagement with the conflict.

2.5. Limitations of the methodology

While this study provided a complex analysis of how Orientalist rhetoric influenced U.S. foreign policy, there were several limitations. Firstly, the study did not attempt to provide an instant cause-and-effect between what Orientalist authors wrote and what specific policy measures were undertaken. Instead, it attempted to trace trends and similarities among numerous texts with an eye toward illustrating the ways in which specific understandings became conventional over time. Second, the research had no access to classified or confidential policy discussions, which were beyond the scope of the research. As such, the examination relied on public domain information such as speeches, reports, and publications. Although these were shaping sources, they could have represented only a segment of the overall policy-making process.

Third, the outputs of think tanks and media organizations often reflected institutional or ideological biases. While this was part of what the research sought to discover, it also had to be interpreted carefully. To manage this, the research cross-checked sources and compared discourse across different time periods and presidencies in an attempt to provide analytical fairness. Lastly, the research focused on discourse and not on material outcomes. While language possessed a powerful sway over ideas and the legitimization of actions, it was only one facet of the overall geopolitical decision-making process.

CHAPTER III. DISCUSSION

3.1. Orientalist representations in U.S. policy discourse on Israel-Palestine

The way the United States talks about the Israel-Palestine conflict is shaped not just by current political goals, but also by deeper ideas that have developed over many years. At the heart of this language are assumptions rooted in Orientalist thinking—stories that often show Palestinians either as threats or as victims needing sympathy, but rarely as real political actors with legitimate demands. Words like “security,” “democracy,” and “self-defense” are used often in U.S. foreign policy, but they usually work to keep a clear moral and strategic divide: Israel is seen as a reasonable, democratic partner, while Palestinians are portrayed as unstable or in need of change. When we follow these narratives in political speeches, national security strategies, think tank reports, and media coverage, it becomes clear that Orientalist ideas are still deeply present in how the U.S. frames its approach to this conflict.

3.1.1. Orientalist framing of security in U.S. foreign policy statements

Security has been a central pillar in the construction of U.S. foreign policy for decades. However according to Campbell (1992), *"Danger is not an objective condition. It is not a thing that exists independently of those to whom it may become a threat."* Security is not a value-free or objectively employed term; it is discursively constructed in terms that convey more pervasive ideological and political worldviews. Concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, American foreign policy far too frequently puts Israeli security on an absolute and primacy pedestal, and Palestinian political agency in the form of a potential threat to Middle Eastern stability — a binary opposition founded upon Orientalist presumptions.

Because there is such asymmetry, it is essential to challenge how the concept of "security" is framed in strategic documents of primary importance. To that end, this section begins by examining the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) documents, which explicitly state the country's world vision and perceived danger. The 2002 and 2010 NSS have already been analyzed in Chapter 1 within their broader Orientalist background and post-9/11 international approach. Accordingly, this chapter now turns its focus to the 2017 and 2022 National Security Strategies released under the Trump and Biden administrations, respectively, to explore how the Orientalist concept of security has evolved in relatively more recent times. However, before proceeding to these documents, it is perhaps worth mentioning in passing the 2002 NSS to highlight a series of indicative citations to security discourse — particularly those that underpin binary constructions of threat and peace in the Middle Eastern context.

Maybe the most insistent trend in how America talks about the war between Israelis and Palestinians is Orientalist thought applied to the definition of "security." On many speeches and policy briefings, security doesn't just refer to military issues—it's also framed as a conflict between an innocent, rational West and an aggressive, irrational East. This provides the impression that Palestinians, and Middle Eastern powers generally, are volatile and menacing, while Israel is depicted as modernizing and capable.

This kind of thinking can be quite readily discovered in President George W. Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS). The strategy refers to "rogue states" and "irrational actors" and does not use "Islam" but the message fits into an easily recognizable Orientalist picture (NSS, 2002). These enemies are not presented as people the U.S. can negotiate with—rather, they are seen as threats that must be controlled. This is due to Said's theory of the "Other": when a people are deemed irrational or uncivilized, they cannot represent themselves or be included in diplomacy.

Under President Obama in 2010, the tone is less aggressive, but the same dynamic remains. His NSS reaffirms Palestinian claims to a state but continues to assert that the security of Israel must come first. This shows that Palestinians are still being made to feel that they have to "earn" legitimacy, while the legitimacy of Israel is treated as unquestioned and automatic (NSS, 2010). It continues the Orientalist trend of elevating one party over another.

The drift is once again stronger with Trump's NSS in 2017 and his address declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel. The rhetoric goes back to more active "us vs. them" rhetoric, American values being labeled good and Middle Eastern "autocratic regimes" as evil (White House, 2017). Palestine is not named, but this kind of rhetoric puts America and Israel together on one side of a confrontation of civilization. When Trump asserted recognizing Jerusalem was just *"recognizing the obvious,"* he bypassed Palestinian requirements as irrelevant—exactly the kind of action Orientalist scholars have described.

Even in Biden's more statesmanlike NSS reports (2022, 2024), this thinking continues. Israel's security is said to be something the U.S. will always protect, and Palestinian statehood is something that is wished for *"when conditions are right"* (NSS, 2022). This gives the impression that Palestinians can only have rights when the U.S. and Israel decide it is acceptable. Again, this takes away Palestinian agency and shows how the West controls the political arena of the "Other," as Said would contend.

Looking at these different administrations, what we see is that the deeper way in which the conflict is talked about remains relatively consistent. Even when there is softer rhetoric or

more diplomacy, Palestinians are unstable or needing reform, and Israel is dealt with as an acceptable partner to be negotiated with. This points to the grasp that Orientalist thinking has, where one becomes modern and the other does not.

We can also see the impact of thinkers like Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes. Lewis (2003) described Muslim societies as proof against democracy, and Pipes (2001) asserted that Islam is a cultural threat to the West. These ideas are not necessarily quoted verbatim, but they are reflected in the manner that U.S. leaders associate Palestinian movements with terrorism or view them as obstacles to peace. Although these thinkers are not named, their mindset influences the way in which the conflict is explained and described.

3.1.2. Orientalist representations of Palestinian political movements in U.S. discourse

U.S. foreign policy rhetoric consistently places Palestinian political movements, and Hamas and the PA more broadly, in opposition to one another. Whereas the PA is selectively represented as a legitimate political organization—qualifiedly—the latter is nearly universally characterized as an extremist, militant movement destabilizing the region. This opposition is characteristic of a broader Orientalist impulse to categorize political movements across the Muslim world as reformable or irreformable threatening.

One of the all-time examples of seizing that dualism was when President George W. Bush reacted to the 2006 Palestinian legislative election in which Hamas emerged victorious with a majority. Bush started out congratulating the exercise of democracy by stating that *"the Palestinians had an election yesterday... and the results of which remind me about the power of democracy,"* only to proceed and sully the saying by denouncing Hamas as illegitimate. He went on to say, *"I don't see how you can be a partner in peace if you advocate the destruction of a country as part of your platform,"* again*, "you can't be a partner in peace if your party has got an armed wing"* (Bush, 2006).These interpretations reinterpret a democratic outcome as not political rhetoric but instead as a security threat, translating political opposition into terms of insincerity unless U.S. and Israeli sanction is secured. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reinforced this construction by chanting that Palestinian government legitimacy was conditional upon the fulfillment of predetermined conditions.

She said that elected leaders must *"speak to the aspirations of the Palestinian people for a better life and for a peaceful life,"* and then broke that down by saying that this life *"can be achieved only through a two-state solution that recognizes the right of Israel to exist… and undertakes the obligations of the roadmap"* (Rice, 2006). Even with the ostensibly positive discourse, it serves to circumscribe Palestinian political legitimacy for those who are prepared

to be included in institutions established without them. Or alternatively, the PA has been framed in a more positive light in popular culture, but always conditionally.

One example is President Obama's Jerusalem address in 2013, when he stated, *"Palestinians must recognize that Israel will be a Jewish state and that Israelis have the right to insist upon their security"* (Obama, 2013). Palestinian political legitimacy is taken for granted as based on precooked agreement to Israeli security needs, and not political will or the Palestinian people's democratic project. The same imperative appears in official strategy reports. The Biden administration's 2022 National Security Strategy upholds that the United States *"will continue to stand with Israel to ensure its security, while supporting efforts to build a democratic and viable Palestinian state"* (NSS, 2022, p. 37). The comparison implies a hierarchy wherein Israel's security is absolute, yet Palestinian statehood is conditional and must be sanctioned.

