



Original article

An Ideological-Rhetorical Analysis of Arab and Western Leaders' Responses to Gaza Starvation: Reconstructing Silence, Evasion, and Moral Responsibility (2025)



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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to investigate how some Arab and Western leaders frame silence, evasion, and moral responsibility in their responses in 2025 to the Gaza starvation crisis by using ideological-rhetorical strategies. In the case of the Gaza crisis, political leaders discuss and establish accountability discursively through these rhetorical strategies. To explore this issue, this study adopts van Dijk's (2006) ideological-rhetorical strategies within a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. The study follows a qualitative research method based on six speeches, three by Arab leaders and three by Western leaders. The findings indicate that the examined Arab and Western leaders use various ideological-rhetorical strategies. Of these, the commonly used are vagueness, victimization, dramatization, distancing, and generalization, which negotiate accountability and build moral positioning. As a result, these discursive strategies highlight the leaders' attempt to depoliticize the Gaza starvation crisis, thus concealing Israeli responsibility.

Keywords: Gaza starvation crisis, silence, evasion, moral responsibility, ideological-rhetorical strategies, critical discourse analysis

تحليل أيديولوجي-بلاغي لاستجابات القادة العرب والغربيين تجاه مجاعة غزة: هيكل الصمت والتهرب والمسؤولية الأخلاقية (٢٠٢٥)

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لُستخلص

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء الكيفية التي يؤثر بها بعض القادة العرب والغربيين الصمت والتهرب والمسؤولية الأخلاقية في استجاباتهم عام ٢٠٢٥ لأزمة المجاعة في غزة، وذلك من خلال توظيف الاستراتيجيات الأيديولوجية-البلاغية. وفي سياق أزمة غزة، يعتمد القادة السياسيون إلى مناقشة المسؤولية وتشكيلها خطابياً من خلال هذه الاستراتيجيات البلاغية. ولاستكشاف هذه المسألة، تعتمد الدراسة استراتيجيات فان دايك (٢٠٠٦) الأيديولوجية-البلاغية ضمن إطار تحليل الخطاب النقدي. وتتبع الدراسة منهجاً بحثياً نوعياً قائماً على ستة خطابات، ثلاثة منها لقادة عرب وثلاثة لقادة غربيين. وتشير النتائج إلى أن القادة العرب والغربيين موضع الدراسة يوظفون مجموعة متنوعة من الاستراتيجيات الأيديولوجية-البلاغية، كان أبرزها استراتيجيات تصوير الضحية، والغموض، والتباعد، والتعميم، والتقديم الإيجابي للذات، في التفاوض حول المسؤولية وبناء التموضع الأخلاقي. ونتيجة لذلك، تكشف هذه الاستراتيجيات الخطابية عن محاولة من قبل القادة لإزالة الطابع السياسي عن أزمة المجاعة في غزة، بما يؤدي خطابياً إلى التستر على المسؤولية الإسرائيلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أزمة المجاعة في غزة، الصمت، التهرب، المسؤولية الأخلاقية، الاستراتيجيات الأيديولوجية-البلاغية، تحليل الخطاب النقدي.

1. Introduction

While there is no universal definition of a humanitarian crisis, it is generally accepted as an event that poses a threat to the health, safety, and well-being of communities (Kapucu et al., 2023). The current Gaza crisis is one of the worst expressions of this phenomenon, with the region experiencing conditions of famine (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 2025). According to World Health Organization (2025), almost 20 percent of children under five suffer from acute malnutrition.

The crisis poses significant political questions, such as how the blame is shifted away from some actors, in addition to its humanitarian aspects. Crisis narratives validate inclusion/exclusion, maintain power relations, and promote political agendas (de Rycker & Mohd Don, 2013). Fairclough (1995) stated that discourse is related to power and ideology. Building on this, language can be used as a means of spreading power and authority (Turkey & Al-Hilu, 2020). In this connection, Al-Rawe (2024) indicated that the response of political leaders to the Gaza crisis has been extremely divergent, from outright condemnatory rhetoric to diplomatic and measured language.

