

# Constructing “Palestinian Terror” and Pro-Zionist Sympathy in British Tory Press: The Sun’s Coverage of the War on Gaza as a Study Case.

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 : 0009-0008-5401-0075

Received	Accepted	Published
13/05/2026	25/05/2026	31/05/2026

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.63939/JAAS.2026-Vol9.N29.32-39>

Munadi, A. I. (2026). Constructing “Palestinian terror” and pro-Zionist sympathy in British Tory press: *The Sun’s coverage of the war on Gaza as a study case*. *Journal of Afro-Asian Studies*, 9(29), 32–39.

## Abstract

*The article analyzes the language the British newspaper the Sun uses in its coverage of the ongoing war on Palestine. It aims to demonstrate how the Sun constructs “Palestinian terror”, versus Israeli rule of law and legitimacy as a state. It argues that the Sun’s annual report of the war on Gaza blindsides the resistance side in the conflict, where resistance is portrayed as a group of outlaw thugs and terrorists, serving as a “terror-proxy for the tyrannical terroristic regime of Iran,” with no visible leadership or signs of an organised and democratically-elected civil authority in Gaza, while Israel is the isle of democracy in a sea of despotism, holding the torch of enlightenment and freedom guaranteed by the rule of law, and discouragingly battling Oriental forces of darkness. The article uses Critical Discourse Analysis combined with Saidian Orientalist Discourse Analysis to demonstrate the language tools the Sun uses to construct “Palestinian terror” and lawlessness as opposed to Israeli statehood and the rule of law.*

**Keywords:** *Orientalism, Tory Press, Gaza war, constructing terror, rule of law.*

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## 1. Introduction

The Anglo-American press is known for its articulate sympathy with Israel. The Sun in Britain is an example of this biased press. While the Sun's link with the Conservative Party is unofficial, it is often expressed through the paper's endorsements of the Conservative Party in elections; it is considered by many to be the mouthpiece of conservative circles in Britain. In this article, we use the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and Orientalist Discourse as it is expounded by the late Edward Said in his many works, especially *Orientalism* (1978) and *Covering Islam* (1983), in order to explore the ways in which the Sun manages to construct an image of a Palestinian outlaw and terrorist out of its coverage of Israel's ongoing war on Gaza. In what follows, we will appropriate the principles of both methods as they were applied in the works of several figures in discourse analysis to explore this issue.

## 2. Discourse

### 2.1 What is Discourse

Discourse is a theory that was developed by the French philosopher/ historian Michel Foucault. It refers to a set of rules that reflect worldly power and is expressed in language, which shapes the human subject by setting boundaries on what can be said, by whom, and in what setting. Moreover, this language is designed not only to reflect a group's identity as it relates to other human groups, but also to carry within its structure and semantics the institutional dynamics of the forces within this group. Therefore, discourse is not a static set of rules, but a dynamic historical and social force that defines knowledge and values, and that shields and reinforces a group's identity against perceived threats from others.

Michel Foucault, who developed the theory of discourse presents it as the new approach that allows new historians to account for moments of discontinuity, of rupture in an outmoded historiographical paradigm that builds its historiographical work on continuity and human consciousness as "the origin of historical development and all actions [which] are the two sides of the same system of thought (Foucault, 1972, p. 12)". Moreover, Foucault argues we need to turn our attention away from traditional historiography's categories like "vast unities like 'periods' or 'centuries' to the phenomena of 'rupture' of 'discontinuity,'" and that traditional historiography works with "an uncertain object, badly-drawn frontiers, methods borrowed from here and there, and an approach lacking in rigor and stability." Therefore, instead of human consciousness and continuity Foucault proposes power as it is embodied in modern institutions as an impersonal category that sets the rules of discourse as mentioned above. By power, of course, Foucault does not mean an impermeable locus of authority at the top of a hierarchical pyramid that functions only through physical coercion of subjects, but a new conception of power, which perceives it as a fluid category that uses modern humanistic knowledge to justify the "gentle" coercion it subjects modern citizens to through the conquests of modern knowledge. Therefore, for Foucault, since the late eighteenth century, modern social and human sciences have stood in league with power, one providing valuable knowledge of a new form of rule, while the other sponsors and reaps the harvest of knowledge to further its control and reinforce conformity.

Discourse, therefore, is the appropriated, dynamic institutional grammar of a social and historical scene by power for two ends: further control and further efficiency in economic production. While human subjects are, according to this nightmarish scheme of discourse, just temporary occupants of social positions of different powers that facilitate either the continuity of discourse/ power, or adjust the terms of discourse, as the social and historical counter forces force it to, for one purpose: the imperial, ever-expanding scope of control and efficiency.

## 2.2 Discourse Analysis

Many scholars influenced by Michel Foucault's theory of discourse have been developing it since his works became known to the scholarly public. Lately, the phrase "Discourse Analysis," also labeled "Critical Science," has come to dominate the field of discourse studies. The Dutch scholar Tuen Van Dijk, for example, describes the function and aim of critical discourse analysis as follows:

*Beyond description of superficial application, critical science in each domain asks further questions, such as those of responsibility, interests, and ideology. Instead of focusing on purely academic or theoretical problems, it starts from prevailing social problems and thereby chooses the perspective of those who suffer most, and critically analyzes those in power, those who are responsible, and those who have the means and the opportunity to solve such problems." (Van Dijk, cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 15)*