Apart from state discourse, Palestinian activism is also reproduced Orientalist representations by think tanks. In a report issued in 2024, WINEP announced Hamas only agreed to give up civilian rule in Gaza *"only in the hope of returning to its military control… expanding its tunnel network, and recruiting fresh fighters"* (Yaari, 2024). Similarly, in a CSIS roundtable session, one of the interviewees stated, *"You don't meet a family who is anti-Hamas or pro-Hamas… Hamas is just within the family"* (CSIS, 2024).These types of explanations are coupled with the suggestion that Hamas is not only a complex political movement with complex constituencies, but an epidemic within Palestinian society—reducing that the population as a whole is complicit. Orientalist scholars such as Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes are responsible for such an ideological atmosphere.

Lewis had asserted that Muslim-world anti-Westernism is *"the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage"* (Lewis, 2003). Daniel Pipes had earlier asserted that Islamic political movements are necessarily hostile to democracy and that *"Islamic values obstruct progress"* (Pipes, 1983, p. 101). These ideas are intellectual rationale for policies that deny Palestinian political movements on cultural or civilizational, rather than real political, grounds. The above analysis illustrates the ways in which Orientalist assumptions remain influential over representation of Palestinian political movements in U.S. policy and popular discourse. To survive democratic opposition, players such as Hamas must only demonstrate that they can survive but must fully satisfy the approval of the West.

This is consistent with Edward Said's (1978) argument that Orientalism never granted the colonized or occupied a right to independent political subjectivity but should instead be "trained," "disciplined," or "reformed." The 2006 elections best demonstrate this. According to Khalidi (2013), the elections were not merely a political choice but also resistance to the existing order. However, American policymakers rebranded that choice as a crisis. By framing Hamas's victory as security, not politics, Bush and Rice were able to circumvent the Palestinian voters' decision, a dramatic example of what Lisa Hajjar (2005) has termed the securitization of Palestinian identity. This discursive tendency carries forward into subsequent administrations.

The 2022 and 2024 NSS reports observe the return of American support for Palestinian statehood only when “conditions allow”—i.e., only when Palestinians have given up on violence and accepted conditions imposed upon them unilaterally (NSS, 2022; NSS, 2024).

Conditionality entails that Palestinians should earn their stripes as Israel's legitimacy is taken for granted. Said (1992) has referred to this as the moral geography of Orientalism, where Western equivalents are rational and dependable, and non-Western players are constantly compelled to validate themselves. In addition, think tank accounts have the onus of rendering these representations concrete. CSIS accounts of Hamas as indistinguishable from Palestinian society hide the differentiation between civilian-political actor. This kind of logic allows for collective punishment and sanctions policy that offends civilian protection. As Hajjar (2005) continues to explain, such rhetoric criminalizes Palestinian identity and authorizes political and military exclusion. Finally, the inclusion of intellectuals like Lewis and Pipes makes clear the ideological agenda behind these accounts. By framing Islamism as aggressive in its nature or reactionary, they provide the epistemological license for policy intervention to ignore or suppress Palestinian resistance as illegitimate. These intellectual currents, repeated in American policy discussion, reinforce Orientalist hierarchies serving Palestinians and Israelis and the West, and not Palestinian political equality.

3.1.3. Orientalist narratives in think tank and media influence on U.S. policy rhetoric

U.S. policy discourse about the conflict in Israel-Palestine is shaped not only by government officials but also by influential institutions like think tanks and mainstream media. These institutions help build and circulate certain narratives by deciding what stories to present and how to present them. Doing so, they tend to borrow from Orientalist ideas, especially when describing Palestinian political culture and behavior. The Middle East Forum (MEF), the Hudson Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) generally interpret Palestinian political leaders through Orientalist frameworks. They tend to portray Palestinians as violence-prone, oppositional to democracy, and unable to be positive players for peace. This results in an impression where Palestinians are not considered political equals, but as impediments.

For example, the Hudson Institute has recently criticized recent moves to recognize Palestinian statehood. In a February 2024 article, the authors quoted Israeli concerns that America was using the idea of a Palestinian state as a threat to Israel. They said that *"the Biden administration [was] falling in love with the idea of the establishment of a Palestinian state and unilateral recognition as a means of pressure on Israel"* (Doran, Kasapoğlu, & Schachter, 2024). Although the tone is not quite as extreme as someone like Pipes, the substance is the same: Palestinian political recognition is not based on their rights or self-determination but simply allowed whenever it is for Israeli security. This is an Orientalist reasoning in which Palestinians are compelled to fit outside requirements to be valid.

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) also positions Palestinian political groups like Hamas as players who use democracy only for the sake of gaining power and ultimately controlling it in its entirety. In one article that commented on U.S. initiatives to promote democracy under the Bush administration, AEI experts wrote: *"Radicals such as Hezbollah and Hamas seem to have learned the mechanics of democracy to undermine it and establish total control"* (AEI, 2005). This refers to an Orientalist idea of democracy as belonging to the Western world, that when non-Western actors try to use it, they are going to desecrate it or misuse it.

The mainstream American media also contribute to echoing this kind of report by covering it asymmetrically. When Trump announced declaring Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017, CNN mainly reported on Israel's foreign and security reaction. Palestinian demonstrations were, however, described with violence- and disorder-related terms. For example, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was quoted as having stated the move would *"ignite a new intifada,"* giving the protest a threatening tone (CNN, 2017). The New York Times also

covered the opening of the embassy in the following manner: *"Dozens of Palestinians killed in Gaza as the U.S. opens embassy in Jerusalem"* (Kershner & Halbfinger, 2018). This reporting framed Palestinian deaths as numbers, with Israeli views described and incorporated explicitly. Such framing contrast supports an Orientalist order in which Palestinians come across as dangerous or unreasonable, while Israelis are presented as reasonable and peaceful. This is what Said (1978) termed the "moral asymmetry" inherent in imperial discourse.

As the above analysis illustrates, Orientalist discourse is not only replicated randomly but is sanctioned by institutions like think tanks and the U.S. media. These institutions are not simply circulating ideas — they are helping to build how Palestinians are understood in both public and political discourse. As Edward Said (1978) explains, Orientalism does not simply operate through cultural stereotyping. It also builds systems of knowledge that make inequality and exclusion normal — especially when Palestinians are characterized as threatening, irrational, or extremists instead of political actors.

An example is the work of Daniel Pipes at the Middle East Forum. He described Hamas as a mortal threat that Western leaders are not taking seriously. This fits into a broader pattern whereby Palestinian resistance is labeled terrorism and root causes like occupation or failed peace talks are ignored (Pipes, 2024). Palestinians are instead portrayed as being stuck in a culture of violence, an explanation that has gained traction in some policy circles.

The same logic is used by the Hudson Institute. In a 2024 article, they warned that recognition of a Palestinian state might "reward" Hamas for as long as it retains control over Gaza (Doran, Kasapoğlu, & Schachter, 2024). The implication is that Palestinians are not entitled to statehood until they completely meet external standards of behavior and peace. Khalidi (2013) asserts that such an opinion assumes Palestinians are not yet mature enough to be independent and necessarily favors Israeli opinions as more reasonable or responsible.

AEI is similarly reflective of this Orientalist thinking. In an article, they stated that Hamas had "learned the mechanics of democracy in order to undermine it." This is suggestive of the fact that when such movements as Hamas are elected, it is not embraced as legitimate democratic action, but instead as a trick. As Said (1992) so beautifully articulated, Orientalism not only describes — it defines who is in and who must be pushed aside.

The media also play a large part in reinforcing these skewed perceptions. For example, when Palestinians are being massacred, headlines employ collective nouns like "dozens killed," but Israeli voices get more individualized and emotional press coverage.

Lisa Hajjar (2005) has referred to this as the "hierarchy of victimhood" whereby Palestinian victimhood is normalized and Israeli victimhood exceptionalized and profoundly tragic. This causes the public and policymakers to think of Israeli actions as legitimate and Palestinian actions as dangerous.

Institutions like the Middle East Forum go even further and try to police who can speak. With programs like Campus Watch, they have targeted university professors who speak out for Palestinian rights or are critical of Israeli policy as "biased" or "radical" (MEF, 2021). Said (1992) explained that Orientalism operates not just by what is said, but by dictating who says it. Silencing protest voices enables Palestinians to be the talked about, not the talkers themselves.

An American Perspective of US Foreign Policy: Public Opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict at Brookings in 2014 demonstrated a persistent trend of highly polarized views in the public opinion of Americans. Shibley Telhami uncovered how *"Americans are deeply divided along partisan lines when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict"* (Brookings, 2014). This bifurcation tends to build corresponding images of the two groups: Israel will be seen as the democratic partner, and Palestinians more and more as a potential security threat. Such dualistic ways of thinking are not personal viewpoints—rather, they are more general discursive practices built up out of elite language and institution building.

Panelists at the event also argued about whether or not language would shape public opinion. Telhami noted that media and public opinion polls like to *pose "questions about Israel's right to self-defense"* but rarely question "Palestinian rights" (Brookings, 2014). Such biased framing imposes a master narrative under which Israeli security is accorded the highest priority and Palestinian structural contexts, particularly Gaza, are relegated to the margin. The daily silencing of Palestinian political and legal claims imposes a one-sided discourse that turns Israeli behavior into a militarized discourse and effaces the blockade and occupation context.