In light of this, the present study investigates the ideological construction of silence, evasion, and moral responsibility in the speeches of Arab and Western leaders that were delivered in 2025 in response to the starvation crisis in Gaza using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

According to Fairclough (1995), CDA is a transdisciplinary approach that considers the construction and maintenance of relations of power, ideology, and inequality through language. The critical aspect of CDA separates it from other approaches, bringing to light the hidden connections between language and social structures that are not otherwise apparent (Fairclough, 2001). In other words, CDA enables identifying the covert interpretation of language in discourse (Kuo & Nakamura, 2005, as cited in Alhusseini, 2020). Ideology is central to this approach, as van Dijk (1998) stated that it is a constellation of beliefs and values that work in favor of the dominant social groups. In addition to ideology, power can be gained and used in political discourse via continuous efforts of political actors or institutions to prevent and manage possible conflicts (Chilton, 2004, as cited in Al-Hilu, 2023).

2.2. Silence

Silence in discourse goes beyond the absence of words. It is a communicative act that reveals or obscures meaning (Crocker, 1980). Gray (2013) suggested that silence has the capacity to facilitate choice as well as speech. Ling (2003) classified the forms of silence into positive, negative, and neutral with different social connotations. As such, it is a mechanism that helps cover up accountability and refute serious issues (Perez & Dionisopoulos, 1995). In the scope of the current study, silence is the omission of actors, events, or sensitive information from political discourse, particularly information about Israeli responsibility for Gaza starvation.

2.3. Evasion

The intentional use of unclear or indirect utterances to avoid a problematic topic is called *evasion* (Dou & Zhang, 2007). Galasiński (2000) distinguished two broad categories of evasion, namely overt evasion (by explicit deflection) and covert evasion (by change of context or focus of a question). Evasion is a tactic used by politicians to avoid revealing embarrassing information and further their political careers (Obeng, 1997). In the present study, evasion is the process of diverting the attention from political responsibility to subsidiary issues through linguistic selection.

2.4. Moral Responsibility

The degree to which a person or group is considered to be culpable for their unethical actions and is liable to be accountable for the violation of ethical standards is called moral responsibility (Skitka et al., 2015). French (1984) illustrated that a morally responsible politician is the one who is accountable for the intent and results of their actions in a political context. Nevertheless, what exactly is meant by the term moral responsibility, which has been used so often in political discourse, is more a sign of a lack of political will than of any real moral consciousness (Beardsworth, 2015). The concept of moral responsibility in the context of this study is the discursive construction of an ethical position by highlighting humanitarian concern or supporting peace through language.

2.5. Previous Studies

There have been many previous studies on the political and media discourse about the Gaza conflict. Laelasari (2023) examined the different ways in which the 2021 ceasefire was portrayed in Al Jazeera and USA Today and identified two differences between them as being of an

ideological nature. Al-Awad (2024) explored the linguistic techniques employed in the Arab and Western newspapers, uncovering the influence of linguistic strategies on the conflicting narratives. Al-Rawe (2024) examined the speeches delivered by world leaders during the Cairo Summit to show how the rhetorical devices were used to create political stances and moral responsibility. Kareem and Najm (2024) conducted a study to explore the level of bias in the Western media during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on van Dijk's (1998) model and obtained patterns which support Israeli actions. Benyza (2025) analyzed the global responses to the Gaza war and found that there has been a widening disconnect between official policy and public perspective. Guettouche and Kouchida (2025) examined the speeches of the Algerian Ambassador to the UN to reveal how he used rhetorical techniques to delegitimize the Israeli forces. The present study, however, concentrates on the construction of silence, evasion, and moral responsibility in the reactions of Arab and Western leaders in 2025 to the Gaza starvation crisis.

3. Research Design

This study is qualitative in approach. Qualitative research has been shown to be able to produce a quality of data that is undeniable (Al-Hilu, 2017). Within this framework, the current study adopts a CDA approach, drawing on van Dijk's (2006) ideological-rhetorical framework. The same analytical framework and procedures are applied to all extracts to maintain consistency and reliability throughout the analysis. Figure 1 shows the strategies of this model that arise from the analysis of the selected extracts. The data used in the study consist of six speeches, three by Arab leaders and three by Western leaders. The six leaders are selected depending on certain criteria, including the political power of their respective states, their direct involvement in the Palestinian issue, and the availability of full transcripts of their speeches. These leaders, in particular, are chosen because of their executive political influence in establishing official positions rather than solely because of their hierarchical titles. One speech per leader is included to provide consistency throughout the corpus and to give the opportunity to investigate them at a deeper level rather than at a superficial level. Representativeness is achieved by including three Arab and three Western leaders with varying political attitudes towards the crisis. The speeches are selected as they were delivered in 2025 during the heightened starvation crisis in Gaza and reflect the leaders' discursively constructed political positions towards it.

3.1. Procedures of Data Analysis

The current study uses several procedures to analyze and interpret the discourses of Arab and Western leaders. These procedures are as follows:

1. Providing sources for the speeches of the selected Arab and Western leaders.
2. Transcribing the speeches and organizing them in numbered extracts for systematic analysis.
3. Exploring the ideological meanings in the speeches according to van Dijk's (2006) ideological-rhetorical strategies.
4. Presenting conclusions for the study based on the analysis.

3.2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

Van Dijk (2006) pointed out a series of ideological-rhetorical strategies that enable political discourse to create and maintain power, ideology, and social stance. These strategies are the following:

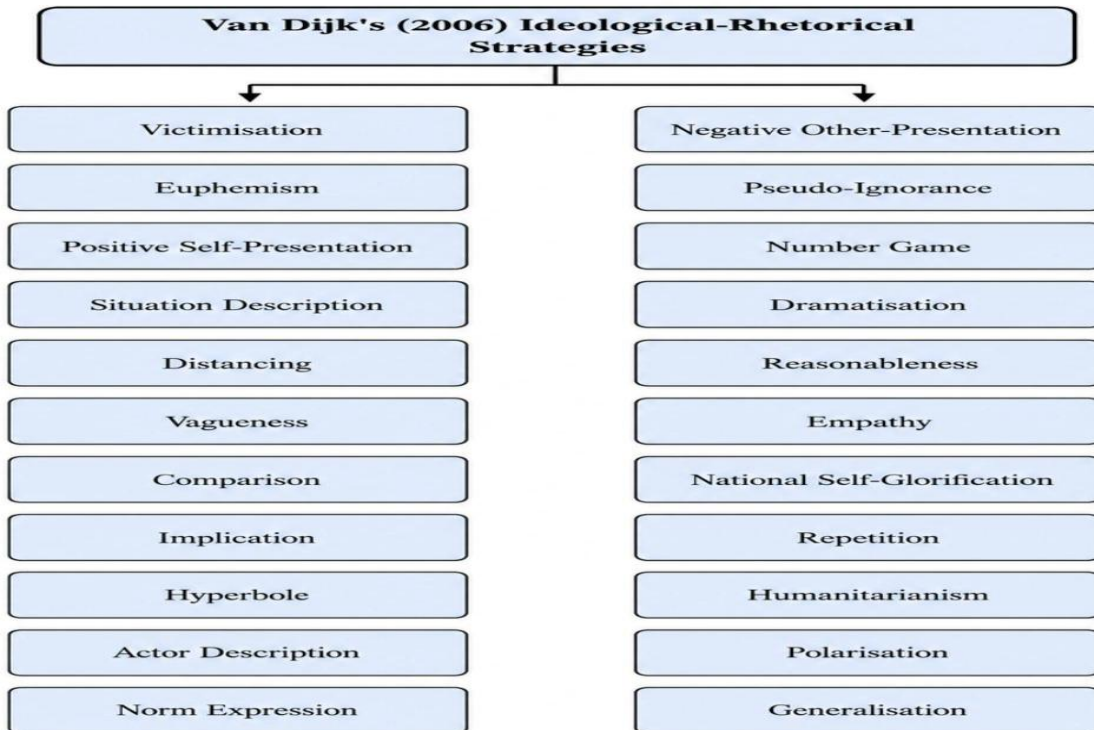
1. Comparison. It is used to highlight the similarities and differences between two entities, such as people, groups, places, activities, and objects.
2. Actor description. This attempts to provide a complete description of the objects in the discourse (person, thing, and place).
3. Euphemism. Such strategy is one of the semantic mitigation techniques that are commonly employed in discourse.
4. Distancing. The most notable aspect of this strategy is the creation of a perceived distance between the members of different social groups or categories using language.
5. Dramatization. This is a rhetorical technique of exaggerating views or occurrences in order to provoke emotions and influence the audience.
6. Empathy. This strategy aims to sympathise with and understand the feelings of other people. It is exhibited in political contexts through sympathy.
7. Hyperbole. It is a semantic rhetorical strategy that aims at exaggerating something. It intensifies the positives of the in-group and the negatives of the out-group.
8. Implication. The audience should use general knowledge to draw conclusions because discourse is like an iceberg and most of it is implicit.
9. National self-glorification. In this type of positive self-presentation, speakers show respect or admiration for their country, values, history, and traditions.
10. Negative other-presentation. It is used by the discourse producers to categorize individuals into out-groups and in-groups, describing the out-group negatively.
11. Norm expression. This is a discursive tactic where the speaker attempts to describe something in a normal and unbiased way.
12. Number game. It shows that speakers emphasize objectivity by mentioning statistics in debates. It is referred to as "facticity."
13. Positive self-presentation. This strategy demonstrates that speakers emphasize the positive side of their organization, country, and party in discourse.
14. Pseudo-ignorance. It is a fallacy in which the speaker knows something about a topic, but pretends ignorance.
15. Reasonableness. This is a strategy whereby speakers attempt to demonstrate that their arguments are not only sound, but reasonable and logical.
16. Repetition. Van Dijk defined it as the practice of repeating words or phrases to create impact or emphasis.
17. Situation description. This strategy aims to describe events, experiences, and entire situations.
18. Vagueness. Ambiguous language can be used by speakers in various situations. Such a strategy entails fuzzy sets that have no definite referent.
19. Victimization. It describes in-group members as the victims of injustice and portrays out-groups adversely.
20. Humanitarianism. This is a strategy of argument based on protecting human rights and criticising those who violate them.
21. Generalization. It is the attribution of the positive or negative aspects of an individual or a small group of people to a larger population.