One of the most important observations from the debate was the power of elite discourse to define what the people believe. As one of the panelists noted, accurately as it would turn out, *"what elites say… matters a great deal in shaping public opinion"* (Brookings, 2014). This top-down impact is that Orientalist constructions—such as the construction of Gaza as violently or irrationally disposed—are not merely in official policy but seeped over into popular opinion via the media and political discourse. Popular opinion here is not constructed in isolation but shaped by the same ideological currents in U.S. foreign policy discourse.

The incident also raised the issue of how opinion poll language can shape results. Issues that put Palestinians in the role of spoilers to peace or reify Israeli victimhood allegedly provoke reactions in harmony with U.S. foreign policy positions. As one interviewee clarified, *"Polls are not neutral instruments; they are constructed in ways that respond to larger political narratives"* (Brookings, 2014). This position complements Edward Said's (1978) aphorism that language is never neutral. How conflict is labeled and defined is ideologically significant and recreates power relations via discourse.

Together, all of these accounts leave an indeterminate impact on U.S. foreign policy discourse. Prioritizing Israeli security, making Palestinian resistance menacing, and positioning the U.S. as part of "Western democracy" fighting "Middle Eastern radicalism" as a matter of course, this way of thinking reproduces Orientalist binaries. It doesn't simply describe policy — it delimits what policy is even conceivable.

3.2. Orientalist influences in U.S. discourse on the recognition of Jerusalem (al-Quds) (2017)

In 2017, the U.S. made a major and controversial move by officially recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, followed shortly by moving its embassy there. Even though this step was presented as something practical and realistic, the way it was talked about revealed much deeper ideas. Behind all the political explanations were long-held assumptions based on Orientalist thinking—where America’s support for Israel is shown as completely normal, justified, and even moral, while Palestinian claims are pushed aside, delayed, or ignored. When we look closely at the official speeches, policy statements, and how people reacted, it becomes clear that this wasn’t just about changing a policy—it was part of a larger story that continues to show Israel as part of the modern, civilized West, and Palestinians either as problems to be managed or as helpless victims needing charity.

3.2.1. Official U.S. justifications for the recognition of Jerusalem (al-Quds): traces of orientalist logic

The 2017 presidential proclamation that officially recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital is an example of the application of Orientalist thinking at times in United States foreign policy. President Trump characterized the move as simply a "recognition of reality," but such a line of argumentation presupposes that there is one version of truth. By calling it "long overdue" and as being a part of "principled realism," the announcement makes the Palestinian claims to East Jerusalem unreasonable or irrelevant (Trump, 2017). Edward Said (1978) warned that such political speech can be employed to ignore other people's views, especially those of colonized

or oppressed individuals. The statement confirms Israel's democracy and history but hardly mentions Palestinians—only in terms of religion or peace talks.

This verbal imbalance is also contributed to by the mention of "all civilized nations," a term which divides nations into two groups: nations which are assumed to be Western and rational, and nations which are assumed to be violent or irrational. Özchelik and Okur (2021) argue that this kind of framing is also very vulnerable to Evangelical Christian ideology, especially the conviction that Israel is destined to have a key role in biblical prophecy. Palestinians in this case are often presented as a problem to be managed or solved. During Trump, Evangelical figures like Mike Pompeo and Mike Pence were especially outspoken, and their theological ideas were echoed in the way the administration spoke about foreign policy. Although the statement at face value is pragmatic and innocuous, it is actually an articulation of a core religious doctrine that underpins the idea of Israeli control over Jerusalem. The terminology, therefore, hides a theological agenda behind what appears to be a political decision.

Finally, the report mentions Israel's political institutions like its parliament and courts but says nothing about Palestinian political institutions. In calling Jerusalem Israel's capital, it ignores that the city's status is still disputed in international law. This echoes Bernard Lewis's (2003) argument that the West has to protect its allies in unstable regions. But by doing this, it also hides the Palestinian political search. This is reminiscent of what Said (1978) called the "silencing" of the Other—excluding voices that are outside of the dominant narrative.

After Trump's official proclamation, the U.S. State Department released a statement making it clear that the move only reflected the "reality" that Jerusalem hosts Israel's central government buildings. The Secretary of State Tillerson explained that the move *"aligns U.S. presence with the reality"* that Jerusalem hosts Israel's legislature, Supreme Court, as well as offices of the President and the Prime Minister U.S. Department of State, 2017). By presenting it as a practical move and not a political one, the U.S. was behaving as if it were simply recognizing facts, rather than actively building the political future of the area. But from the point of view of discourse analysis, such rhetoric works to normalize Israel's claim to all of Jerusalem without paying attention to the fact that the status of the city is still in contention under international law. As Said (1978) has outlined, Orientalist rhetoric is apt to mask political violence by depicting it as belonging to a natural or rational world order.

Trump and Tillerson further maintained that the announcement of Jerusalem would help the peace process. But in claiming that they hoped *"a great deal for both Israelis and*

Palestinians," they left the impression that each side has an even balance of power—when there is a massive imbalance. Özçelik and Okur (2021) observe that such rhetoric is consistent with Evangelical theology that is pro-Israel as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, putting more weight on Israel than on Palestinian political rights.

This inconsistency is further evident when we look at Trump's 2018 tweet in which he announced that the U.S. had *"taken Jerusalem off the table."* While his administration claimed that it hadn't made any final moves on the city's status, that statement put Palestinian claims aside before any negotiation could occur. As Kattan (2018) describes, this broke with the U.S.'s past dedication to staying impartial and contravened international agreements like the Oslo Accords and United Nations Security Council Resolutions 476, 478, and 2334, all of which maintain that land may not be attained by force.

In this case, the embassy move was not just policy—it was a move to occupy territory in symbolic terms. Said (1978) explained that Orientalist power is exercised through domination over language and narrative—by dictating which voices matter and whose do not. By acting as if the position of Jerusalem already exists, and treating Palestinian claims as irrelevant or disruptive, the U.S. reaffirmed a power arrangement favoring Western constructions of logic and legitimacy. Kattan (2018) asserts that this discursive turn not only ignored international law but actively diverged from multilateral negotiation towards a religious nationalist agenda.

The U.S. explanation of policy in Jerusalem at the United Nations is similarly Orientalist in thinking mode, in which Western action is presumed to be morally correct and best by default. When U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley spoke to the UN General Assembly before the December 2017 vote condemning the announcement of Jerusalem, she never discussed the criticism as a legal or diplomatic disagreement. Rather, she framed it as an unwarranted attack on American sovereignty. She said, *"The United States will remember this day in which it was singled out for attack in the General Assembly for the very act of exercising our right as a sovereign nation"* (Haley, 2017). This framing positioned the U.S. as a responsible international leader wrongly targeted by the international community. This is in line with Said (1978) when he talks of the Orientalist tradition of self-defense, where Western powers represent themselves as rational and morally balanced actors, even when they are being questioned.

Haley also made a clear distinction between the U.S. and its critics. She maintained that America contributes to the world in the form of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance, and that the goodness had to be more valued than in criticism to the law: *"We nurture and sustain fragile peace… and we hold outlaw regimes accountable… it represents who we are. It is our*

American way" (Haley, 2017). This form of language puts the U.S. as a force of good and world order and describes others who disagree as chaotic or unreasonable. As Kattan (2018) explains, this form of moral framing shifts focus away from the legal status of Jerusalem and turns it into a debate about values—where the U.S. always gets to be on the good side.

Haley's threat to make the U.S. "remember" how states voted also illustrates how power operates through symbolic coercion. The threat to pull financial aid shows what Gregory (2004) describes as a "colonial present," where Western aid depends on political loyalty, rather than global norms. Far from taking seriously the legal issues of Jerusalem, the U.S. response was all about pride and moral ground. This shift from legal disagreement to moral absolutism is one of the fundamental features of Orientalist discourse, whereby Western conduct is assumed to be naturally correct and disagreement by foreigners is excluded from consideration.

The text of H.R. 257, the "Recognition of Jerusalem as the Capital of the State of Israel Act," introduced in January 2017 exhibits deep Orientalist assumptions in US law. The bill begins by offering a skewed history that spotlights a purportedly 3,000-year-old *"continuous connection"* between the Jews and Jerusalem, which they call their *"eternal and indivisible capital"* (H.R. 257, 2017, sec. 2.1). Such a framing simplifies Jerusalem's history as rich and complex by limiting its consideration to Jewish heritage and depicting it as an eternal, unchanging reality. Orientalist discourse, noted Edward Said (1978), tends to transform nuanced history into hard cultural facts supporting one dominant explanation.