22. Polarization. This strategy refers to the segregation of people into the in-group and the out-group.

Figure 1: *Theoretical Framework adopted from van Dijk's (2006) Ideological-Rhetorical Strategies*

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Arab Leaders' Discourses



This section examines the speeches of selected Arab leaders delivered in 2025 in response to the starvation crisis in Gaza. It focuses on three key figures, namely the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, the Jordanian King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein, and the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

4.1.1. Analysis of Extract (1)

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi delivered a speech about the humanitarian crisis and starvation in Gaza. In this context, El-Sisi stated that:

The lives of the Palestinian people in Gaza, and possibly also in the West Bank, are now being used as a political bargaining card. ... Before the war, 600–700 trucks of food and basic necessities used to enter Gaza daily to support 2.3 million Palestinians. Imagine reducing that number to zero over the past 21 months. The current situation in Gaza stems from this, not from Egypt abandoning its role or participating in the siege. ... The Rafah crossing has not been closed by Egypt at any point. (Ahram Online, 2025, paras. 4, 10, 12)

Based on van Dijk's (2006) ideological-rhetorical strategies, the extract foregrounds victimization as the main strategy, as realized through the expression "used as a political bargaining card." This ideologically represents Palestinians as an in-group positioned as victims of injustice. This is supported by the negative other-presentation strategy, which implicitly constructs an unnamed out-group that is responsible for the exploitation. The clause employs the euphemism strategy, in

which "political bargaining card" is used instead of "leverage" or "political weapon." This language obscures the inhumanity of starvation and makes the fate of Gazans seem like an ordinary part of political processes. The word "possibly" is a vague term used to realize the pseudo-ignorance strategy. It potentially implies that there were also Palestinians starving in "the West Bank," but this is not stated clearly.

Egypt is then positioned in a positive manner through the positive self-presentation strategy. It is framed as a reliable humanitarian donor through "used to enter ... to support 2.3 million Palestinians" and conceivably builds up moral responsibility through emphasizing aid delivery. The number game strategy is used through the use of particular numbers, "600-700 trucks" and "2.3 million Palestinians," which enhances the credibility of the information. Moreover, the situation description strategy organizes the regular assistance flows using temporal indicators "before the war" and "daily." Consequently, this reinforces a sense of trustworthiness and accountability, placing Egypt in the moral in-group.

The appeal realized through "reducing that number to zero" uses dramatization as a central strategy. It prompts reflection on a hypothetical situation of humanitarian collapse. Meanwhile, the negative other-presentation strategy recurs. It shifts blame onto an unnamed out-group through the temporal framing "the past 21 months." Thus, this could allow ideological evasion of explicitly condemning Israel by directing the focus to other subsidiary details.