The bill also redefines legal language by referring to East Jerusalem as "disputed" rather than "occupied," drawing on Jordan's 1988 relinquishment of its claim to the area to suggest that sovereignty has long since passed (H.R. 257, 2017, sec. 2.4). This is in direct opposition to the position of international law and UN resolutions, which continue to characterize East Jerusalem as occupied territory. Additionally, by detailing how Israel has "exceeded" international law (sec. 2.8–2.9) and as a guarantor of peace and religious co-existence, the bill positions Israel not only as valid but morally justified. Such positioning is part of a broader narrative of civilization wherein Western-aligned nations are portrayed as modern and righteous and other nations' rights and presence are absent or lamented, most especially the Palestinians.

The legislation also mandates that all documents of the United States identify Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and provides a deadline for relocating the U.S. embassy. It shows how recognition is not merely symbolic but rather made an integral part of regular legal and bureaucratic business. As Gregory (2004) argues, this is an instance of the "colonial present," where political domination is exercised through technical and legal language masking active

struggle and repressing the agency of colonized peoples. This, in turn, does not simply articulate Orientalist ideology in language—it injects it into the very tissue of U.S. policy and law.

3.2.2. Domestic and international responses through an orientalist lens

This part of the research analyzes the response of US officials and international players after the Trump administration's official announcement in December 2017 to declare Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. An example is a press briefing by White House Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Sanders answered local and foreign inquiries during the session, and her responses reflect how American political rhetoric articulates Orientalist reflection.

Speaking of the global outcry, Sanders termed the decision as a "bold and courageous" one with Congressional support on several occasions before it. This kind of presentation makes the action strong on morals and courage, not as a controversial political action. Western powers typically present their actions in the East as righteous and justified, even if harmful, says Edward Said (1978). In this case, Sanders positioned the U.S. as a moral force and downplayed the importance of worldwide opposition.

When asked whether other countries would follow the American lead, Sanders said she did not know of any such plans. Such a casual and neutral answer attests to the notion that the U.S. does not need anyone's permission to act—alone and on its terms. Kayyali (2013) explains how this Western independence is characteristic of Orientalist discourse, where the West acts upon its terms and ignores what others think.

Sanders also said the U.S. was still committed to the peace process and would keep supporting negotiations. This ignores how the U.S. shift to recognize Jerusalem already skewed one side's advantage—Israel. According to Said (1978), Orientalist discourse often positions Western action as neutral even when it is aligning with great powers.

Lastly, in reply to criticism from American allies such as the UK, Sanders congratulated the president for "following through" on his commitments. Simply doing what one said is, in this instance, framed as an act of leadership. This is an example of a type of moral certitude present in Orientalist discourse—where action by the West is considered right by default, and criticism is perceived as weakness or lack of consistency.

Vice President Mike Pence's speech to the Israeli Knesset followed the same formula of earlier U.S. statements, asserting that Jerusalem is "the capital of the State of Israel." Pence had referred to the U.S. recognition as a restoration of a historical truth and a statement of "historical truth." By referring to a 3,000-year-old biblical covenant and the "unbreakable bond" between

the Jewish people and Jerusalem, Pence appealed to religious history in a defense of political claims. This kind of framing avoids Palestinian narratives and considers them to be false or irrelevant. He even stated that *"the United States has chosen fact over fiction,"* words which clearly abandon any other narratives (Pence, 2018).

Pence used aggressive moral discourse, asserting the U.S. is for *"right over wrong, good over evil, and liberty over tyranny."* This dichotomy view presents the conflict as a civilizational divide, in which the U.S. and Israel are for civilization and morality, and the Eastern or Muslim "Other" poses a threat. His comment that Israel had "turned the desert into a garden" is a phrase of old-fashioned colonial ideas that justify domination by claiming to bring progress and civilization to empty or sparsely populated land.

International reactions stood in sharp contrast to this. At the emergency UN General Assembly session on December 21, 2017, many countries condemned the U.S. decision. Yemen's representative called the move "null and void," warning that it broke international law and threatened regional peace (A/ES-10/PV.37, p. 2). Alongside Turkey and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Yemen sponsored a resolution calling for the U.S. to reverse its decision. These countries stressed that Jerusalem is still "an occupied Palestinian city," and warned that turning religious or historical ideas into political tools could increase conflict.A majority of the speakers also criticized the U.S. for weakening international organizations like the UN and for behaving in violation of international treaties. For them, the U.S. action was a clear sign that it was partial and not neutral.

European Union foreign chief Federica Mogherini also reacted firmly. She stated the EU was fully united for a two-state solution with Jerusalem as a capital for both Palestine and Israel (Mogherini, 2017). After meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, she emphasized that no single country can unilaterally decide the ultimate status of Jerusalem. She pointed out that the EU still adheres to international law and negotiated agreements. Mogherini also warned that the U.S. move could strengthen extremist forces and contribute to instability. In contrast with the U.S. policy, her speech painted the EU as a peace-loving, collaborative, and neutral player dedicated to peace and respecting all sides. She described the EU's role as pragmatic, even-handed, and consensus-based rather than ideological.

Together, these statements refer to how U.S. and international discourses reflect fundamentally opposing worldviews. U.S. officials like Sanders and Pence positioned their actions as morally right and historically accurate, with no room for disagreement. They relied on religious symbolism, moral certainty, and simplified versions of history—strategies that

match what Edward Said (1978) described as Orientalist thinking. In their framing, the U.S. leads with truth and principle, while critics are either confused or biased.

On the other hand, international responses—especially from the UN and EU—focused on legal frameworks, diplomacy, and the risks of undermining peace. These actors treated the U.S. decision as not only a legal violation but also a dangerous precedent that weakens international norms. This difference shows how Orientalist logic supports U.S. exceptionalism by allowing it to ignore global opinion while claiming moral high ground.

The use of Orientalist language—such as "good vs. evil" and "fact vs. fiction"—justifies unilateral decisions by wrapping them in grand narratives of destiny, progress, and civilization. These narratives silence Palestinian voices or reduce them to obstacles in the way of peace. As Said (1978) and Kayyali (2013) argue, this kind of discourse doesn't just explain events; it creates a structure where Western power is always seen as legitimate and just. In the case of Jerusalem, it helps normalize a colonial logic that favors one group's claims while erasing the political and legal rights of others.

3.2.3. Reflections of orientalist thought in U.S. justifications for the recognition of Jerusalem (al-Quds)

This section discusses additional justifications articulated by U.S. political figures, policy experts, media outlets, and think tanks in support of the Trump administration's 2017 decision to relocate the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. Although these justifications do not openly resort to Orientalism, they reflect deep-seated presumptions that are in line with broad civilizational hierarchies and geopolitical binaries. Referring to public speeches, institutional rhetoric, and expert analysis, this chapter illustrates how the U.S. discourse legitimates unilateral recognition and excludes Palestinian political claims. Such narratives typically position the U.S. and Israel as the defenders of order, truth, and modernity—implicitly positioning them against a less rational and more disorderly "Other."

A harsh example of this framing is found in the speech of U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley before the UN General Assembly on December 21, 2017. In support of the administration's move, she stated, *"America will put our embassy in Jerusalem. That's what the American people want us to do"* and *"it's the right thing to do."* She also warned that *"this vote will be remembered"* when the U.S. is considering its contributions to the UN budget (The Times of Israel Staff, 2017). In this case, Haley presented the decision as both a moral and democratic necessity and dismissed global criticism as either political or disrespectful in intent. Her speech claimed U.S. hegemony and moral leadership, reproducing a binary in which American policy

is principled and above reproach, and in which dissent—particularly from countries of the Global South—is irrational or ingrate.

James Phillips of The Heritage Foundation echoed the same arguments, arguing that the move corrected a "historic injustice" and that Israel was the only country *"not allowed to determine its own capital"* (Phillips, 2017). By branding past U.S. policy as a failure and describing Jerusalem's recognition as long overdue, Phillips reframed diplomatic restraint as unjust. He contended that global refusal to acknowledge Jerusalem as Israel's capital was indicative of an *"international campaign to delegitimize Israel."* This type of rhetoric chokes off honest discussion by conflating opposition with aggression. There is an underlying assumption in his presentation that Israel, as a Western ally and liberal democracy, ought to be naturally accepted, and Palestinians are depicted as being engaged in some grander campaign of rejection.

Phillips also framed Trump's policy as an instance of "realism" that would enhance U.S. strategy in the long term and even reshape Arab political thinking. Though he acknowledged the risk of unrest, he framed it as a price worth paying for a more stable future. He dismissed Palestinian opposition, contending that rejection of the decision disqualified the Palestinians as a partner for peace. This argument reinforces a binary within which one is cast as mature and strategic, the other as unreasonable or obstructive to progress—a figure long on offer in Orientalist discourse.

This type of framing was also applied in a 2017 Wall Street Journal editorial, which praised Trump's overall policies by stating his administration *"restores power to local people."* Though the editorial discussed domestic policy, its justification echoes the terminology used in foreign policy—framing U.S. action as a necessary correction of past overreach. Translated to the Jerusalem issue, this suggests that disagreement is not only wrong but also un-democratic. It simplifies the intricacy of conflict and international law into a story of rightful return. The unspoken message is consonant with Orientalist stereotypes where the West is the rightful custodian of reason and order.

Not everyone supported these representations, though. There was also a critical perspective from political scientist Shibley Telhami, who questioned the logic of the recognition. Writing on the day before the announcement, he noted that *"63 percent of Americans oppose moving the U.S. embassy"* (Telhami, 2017), challenging the implication that the move was a reaction to popular demand. Telhami also warned that it would damage U.S. credibility in the region and harm key goals like counterterrorism cooperation. He reminded

readers that past negotiations—such as the Camp David negotiations—broke down in part because U.S. officials underestimated the importance of Jerusalem to Palestinians and Arabs more broadly. The recognition could be interpreted as the U.S. giving up on the peace process entirely, Telhami said, and blaming Palestinian leadership instead.

Telhami's critique reveals the disconnect between the rhetoric of moral clarity and the practical consequences of such policy shifts. Unlike the confident tone used by Haley and Phillips, Telhami exposed the risks of treating Jerusalem as a symbolic victory rather than a contested space requiring careful negotiation. His argument contrasts with dominant U.S. narratives by highlighting the strategic and ethical costs of ignoring Palestinian political agency.

Cumulatively, these speeches, articles, and expert opinions boil down a vastly complex and sensitive issue into a set of stark binaries: truth or lies, loyalty or betrayal, civilization or rejection. For all that they claim peace and realism, they ultimately promote a vision of the world where Western powers adjudicate legitimacy and Palestinian voices are excluded or relegated as obstacles. Even when religious or moral language is used, the underlying political message is the same—it imposes asymmetry and discourages diplomacy by representing U.S. policy as inherently right and absolute.

This way, Orientalist logic is not present in open citation, but in assumptions: that the West is rational, Israel a natural ally, and Palestinian resistance is emotional, backward, or violent. These narratives operate to institutionalize unequal power dynamics in the form of justice, democracy, or historical fact—the very kind of ideological framing Edward Said (1978) and Kayyali (2013) have faulted.

3.3. Orientalism in Practice: U.S. Responses to the Gaza Conflicts (2014, 2021, 2023)

In the last ten years, Gaza has been at the center of repeated violence and global attention, but the way the U.S. responds hasn't really changed. Whether it's Obama, Trump, or Biden, the language American officials use tends to stay the same. Israel's actions are always described in terms of self-defense or democracy, and whatever Palestinian resistance exists is either referred to as terrorism or downgraded to a simple humanitarian issue—depoliticized. Yet this is more than politics or alliances; it is an expression of a profound mode of perceiving the conflict—one shaped by Orientalist reasoning. In this mindset, Israel is the rational, Western side, and Palestinians are either unstable threats or helpless victims. U.S. statements, press briefings, and resolutions usually don't treat Gaza as a place with political rights. Instead, it's either a security problem to be managed or a tragedy to feel sorry for—but not something that deserves real political recognition.

3.3.1. U.S. policy responses to the Gaza conflicts: an overview

During the 2014 Gaza war, President Barack Obama made a public statement in which he strongly supported Israel's right to defend itself. He declared, *"Israel has a right to defend itself against rocket and tunnel attacks from Hamas"* (Obama, 2014). This wording placed the focus on Hamas as the primary aggressor and justified Israeli military action as a reaction to terrorism. At the same time, Obama voiced concern over *"the rising number of Palestinian civilian deaths"* and called for *"a cease-fire that ends the fighting and that can stop the deaths of innocent civilians."* This is typical American rhetoric: both supporting Israeli security and quietly mentioning Palestinian distress. But it's still stressing Israel's right to defend itself, not on the root cause of the violence or the political status of the Palestinians in Gaza.

Rashid Khalidi provides a critical analysis of this type of discourse in The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. According to him, U.S. policy does not frequently deal with the overall context of occupation and settler-colonialism but instead reduces Gaza too often to an understanding within the context of violence and security, which erases the political nature of Palestinian resistance. This reflects Obama's approach—cautious and diplomatic, but still founded upon a logic that perpetuates the military status quo. For Khalidi, conceiving Israel as a democratic state acting defensively while denying Palestinian political rights erases the very power imbalance that exists and legitimates Palestinian national identity.

In his 2014 speech, Obama spoke of returning to the 2012 ceasefire agreement and said, *"We don't want to see any more civilians getting killed."* This is a phrase about being worried about humanitarian issues, but in portraying Palestinians as helpless victims of violence, they lose their political agency. They are not perceived as a people under siege or occupation, but as civilians caught in the crossfire. Khalidi finds fault with this sort of account, claiming the U.S. is rather "Israel's lawyer" than an even-handed mediator of the peace process (Khalidi, 2020, p. 172). Even when American statements are worded as balanced or humane, they tend to be a reflection of a more profound ideological bent: one that accords primacy to Israeli security and legitimacy at the expense of Palestinian rights and self-determination.

In the 2021 Gaza conflict, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken once more affirmed United States backing of Israel's right to self-defense in stating, *"The United States fully supports Israel's right to defend itself against attacks such as the thousands of rockets fired by Hamas indiscriminately against Israeli civilians"* (Blinken, 2021). As in President Obama's earlier articulation, Blinken also acknowledged civilian deaths on both sides by saying, *"To lose a life is to lose the whole world, whether that life is Palestinian or Israeli."* While the rhetoric

is even-handed, the policy that ensued—e.g., the expedited resupply of Israel's Iron Dome system—illustrates a clear asymmetry of U.S. interests. Gaza, yet again, was framed in the context of it being a humanitarian crisis that required aid and stability, rather than so much as a political entity with its agenda and grievances.

Aaron David Miller (2021) from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was critical of this strategy in no uncertain terms. He elaborated that the U.S. made public statements supporting de-escalation, but its actions reflected the opposite. By backing Israeli military operations without inhibition, Miller argued, the Biden administration had signaled that *"Washington had no red lines."* He referred to this as *"diplomacy without direction,"* with the United States relying on temporary ceasefires instead of insisting on a political settlement. This strategic vacuum not only cemented Israeli impunity, Miller argued, but further marginalized Palestinian political interests.

This trend sped up in 2023 following the October 7 Hamas attack. President Biden responded by calling the attack "sheer evil" and comparing Hamas to ISIS. He reaffirmed the U.S.'s unequivocal support, stating that *"we stand with Israel"* and pledging both military and diplomatic support. While he did briefly discuss civilian casualties, he spoke almost entirely of Hamas as an existential threat, stating the group *"offers nothing but terror and bloodshed."* This type of rhetoric placed the event within a civilizational context—rational democracies vs. violent extremists—without reference to the decades-long history of blockade, occupation, and Palestinian resistance.

Biden's words were matched with military action, including the deployment of the USS Gerald R. Ford Strike Group and accelerated arms shipments to Israel. While U.S. officials called for humanitarian restraint and demanded that all parties respect international law, there were no strings attached to Israeli action or U.S. weapons use. This asymmetry was especially stark in the effective erasure of any Palestinian political agency from Biden's rhetoric. Palestinians were nurtured primarily as victims—not as agents with legitimate national ambitions.

Human rights analysts and legal scholars directly confronted these narratives. At the October 2023 "Gaza on the Brink" webinar, for example, analyst Raz Segal warned that Israel's rhetoric and actions were invoking the prelude to genocidal campaigns through siege warfare and dehumanizing rhetoric. Others, including Maha Abdallah and Arnesa Buljusmié-Kustura, argued that the operations against Gaza evoked historical patterns of ethnic cleansing and structural violence of a long-term variety. These criticisms are indicative of the dangers of

political rhetoric that strips Palestinians of identity and reduces them to collateral damage within a general "war on terror" narrative.

Across the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations, the rhetoric has remained the same. Although the tone varies—from Obama's calculated diplomacy to Trump's unilateralism, to Biden's restraint—each administration has had the same implicit justification. Israel is presented as a rational state acting in self-defense, and Gaza is presented as a humanitarian, rather than a political, crisis. Palestinian resistance is de-politicized in this way, and the root causes of conflict—occupation, blockade, and political exclusion—are effectively ignored.

Last, American responses to Gaza are not just strategic alignment with Israel. They reflect a deeper discursive framework informed by Orientalist assumptions—where Western-supported forces are forces of order and others are forces of chaos. It is this structure that decides whose pain will be endured, whose grievances will be legitimized, and whose voices will be heard.