The formulation "not from Egypt abandoning its role" in the next clause is an instance of the distancing strategy, as it distances Egypt from responsibility. Egypt is presented as rational and moderate through the reasonableness strategy and the causal framing "stems from this." The vague deictic expression "this" shows the vagueness strategy, which obscures the responsible actor and arguably maintains silence about Israeli involvement because the actor is not named explicitly.

Lastly, the denial in the form "has not been closed by Egypt at any point" mainly reflects the pseudo-ignorance strategy. In this regard, El-Sisi appears to suggest that the decision to impose the blockade is not exclusively Egyptian, which downplays the Egyptian role. This kind of framing supports the positive self-presentation strategy, which enables discursive evasion of acknowledging that Israel has blocked "the Rafah crossing."

4.1.2. Analysis of Extract (2)

King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan delivered a speech addressing global issues, particularly the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In this context, the King stated that:

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict ... should have elicited outrage and action, especially from major democracies. ... However, for almost as long, Palestinians have been living through a cruel cycle of "yet again". ... And throughout all these years, Israeli families, too, have not been able to live in true security. Because military action cannot bring them the safety they need. ... Security will only come when Palestine and Israel begin to co-exist side by side. ... In Jordan, we are determined to work for a world in which people are secure in their homes, are safe to practice their faiths, and are able to live and thrive in dignity. (King Abdullah II Official Website, 2025, paras. 5, 14, 21, 32, 39)

Within van Dijk's (2006) ideological-rhetorical strategies, the norm expression strategy is employed in the wording "should have elicited outrage and action." It invokes moral obligation through the use of the modal verb "should." This enables the speaker to adopt an ethical position as it suggests what should be done without taking action. Simultaneously, the mention of "major democracies" triggers a prominent vagueness strategy by avoiding responsibility through non-specific reference. Ideologically, this abstraction is further reinforced by the generalization strategy that could indicate moral responsibility through showing rejection of the destruction without assigning political accountability.

Against this background, "cruel cycle" and "yet again" function as linguistic choices that trigger victimization as the primary strategy. This is further reinforced through the metaphor of a "cycle" that realizes the dramatization strategy, which frames violence as recurring and persistent. Meanwhile, it is also observed to implement the empathy strategy by presenting Palestinian suffering. This process can generate evasion since it tends to highlight suffering as an abstraction rather than the causes of starvation and responsible actors. Moreover, the use of the phrase "for almost as long" activates the vagueness strategy. In turn, this can imply silence by omitting historical reference, precise temporal specification, and responsibility and suffering specifics.

Then, the Israeli insecurity is framed through the context of "Israeli families" and the lack of "true security," with the marker "too" used mainly to engage in the comparison strategy. In ideological terms, such a move might facilitate evasion through the construction of equivalence of Palestinian and Israeli suffering, which apparently shifts attention away from the Palestinian cause to the shared concern. As a result, this structure does not presuppose a clear in-group/out-group dichotomy, thus shifting blame and responsibility.

Under this framing, the speaker employed the vagueness strategy. The inability to provide "true security" to "Israeli families" is attributed to "military action," which fails to give them the "safety," plausibly positioning Israel as the source of insecurity for the Palestinians and Israelis. Such attribution is mediated through abstraction and comparison, which could enable the speaker to avoid political consequences. Meanwhile, the expression "security will only come when Palestine and Israel ... co-exist side by side," characterized by "only," performs a delicate balancing function. Such linguistic choices tend to support evasion of condemning Israel by possibly marginalizing Palestinian political realities and the conditions of starvation in Gaza.

The shift to the expression "in Jordan, we are determined" primarily triggers the national self-glorification strategy. The use of "we" constructs Jordan as a moral in-group. The concept of moral responsibility is expressed by foregrounding humanitarian actions through words such as "work," "secure," "safe," and "dignity." At the same time, this may serve as a discursive strategy of evasion that shifts the topic and produces silence about the opponent in the Gaza crisis. Such evasion is further supported by the generalization strategy through the generic reference to "people."

4.1.3. Analysis of Extract (3)

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman delivered a speech to dignitaries and officials. The speech addressed the Palestinian issue and referred to the responsibility for ending the current situation in Gaza. In this respect, the Crown Prince stated:

The suffering of our brothers in Palestine continues as a result of the ongoing Israeli aggression. We reaffirm the importance of the international community's role in ending the disastrous consequences of this aggression, protecting innocent civilians, and working toward a new reality in which Palestine can enjoy peace in accordance with international legitimacy and relevant resolutions. We ask God Almighty to perpetuate security and stability in our country, in all Muslim countries, and across the world. (Arab News, 2025, paras. 3-4, 8)

According to van Dijk's (2006) ideological-rhetorical strategies, the extract focuses on the central strategy of victimization. The speaker positioned Palestinians as an in-group marked by moral proximity through the expression "the suffering of our brothers in Palestine." "Suffering" is presented as a continuous state of being, and direct allusions to starvation or siege are avoided, which possibly contributes to the construction of silence about Israeli policies. Moreover, the reference to "Palestine" instead of specifically naming Gaza in "the suffering of our brothers in Palestine" and "a new reality in which Palestine" signals the vagueness strategy. Such a tactic obscures the location of the siege.

"Our brothers" realizes the actor description strategy, which indicates emotional closeness and identification with the Palestinian group. The phrase "ongoing Israeli aggression" foregrounds the negative other-presentation strategy. Such a formulation suggests an implicit us versus them moral dichotomy. The euphemism strategy is realized through the analysis whereby "aggression" substitutes the more direct lexicalizations of violence. Such substitution makes allusions to starvation and famine more indirect, thus potentially enabling evasion of direct criticism of Israel. The next clause expresses responsibility primarily through the distancing strategy, which may contribute to silence about Israeli agency through the expression "we reaffirm the importance of the international community's role." Responsibility in this expression is transferred to an external group of actors, which is represented by "the international community." Therefore, moral responsibility appears to be redefined as advocacy through reaffirmation. Such a discursive move indicates the reasonableness strategy, which introduces the speaker's position as balanced and institutionally-oriented.

The implication strategy operates through "protecting innocent civilians" and "working toward a new reality." These formulations are an indication of victimization coupled with moralization. They also reposition the crisis as a gradual improvement initiative, rather than a crime with a responsible actor. By concluding the speech with a prayer, evasion of taking concrete action for Palestinians and against Israel might be facilitated.

4.2. Western Leaders' Discourses

This section analyzes some speeches by specific Western leaders delivered in 2025 in response to the starvation crisis in Gaza. It focuses on three leaders, namely the President of the United States (US), Donald Trump, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, and the Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni.

4.2.1. Analysis of Extract (4)

The President of the US, Donald Trump, gave a speech in response to a journalist's question: "Should Israel be doing more to allow food into Gaza?" (Hindustan Times, 2025, 3:06:10). Trump responded as follows:

We gave \$60 million two weeks ago for food and nobody even acknowledged it, and it's terrible. You know, you really want at least someone to say thank you. No other country gave anything. We gave \$60 million two weeks ago for food for Gaza. And nobody acknowledged it. Nobody talks about it. And it makes you feel a little bad when you do that and you know you have other countries not giving anything... I mean, nobody gave but us, and nobody said thank you very much. And it would be nice to have at least a thank you. (Hindustan Times, 2025, 3:06:19)

Drawing on van Dijk's (2006) ideological-rhetorical strategies, the extract functions as a tactical response to the journalist's question. The discourse provides grounds for the positive self-presentation strategy through the repetition of the donor claim "we gave" and the number game strategy using "60 million dollars" and "two weeks ago." These quantified claims function as evidence of virtue, reinforcing the speaker's moral responsibility through highlighting his support for the vulnerable. Evasion of discussing responsibility for the Gaza starvation crisis is most likely reproduced by means of reiteration. The act of donation is presented as the focal moral activity, and the Israeli contribution to the creation of starvation and the manipulation of access seem to be backgrounded within this framing.

This elevation of moral self-image is further reinforced through the polarization strategy, as realized in "no other country gave anything" and "other countries not giving anything." Such an absolutist formulation reinforces the in-group/out-group dichotomy and establishes a moral scorecard structured around the binary "we give / they do not." This polarization may function as a strategy of silence by redirecting evaluative attention towards "other countries" instead of focusing on whether Israel facilitates or restricts food entry into Gaza.