3.3.2. The power of language: orientalist perspectives in U.S. discourse on Gaza

Among the main features of Orientalist language in U.S. reactions to the Gaza conflicts is the intentional use of linguistic approach by government officials. Such rhetorical paradigms are far from neutral; they perform an active role in shaping how Palestinians are perceived—usually eliminating Palestinian political agency and presenting Palestinian suffering as a horrific but unavoidable collateral casualty of war, rather than resulting from structural issues such as blockade and occupation.

A straightforward illustration of this was during a State Department press briefing on July 9, 2014, when press spokesperson Jen Psaki spoke about the increasing humanitarian crisis in Gaza during Israeli air bombardments. Psaki once again reaffirmed Israel's *"right to defend itself"* and condemned Hamas as a "terrorist organization," but refrained from elaborating further on Palestinian civilian casualties. Her statement—*"no country should be expected to stand by while rocket attacks from a terrorist organization are launching into their country and impacting innocent civilians"*—rearticulated a security-first narrative. By invoking casualties, she used a blanket term for concern for *"the safety and security of civilians on both sides,"* which simulated the appearance of balance that covered the disparity of power between an occupying government and an occupied populace.

This positioning disempowers the fact of civilian loss in Gaza and substitutes the political reality of Palestinian resistance. In response to being asked if Gazans were truly

civilians, Psaki declined to provide a simple answer, so much so that the image of Gaza as an area under the control of militants remained unblemished. This is consistent with standard Orientalist stereotypes wherein occupied or colonized peoples are dreamed up as unstable, bellicose, and in need of foreign oversight.

Psaki's repeated references to "de-escalation" and "restoring calm" also serve to deflect attention from structural issues such as the blockade, occupation, and the settler-colonial dynamics underlying the violence. By presenting Israeli airstrikes as self-defense and Palestinian resistance as terrorism, U.S. officials erase the root causes of the conflict and uphold a status quo that overwhelmingly favors Israeli strategic interests.

This rhetorical asymmetry has practical policy consequences. So long as the conflict seems to be a symmetrical war of similar strength, American actions such as Iron Dome funding or United Nations resolution blocking can seem like neutralization or stabilization measures. These enhance Israeli military dominance on an inflated level. Orientalist framing serves here as a mechanism for the legitimation of foreign policy that hides America's role in structural violence against Palestinians.

Importantly, the power of this discourse lies not only in what is said but in what is omitted. Psaki's statements erase references to international law, occupation, and civilian protection under humanitarian principles. Palestinians are positioned either as passive victims or as aggressors, but rarely as political actors with legitimate claims. This rhetorical pattern supports the ideological foundation of U.S. Middle Eastern policy, justifying suspicion that Israel is a rational government and Palestinians peace obstacles.

The same discursive principle was used in a July 28, 2014, White House press conference by Deputy National Security Advisor Tony Blinken. Blinken invoked self-defense rhetoric as he asserted, *"Hamas intentionally targets civilians… and uses the Palestinian people as human shields."* Acknowledging suffering in Gaza as "great and growing," he placed blame practically entirely on Hamas' doorstep, exonerating Israeli military action and practice in any serious way.

Blinken went on to say that *"any process to resolve the crisis in Gaza… must also lead to the disarmament of terrorist groups,"* i.e., any peace would be contingent upon Israeli-set security concerns, not Palestinian rights. This reinforces Orientalist assumptions by painting Palestinians as first and foremost security dangers to be mastered, and not as a nation with sovereignty and a right to justice. His speech wasn't a single phrase regarding international law,

proportionality, or collective punishment—terms that might blow up the dominant security narrative.

Lastly, these rhetorical devices show how language doesn't just represent foreign policy—it does it. Through selective framing, omission, and repetition, U.S. leaders construct a discourse that legitimates Israeli military aid, political alignment, and diplomatic endorsement, while erasing or ignoring the Palestinian experience of occupation and dispossession. As Edward Said (1978) argued, language within Orientalist discourse is employed to maintain power relations—and in the current case, such power relations are inherent within the language of diplomacy itself.

The Orientalist rhetoric that was prominent in U.S. public discourse in the 2014 Gaza War resurfaced during the 2021 outbreak of violence. On May 10, 2021, State Department Spokesman Ned Price condemned *"the barrage of rocket attacks fired into Israel"* and reaffirmed Israel's *"legitimate right to defend itself and to defend its people and its territory."* Although he briefly mentioned that *"all sides must ensure calm and de-escalate tensions,"* the focus remained squarely on Hamas's actions and Israeli security concerns. This language once more illustrated a typical asymmetry whereby the legitimacy of Israeli defense is presumed and Palestinian claims excluded.

When asked directly whether Palestinians have a right to self-defense, Price replied, *"We believe it [self-defense] applies to any state,"* implying that because Palestinians do not have recognized statehood, they are excluded from this right. Palestinian suffering is only audible when filtered through the rhetoric of state institutions—which Palestinians, as an occupied people, have no full access to. Their activism is therefore easily discredited or not taken into account at all.

Price also avoided direct terminology when faced with the issue of children dying in Gaza due to Israeli bombing. He stated the U.S. was continuing to gather information and did not want to comment on *"reports that are just emerging."* The slow and guarded reaction was in sharp contrast to the immediate condemnations that came after Hamas rockets. Such rhetorical asymmetries not only trivialize the framing of Palestinian victimhood but also reproduce a discourse in which Israel is morally privileged and Palestinians are responsible for the violence.

Moreover, Price declined to comment on the situation in Sheikh Jarrah and East Jerusalem, declining to describe Israeli conduct there as part of a broader pattern of settler expansion or forced displacement. Instead, he repeated general calls for de-escalation without

specifying the root causes of the crisis. Such rhetoric wipes out the political context and converts a profoundly asymmetrical conflict into a "clash" between two sides, hiding the long-term structural violence experienced by Palestinians.

This same debate was present in U.S. congressional discussion in Senate Resolution 250 (S. Res. 250) on 27 May 2021. The resolution did not directly discuss the Gaza violence but reflected the same overall Orientalist paradigm. The resolution condemned the spike in global anti-Semitic attacks "since terrorists in the Gaza Strip triggered several days of violence against Israel," reaffirmed commitment to Israel's right of self-defense, and specifically condemned the BDS movement. The resolution did not refer to Palestinian suffering, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, or the disproportionate impact of the violence on civilians. Its plot concentrated exclusively on Israeli victimhood and depicted Palestinian actions as irretrievably violent and unjustified.

Though symbolic, the resolution consolidated a discourse where Palestinian resistance is illegitimate and criticism of any Israeli policy is equated with anti-Semitism. It illustrated the way Orientalist assumptions continue to shape U.S. political discourse—by validating Israeli discourses as morally rightful while denying both political and moral legitimacy to Palestinian discourses. Official discourse and law therefore remain structurally consonant with Israeli policies, while rhetorically distancing the U.S. from the policy implications.

The Orientalist rhetoric that has long dominated American discourse about Gaza continued in 2023. On November 3, 2023, during his fourth visit to Israel since the October 7 Hamas attacks, Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a press conference in which he reiterated the strong U.S. support for Israel's *"right and obligation to defend itself."* His comments were almost entirely devoted to Israeli suffering, citing particular examples of violence by Hamas. While he issued a temporary acknowledgment of Palestinian civilian victims, he largely attributed blame for this to the actions of Hamas, maintaining that *"civilians should not suffer the consequences for [Hamas's] inhumanity and its brutality."* Through this, he framed Palestinian suffering as collateral damage to a justifiable war effort.

Although Blinken expressed a wish to avoid harming civilians, this was consistently subordinated to the defeat of Hamas. His statements firmly avoided any mention of international law, occupation, or the broader context of collective punishment in Gaza. By focusing rather on Hamas as the source of all suffering, Blinken solidified the Orientalist rhetoric that frames Palestinians not as political actors with justified grievances but as threats to order and stability.

Blinken also proposed "humanitarian pauses" to facilitate the provision of aid and hostage negotiations, but firmly rejected a call for a ceasefire. This division is reflective of a discursive rationality in which short-term humanitarian interests are acknowledged but not necessarily permitted to encroach on long-term strategic interests. The semantic form of Palestinian life as conditional—to be preserved only when it is not in contradiction with Israeli interests—is part of a broader Orientalist discourse situating Western-aligned actors at the center of moral concern.

Even when discussing the future of Gaza, Blinken kept to this structure. He ruled out reverting to pre–October 7 conditions and ruled out renewed Israeli occupation or Hamas control but had no actual vision to offer for Palestinian self-determination. Rather, he emphasized regional cooperation in managing Gaza without suggesting what role, if any, Palestinians themselves would play. This is all part of a larger trend in U.S. rhetoric whereby Palestinian agency is circumscribed and determined by others.

These rhetorical positions were mirrored in U.S. congressional rhetoric. On September 25, 2024, the U.S. Senate resolution S. Res. 890 was brought by the Senate, condemning Hamas for the October 7 attacks, vowing continued support to Israel, and calling for the *"complete denial of the ability of Hamas to reconstitute in the region."* The resolution prioritized Israeli lives to be saved and to achieve *"ensuring the forever survival of Israel."* Never did it mention the Gaza civilian casualties and subsequent humanitarian crises. Like S. Res. 250 in 2021, the resolution defaulted to discursive binary opposition to Israeli victimhood and the erasure of Palestinian suffering and resistance.

Collectively, pronouncements by administrators like Psaki (2014), Price (2021), Blinken (2023) and Senate Resolutions 250 and 890 reproduce the same script in US discourse regarding Gaza. These documents perform Orientalist thinking through the erasure of Palestinian political grievances, the delegitimization of resistance, and selective recourse to humanitarian rhetoric. They construct a moral geography wherein Israeli security precedes all else, and Palestinian life is recognized only within boundaries that do not disrupt strategic or political objectives. This consistency supports the manner in which Orientalism is not merely an interpretive framework for explaining conflict but is an underlying assumption for guiding U.S. policy in Gaza.

3.3.3. Through the lens of the 'Other': Gaza between threat and sympathy in U.S. policy

This chapter explores this tension within U.S. political discourse that is sympathetic to Palestinian civilians but still portrays Gaza primarily as a security threat. This is the paradox at the core of Orientalist logic: Palestinians are acknowledged as human largely in moments of

victimhood, but their resistance or political engagement is either ignored or portrayed as dangerous. Sympathy is offered in emotional or humanitarian terms, but not often followed by recognition of the structural conditions—occupation, blockade, or statelessness—that generate that suffering. Empathy then functions as a rhetorical tool to manage public opinion without leading to any meaningful change in policy.

A prime example of this selective framing can be seen in the July 27, 2014, readout of the telephone conversation between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. While Obama claimed to be *"serious and growing concern"* about the rising Palestinian civilian toll, he also reiterated Israel's *"right to defend itself"* forcefully. His concern was couched in passive, general terminology that contained no condemnation of Israel, and his call for a *"humanitarian ceasefire"* was aimed at halting the violence temporarily and not its roots. The call was framed to reflect stability, and not justice or political resolution, as the top priority—reducing Gaza to a territory that needed to be pacified rather than liberated (Obama, 2014).

The rationale was more fully articulated the next day by National Security Adviser Susan Rice. In her July 28, 2014, speech, Rice sympathized with Palestinian children and civilians, stating they were *"trapped in the crossfire."* However, she placed the blame for the conflict squarely on Hamas, which she claimed *"initiated this conflict"* and *"dragged it on."* This narrative completely overlooked the role of occupation, siege, and statelessness in Palestinian life. Rice also praised U.S. investment in Israel's Iron Dome and criticized the UN for its reaction to Israeli actions, indicating where U.S. policy interests were (Rice, 2014).

This trend was evident in President Biden's May 20, 2021 speech. While he stated that *"Palestinians and Israelis equally deserve to live safely and securely,"* his speech nevertheless emphasized Israeli security and technological advancements. Biden reaffirmed support for the Iron Dome system and made explicit that any humanitarian assistance would be administered through the Palestinian Authority—and not Hamas. This clarification underscored how U.S. policy selectively legitimates Palestinian political actors solely when they align with Israeli and American strategic interests, and others are delegitimized (Biden, 2021).

Senate Resolution 250, introduced that month, codified this logic into legislative bill language. While it condemned Hamas and reaffirmed support for Israel, it made no effort to recognize Palestinian grievances or the effects of Israeli military operations. Its superficial reference to civilian suffering did not consider the structural violence intrinsic to Gaza's crisis. By focusing solely on terrorism and Israeli security, the resolution depoliticized the violence

and reinforced an Orientalist discourse that portrays Palestinians solely as threats, never as political actors (U.S. Senate, 2021).

In 2023, this discursive trend continued, albeit with slightly more sympathetic language. In an October 29 interview with CBS, Vice President Kamala Harris stated Palestinians do *"deserve equal measures of safety and security,"* only to turn immediately back to Israeli trauma and American military responses. She reiterated the U.S. would not send troops while simultaneously emphasizing strikes against Iranian-backed groups. Her insistence on delinking Palestinians from Hamas still left the issue of representation unanswered. While her tone was softer, her framing remained within a security-first narrative (Harris, 2023).

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield's speech to the UN on October 25, 2023, was no exception. The U.S.-drafted resolution she presented put humanitarian pauses and civilian protection first, but also strongly reaffirmed Israel's right to self-defense and condemned Hamas without any similar reference to Israeli actions. She spoke of American hostages but was silent on Palestinian families. Her final call for two democratic states- *"we must continue to work toward a future where two democratic states... live side by side,"* was abstract and unmoored from any reference to occupation or political rights (Thomas-Greenfield, 2023).

Combined, these examples demonstrate that across administrations and periods of conflict, U.S. rhetoric consistently sympathizes with Palestinians on depoliticized, humanitarian terms. Phrases like *"equal measures of dignity"* or *"concern for children"* are less critiques of the machinery that produces violence than gestures of symbolism. As Edward Said argued, Orientalist logic allows the colonized to be visible only as victims or threats—but never as political actors in their own right. Within this framework, sympathy is not recognition. It then becomes an instrument of control: granting visibility without agency, and concern without rights.

FINDINGS&RESULTS

This chapter wraps up the thesis by summarizing the most important findings in the context of the research aim and guiding question. It also reflects on the importance of how the research contributes to a greater understanding of U.S. foreign policy discourse, specifically in terms of Orientalist narratives. The chapter then discusses the main limitations of the study and suggests possible avenues for follow-up studies that could build on these findings.

Through the examination of official statements, policy documents, think tank reports, media narratives, and congressional debates, five major patterns were identified that demonstrate the persistence of Orientalist assumptions in American discourse.

U.S. National Security Strategy documents and presidential speeches from 2002 to 2024 consistently framed Israeli security as essential and unquestionable, while presenting Palestinian political aspirations as unstable, threatening, or conditional. This securitization of Palestinians and normalization of Israeli legitimacy reflects persistent Orientalist assumptions about rational Western actors versus irrational Eastern actors.

U.S. discourse selectively legitimized the Palestinian Authority as a reformable actor while framing Hamas as an irredeemable extremist threat. Palestinian political agency was portrayed as acceptable only when fully aligned with Israeli and U.S. interests, mirroring Orientalist binaries that divide the Muslim world into civilizable and incorrigible subjects.

Think tanks like the Middle East Forum, American Enterprise Institute, and Hudson Institute, along with mainstream U.S. media and public opinion research, reinforced Orientalist narratives by portraying Palestinians as violent, irrational, and culturally resistant to democracy, while presenting Israel as rational, democratic, and aligned with Western values. These institutional narratives helped normalize asymmetric perceptions of legitimacy and victimhood.

U.S. official statements, laws, and think tank narratives during the 2017 Jerusalem recognition framed Israeli claims as rational and legitimate, marginalized Palestinian political rights, used religious justifications to erase Palestinian agency, and positioned Western actors as inherently moral—all of which reflect key Orientalist patterns described by Edward Said.

U.S. official discourse during the Gaza conflicts consistently framed Israel as a rational actor defending itself and Palestinians as humanitarian victims or security threats without political agency. Across multiple administrations, statements emphasized Israeli security while depoliticizing Palestinian resistance and ignoring the structural causes of violence, reproducing

Orientalist binaries that privilege Western-aligned narratives and erase Palestinian political claims.

This study sought to explore how Orientalist ideology continues to appear in U.S. foreign policy discourse on the Israel-Palestine conflict during the 21st century. The goal was to better understand how older patterns of representing the region still influence how the U.S. talks about issues like legitimacy, political agency, and security in international relations. Since U.S. foreign policy plays a major role in the Middle East, and there has been little long-term focus on how official American language is shaped, this research aimed to show that Orientalist ideas are not just part of academic or cultural conversations—they still appear in today's political discourse as well.

The research addressed this aim through four key steps: reading the works of leading American Orientalist scholars like Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes; reading how their views are depicted in U.S. policy rhetoric; reading how think tanks and the media help to perpetuate these narratives; and analyzing specific examples like U.S. rhetoric on Jerusalem and the Gaza conflicts.

The study clearly illustrates that American foreign policy rhetoric invariably employs Orientalist ideas—portraying Israel as rational, democratic, and legitimate, and Palestinians as helpless victims or irrational threats. These patterns were observed repeatedly across presidential administrations and institutional sources, confirming that Orientalist rhetoric still shapes the manner in which the U.S. creates meaning, security, and legitimacy in its approach to the conflict.