The discourse then evolves into self-victimization through the victimization strategy to establish emotional and reputational damage. Configurations such as "nobody even acknowledged it," "nobody talks about it," "it makes you feel bad," and "at least thank you" position Trump as an unjust victim whose generosity is overlooked. Instead of foregrounding starving Gazans as the victims of famine brought about by the siege, the discourse reframes the speaker as the victim of thanklessness. This act of victimization could lead to evasion of recognizing Palestinians' suffering as a result of Israeli violence, recontextualizing the starvation crisis as a personal grievance of the speaker.

Moreover, the rhetorical emphasis is arranged based on repetition as the main strategy. The lexical reiteration of "nobody" in expressions such as "nobody acknowledged," "nobody talks," "nobody gave," and "nobody said thank you" creates a totalizing feeling of being neglected. This repetition is further intensified through the dramatization strategy, which amplifies the perceived injustice of a minor failure in the form of a lack of thanks into a broader moral outrage. Practically, silence may be reframed as a focus on the contribution of the donor rather than concerning Israeli restrictions or responsibility for starvation in Gaza.

4.2.2. Analysis of Extract (5)

French President Emmanuel Macron delivered a speech at the United Nations podium. The statement articulated the position of France on the situation in Gaza and the two-state settlement. In his speech, the President said:

Nothing, nothing justifies continuing the war in Gaza any longer. Nothing. On the contrary, everything calls for the war to be brought to a definitive end now ... To save lives. The lives of Israeli hostages who are still being detained in atrocious conditions. The lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians wracked by hunger, suffering, the fear of death, and grief over their loved ones. To save all lives. Because for two years now, it is the denial of one another's humanity and the sacrifice of human life that have prevailed. Yes, since 7 October, what has been denied is one another's lives. (Présidence de la République, 2025, para. 9)

Drawing on van Dijk's (2006) ideological-rhetorical strategies, the discourse seems to build moral responsibility by supporting peace through the repetition strategy. "Nothing, nothing ... nothing" constructs an absolute rejection of any justification for continuing the war "any longer." Nevertheless, it also fulfils the implication strategy as "continuing the war" is condemned, but the actor is not specified. The major strategy that is employed to strengthen the urgency is hyperbole since "everything" demands "a definitive end now." However, this tends to facilitate evasion of addressing the specifics of the Gaza crisis and directly attributing responsibility.

The actor description strategy is used as a key mechanism to create empathy. The association of "Israeli hostages" with "atrocious conditions" increases moral judgement, whereas the accountable actor remains unidentified. The number game strategy, actualized through "hundreds of thousands," alongside the victimization strategy realized through "wracked by hunger ... fear of death ... grief" exacerbate the suffering of Palestinians. The implication strategy is also realized. The ideologically important phrase "since 7 October" seems to invoke the inference that the subject of the action implied is Hamas, but it is not stated directly.

The repetition strategy is predominantly achieved through the refrain "to save lives ... to save all lives" and the generalization strategy is strengthened through the general quantifier "all." This is also maintained in the comparison strategy, which equalizes the suffering of Israeli hostages and the Palestinians in Gaza. Despite this balanced framing, it potentially creates silence by not mentioning Israeli offences that resulted in Gaza being victimized. This is reinforced through evasion by replacing the focus on Gaza starvation with a balance between Israeli and Palestinian needs for security. At the same time, this representation contributes to projecting the speaker's moral responsibility, and the stated purpose centers on population security and the safeguarding of human life.

Finally, the expressions "the denial of one another's humanity" and "the sacrifice of human life" foreground abstraction. This moralization of the crisis actualizes the situation description strategy, which is strengthened with the time indicator "for two years now." The temporal marker "since 7 October" gives immediacy, and "one another's lives" serves as a sign of reciprocity. In this configuration, the speaker failed to create an explicit out-group, and he made both parties victims. The repetitive humanitarian language used in the discourse might serve as a discursive practice of silence.

4.2.3. Analysis of Extract (6)

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni delivered a speech that outlined the Italian official position on global conflicts, with particular reference to the war in Gaza.