This study contributes to the area of political discourse analysis and studies of the Middle East by providing evidence that the Orientalist perspective still informs how U.S. foreign policy approaches the issue between Israel and Palestine in the 21st century. Even if Edward Said's Orientalism thesis has mainly been used to discuss literature and culture, this dissertation applies his framework to official American discourse itself. It shows that such discourse is helpful in entrenching asymmetries in power.

Through a critical reading of political speeches, National Security Strategy documents, think tank white papers, and news coverage, the book makes visible the ways in which enduring Orientalist binarism—reason to unreason, modern to backward, legitimate to threatening—are continuing to structure the representation of Palestinians and Israelis. The study helps us see how Palestinians are commonly portrayed either as vulnerable victims or threats, and Israeli actions interpreted as morally justified and defensive.

In so doing, the research fills a literature gap by tracing the ideas of American Orientalist intellectuals to their policy terminologies in actual events, especially milestone ones like the 2017 Jerusalem recognition and the 2014, 2021, and 2023 Gaza wars. It further demonstrates how U.S. official and institutional discourse does not only articulate Orientalist thought—it works to cement it in legal, strategic, and humanitarian structures.

While this thesis does not attempt to overthrow conventional theory, it is an important step towards a re-examination of how U.S. discourse is helping to sustain asymmetrical structures within the hemisphere. The insights herein can inform future research on how language builds global imaginaries and could help scholars and policymakers be more critical in their thoughts regarding how diplomatic language is used.

As with any academic research, there are some limitations to the study that should be noted. First, the study only considered discourse—i.e., the language employed in official U.S. documents, speeches, media, and reports from think tanks. It didn't consider the construction of such narratives behind the scenes or quantitatively examine how Orientalist ideas influence specific policy decisions directly. So, while the study shows how Orientalist thinking appears in public language, it does not claim to prove exactly how much it affects real-life policymaking.

Second, the study looked only at English-language sources and mainly included the views of elite institutions. It did not look at media from the rest of the world or include grassroots Palestinian voices, which could have given different perspectives and added more depth to the research. It did not include global media coverage or Palestinian grassroots opinion, which might have provided alternative analysis and helped to advance the analysis.

Third, the study spanned a specific timeframe—2002-2024—and examined selected events like the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem and the 2014, 2021, and 2023 Gaza wars. Though these examples were substantial and relevant, they represent only part of the overall U.S. talk on the conflict.

Finally, since this is a qualitative research grounded on discourse analysis, of course, there is some interpretation involved. Even though the study was done meticulously and with academic integrity, the findings must be considered as part of an ongoing discussion rather than conclusions. Future research may build upon this study by utilizing more varied sources, interviews, or even utilizing quantitative tools to analyze language on a larger scale.

On the basis of what this research found—and with its own limitations in mind—there are a few directions future research could take. First, although this thesis has focused on the occurrence of Orientalist themes in U.S. foreign policy discourse, future research could explore how they are received and interpreted by different publics, especially in Palestine and across the Arab world. Understanding how people on the ground interpret this language could help explain how it affects the way U.S. actions and legitimacy are seen.

Second, future research could bring in the voices of people who help shape U.S. foreign policy—like advisors, speechwriters, or officials working in government institutions. Talking to these individuals could reveal whether Orientalist thinking is being used intentionally or just passed along without much reflection, and whether there's any resistance to such thinking within the system.

Third, while this study looked at a limited number of speeches and documents, future work could use bigger sets of texts and digital tools like corpus linguistics or computational analysis. This would make it possible to study patterns in language over longer periods of time and across more sources, helping researchers see how often and in what ways Orientalist ideas show up in U.S. foreign policy.

Finally, future studies could take a more interdisciplinary approach by combining methods from discourse analysis, international relations, and postcolonial theory. This would help widen the horizon beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and show how Orientalist narratives influence even U.S. policies towards countries like Iran, Afghanistan, or Syria. Such an exercise could give a clearer picture of how political narratives and international power equations are connected.

This thesis set out to explore how Orientalist ways of thinking still show up in the language the U.S. uses when talking about the Israel-Palestine conflict today. By looking closely at political speeches, strategy documents, and what institutions like think tanks and media say, the study found that Palestinians are often described either as helpless victims or as threats, while Israeli actions are usually shown as reasonable and necessary. These trends suggest that some archaic assumptions continue to be deeply embedded in the manner in which the U.S. speaks about the region. The findings help us better appreciate how these ideas affect foreign policy and recommend more thoughtful and sophisticated approaches to speaking about international affairs. This research further leaves room for subsequent research that can overcome these embedded narratives and offer alternative viewpoints.

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APPENDCIES

Appendix 1.

ABSTRACT

The Israel-Palestine conflict remains one of the most politically and symbolically sensitive issues in international relations, especially when it comes to U.S. foreign policy. While American support for Israel is usually explained through geopolitics, much less attention has been given to the language and narratives that help shape this support. Building on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, this study analyzes how American Orientalist scholars have framed and explained U.S. foreign policy with respect to the Israel-Palestine conflict. It is particularly interested in how Palestinians are described in official U.S. rhetoric—and how these descriptions contrast with how Israel is presented.

While Orientalism has been widely discussed in literature and cultural studies, far less attention has been paid to how its core ideas still shape the language and reasoning behind U.S. foreign policy. This study seeks to address that gap by looking at how Orientalist thinking continues to influence the way the Israel-Palestine conflict is described and defended in official discourse today. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how Orientalist thinking appears in American speeches, strategy documents, think tank reports, media coverage, and congressional debates.

Using critical discourse analysis, the study reveals consistent patterns between presidential administrations and institutional platforms. The discursive analyses of the data show that Palestinians are routinely positioned as victims or threats, while Israeli actions are framed as moral, legal, or civilizational justifications. This study contributes to postcolonial and foreign policy discourse analysis by demonstrating how enduring Orientalist thinking continues to structure American discourses. The findings call for a more balanced and self-aware approach to political language and offer new ways to understand how ideology and power interact in global politics.

ƏLAVƏLƏR

Appendix 2

XÜLASƏ

İsrail-Fələstin münaqişəsi beynəlxalq münasibətlərdə, xüsusilə də ABŞ xarici siyasəti kontekstində, həm siyasi, həm də simvolik baxımdan ən həssas məsələlərdən biri olaraq qalır. ABŞ-ın İsrailə verdiyi dəstək adətən geosiyasi maraqlarla izah olunsa da, bu dəstəyi formalaşdıran dil və narrativlərə kifayət qədər diqqət yetirilməmişdir. Bu tədqiqat Edward Said-in "Orientalizm" nəzəriyyəsinə əsaslanaraq, Amerika orientalist alimlərinin ABŞ-ın İsrail-Fələstin münaqişəsinə dair xarici siyasətini necə çərçivələndirdiklərini və izah etdiklərini təhlil edir. Xüsusilə diqqət yetirilən məqam, fələstinlilərin rəsmi ABŞ ritorikasında necə təsvir olunması və bu təsvirlərin İsrailin təqdimatı ilə necə ziddiyyət təşkil etməsidir.

Orientalizm anlayışı ədəbiyyat və mədəniyyət sahələrində geniş şəkildə müzakirə olunsa da, onun əsas ideyalarının hələ də ABŞ xarici siyasətindəki dil və məntiqi necə formalaşdırdığına daha az diqqət ayrılıb. Bu tədqiqat həmin boşluğu doldurmağı qarşısına məqsəd qoyaraq, İsrail-Fələstin münaqişəsinin rəsmi diskursda necə təsvir edildiyini və müdafiə olunduğunu göstərmək üçün Orientalist düşüncənin təsirini analiz edir. Bu məqsədlə ABŞ prezidentlərinin çıxışları, strateji sənədlər, beyin mərkəzlərinin hesabatları, media xəbərləri və konqres müzakirələri diskurs analizinə cəlb olunmuşdur.

Tənqidi diskurs analizindən istifadə edilərək aparılan araşdırma göstərir ki, müxtəlif prezident administrasiyaları və institusional platformalar arasında ortaq tendensiyalar mövcuddur. Analizlər göstərir ki, fələstinlilər davamlı olaraq ya qurban, ya da təhlükə kimi təqdim olunur, İsrailin addımları isə əxlaqi, hüquqi və sivilizasiyalı əsaslarla əsaslandırılır. Bu tədqiqat postkolonial və xarici siyasət diskurs analizinə töhfə verir, çünki o, orientalist düşüncənin ABŞ diskursunda necə davam etdiyini nümayiş etdirir. Tədqiqat nəticələri daha balanslı və özünüdərkə əsaslanan siyasi dilə ehtiyac olduğunu vurğulayır və ideologiya ilə gücün qlobal siyasətdə qarşılıqlı təsirini anlamaq üçün yeni yollar təklif edir.