Hamas took advantage of the weakening of this architecture to launch its attack against Israel on 7 October 2023. ... That attack ... drove Israel to ... a legitimate reaction, because every State and every people has the right to defend itself. ... We will not join those who place all the responsibility for what is happening in Gaza on Israel, for it was Hamas that started the war. It is Hamas that could bring Palestinians' suffering to an end, by immediately releasing all the hostages. It is Hamas that seems to want to prosper on the suffering of the people it claims to represent. ... The children of Gaza ... are seeking responses that can improve their situation, and this is what we are working on. (Italian Government Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2025, paras. 9, 12, 15)

Following van Dijk's (2006) ideological-rhetorical strategies, the polarization strategy is realized in the discourse through the selective description of actors. Hamas is ideologically positioned as the initiating out-group actor with the constructions "took advantage," "launched its attack," and "started the war." Conversely, Israel is concurrently redefined as an in-group member that is influenced and forced. Israeli actions are not independently foregrounded, but are instead framed within a causal context, such as "that attack ... drove Israel." This configuration frames Israeli actions as reactive and necessary. This pattern can be interpreted as silence by hiding the policies of Israel and the nature of its response. The phrase "a legitimate reaction" functions as a form of legitimation, presenting Israeli violence as lawful and justified. The norm expression strategy also reinforces this in the universalized claim that "every State and every people has the right to defend itself."

Through recurring refusal in "we will not join those who place all the responsibility ... on Israel," the hyperbole strategy is realized through repetition with responsibility constantly shifted onto Hamas. At the same time, it may function to enact evasion by diverting attention away from the Palestinian historical context that differentiates between aggressor and victim roles.

The repeated construction "it is Hamas that" enacts the repetition strategy, which progressively intensifies the attribution of blame and shifts responsibility predominantly onto Hamas. Hamas is thus not only placed in the position of being militarily guilty but also morally discredited. The dramatization strategy is realized by the linguistic formulation "seems to want to prosper from the suffering." Such a strategy frames Palestinian suffering as a resource that is instrumentalised by Hamas rather than as an outcome of policy. This seemingly avoids Israeli responsibility through the justification of an undefined "reaction." This arrangement may eventually contribute to silence because the impact of Israeli actions on Palestinian civilians is not mentioned.

The discourse is based on the humanitarianism strategy, which could establish moral responsibility as the speaker assumed the role of an ethically concerned leader. In this respect, he addressed abstract victims, "the children of Gaza," and mentioned their plight using the ambiguous wording "their situation," which is quite an abstract construction. This substitutes the explicit mention of starvation and pre-empts ethical action by introducing it with "this is what we are working on." There are no direct references to terms such as "Palestine," "famine," and "blockade." This humanitarian discourse arguably contributes to silence about starvation by avoiding such terms and acts as a kind of evasion by replacing explicit words with abstract ones.

Table 1

Frequency of van Dijk's (2006) Ideological-Rhetorical Strategies in the Analysis of Arab and Western Leaders' Speeches

van Dijk's (2006) Ideological-Rhetorical Strategies	
Ideological-Rhetorical Strategies	Frequency
1. Vagueness	3
2. Victimisation	3
3. Dramatization	3
4. Distancing	2
5. Generalization	2
6. Number game	2
7. Situation description	2
8. Comparison	2
9. Repetition	2
10. Hyperbole	2
11. Norm expression	2
12. Negative other-presentation	1
13. Euphemism	1
14. Pseudo-ignorance	1
15. Positive self-presentation	1
16. Reasonableness	1
17. Empathy	1
18. Implication	1
19. Actor description	1
20. National self-glorification	1
21. Polarization	1
22. Humanitarianism	1

5. Conclusions

Adopting van Dijk's (2006) framework for an ideological discourse analysis, this study has analyzed the responses of some Arab and Western leaders delivered in 2025 to the Gaza starvation crisis. The analysis shows that the systematic construction of silence, evasion, and moral responsibility is carried out through ideological-rhetorical strategies such as victimization, vagueness, distancing, and generalization, minimizing direct political responsibility. Through the analyzed speeches, Palestinian suffering is often portrayed in generic humanitarian terms which do not directly attribute responsibility to Israel for starvation and blockade conditions. The responsibility is either shifted to unspecified parties or reallocated towards Hamas, while the speakers remain diplomatically neutral and politically abstain from direct confrontation with Israel. Furthermore, equating Palestinian and Israeli suffering creates a politically uneven reality as a humanitarian tragedy, thereby downplaying Palestinian victimization. As a whole, the

humanitarian rhetoric studied serves not only as an act of compassion, but also as a political and ideological tool for hiding accountability. This study is therefore a contribution to CDA, in that it uncovers how humanitarian language is used instrumentally in political discourse to promote ideological agendas rather than political justice.

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