Many appropriators of Foucault's theory of discourse and those who have developed its approach to different social, historical or epistemological phenomena furthered the preoccupation with socially and historically underprivileged groups, who are often subjected to cultural vilification and redirected attention to oppressive groups as their ideological apparatuses solidify in place discourses that absolve them of responsibility for the state these underprivileged group have been subjected to by the constant portrayal of them as inherently evil and deserving of the underprivileged state they live in. therefore, a Critical Discourse Analyst "play an advocacy role for groups who suffer from social discrimination." (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 15)

While Foucault asserts that wherever there is power, there is resistance, his focus was always on the analysis of the mechanisms of work of the discourse of the modern state's power, especially on moments of discontinuity where and when this discourse underwent change as new categories of knowledge disrupt the continuous dominance of a discursive utterance. But many of his followers adopt an analytical tone that aligns with the perceived ethical condemnation of the grievances of dominant powers as they account for forms of social or historical injustice. Not only are Critical Discourse Analysts preoccupied with dominant discourses as they function, but as Wodak argues, "Discourse theories aim at the conceptualization of discourse as a social phenomenon and try to explain its genesis and its structure." (Wodak & Meyer, 2001)

## 2.3 Orientalism

Edward Said (1935- 2001) is a Palestinian American scholar who appropriated Foucault's theory of discourse to an eclectic cultural analysis of Western discourse on the Orient, which he called Orientalism. The word "Orientalism" came to mean in Said's work the inherited and constantly reinforced ideological apparatus by which "the European [and later the American] culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self." What stands out about Orientalism, argues Said, is that apart from simple factual references used by Western authors about the Orient and its peoples, civilizations, religions, etc., Orientalism is completely fantastic. Orientalist discourse uses these to induce an effect of the real in Western readers: "the Orient was almost a European invention and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experience." (Said, 1978, p. 3)

In tracing the genesis and structure of Orientalism, Said notes that it is a consistent discourse in that the Oriental has little say in how he or she is portrayed and represented in works meant to be about him/her. The Oriental is forcefully subjected by the desire of the Western representer to be Oriental; that is, to appear and behave as the Westerner representing him desired/decided, or inherited the decision from within his culture/discourse, to perceive him/her; a process that Said calls Orientalizing the Oriental.

This desire/ power to Orientalize the Oriental, to see him not as he is, but as we wish to see him coincides with a pre-formed perception of Muslim Orientals, usually as groups not as individuals, for example as belonging to a horde of sub-human beings upon whom we hurl everything we do not like about ourselves or the world our authority shapes: “there is consensus on “Islam” as a kind of scapegoat for everything we do not like about the world’s new political, social, and economic patterns.” (Said, 1981/1997, p. III)

In their coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, Western press often reiterates the same inherited tropes as they are found in Orientalist discourse about Islam from the Middle Ages: “When Palestinians resist Israeli colonialism...such resistance is religious, not political or civil or human.” What’s more, this “Islam”, which is believed to be the worldview of these “Muslim terrorists,” “was believed [for most of the Middle Ages] to be a demonic religion of apostasy, blasphemy and obscurity.” (Said, 1981/1997, p. 39)

### **3. British Conservative Press and the Economy of Coverage**

#### **3.1 Israel in Conservative British Press**

Anglo American Press, on the other hand, often presents Israel with laudatory epithets like: “the Middle East’s lone democracy,” “a democratic island in an authoritarian sea,” “a tiny nation in a hostile region,” “a small country surrounded by enemies,” or “a national constantly on alert.” This repertoire of descriptive phrases stresses the existential threat Israel faces as an ally, regardless of the acts of aggression that this state has been carrying out since its foundation, which are often presented as acts of desperate nation’s self-preservation from the ominous threatening forces at its doors: the regular massacres of Palestinian people, Israel’s intransigence in the PLO’s decades-long peaceful protest for a neighboring Palestinian state as approved by the UN, its ever-expanding settlements in the West Bank, its decades-long military, economic and political siege of Gaza strip and isolation of Gazans from their natural environment; all of these and more are covered up or sugarcoated as necessary “security” precautions against a hostile, terroristic and evil-bent Palestinian population.

While the laudatory epithets which often accompany Israel in opinion pieces demonstrate the shared foundations between Western states’ political structure and Israel; that is liberal democracy, other appellations from the same press stress the commonality between both nations of the same civilizational identity and shared destiny: phrases like “Western-style democracy,” “a bastion of Western values,” “a bulwark of democracy,” “part of the democratic world,” “a strategic outpost of the West,” “a fellow democracy,” “a frontline state of the West.”

In this sense, Israel is seen as a pioneer small state under constant imminent existential threat from the Oriental “forces of darkness, chaos and annihilation”; threats that the Orient has always been to the democracies of Athens and Sparta in antiquity, to the humanistic and lenient Christendom of the Occident of the Middle Ages, and to the democracies of the modern West now. Israel, most Westerners believe, shares with us, and embodies a Western outpost of enlightenment, democracy, rationality and belief in human rights; therefore, whatever measure will guarantee its prosperity and expansion in the face of the hordes of fanatic and terroristic Muslim Orientals can be overlooked and ultimately justified as “a state’s right to self-defence.”

In his two-volume work, the biologist Mark Moffett argues that human groups share with many animal groups fear of what they don’t understand. But while animals attack other animals from the same species from different groups based on their different chemical or physical properties, our problem as human groups with other groups stems from the failure to understand their affective expression of diverse sentiments like grief, joy, wonder, and so on. Israel is the Jewish Western state in the Middle East. We are familiar with Israel and Israelis, we are familiar with their political structure; we share the Judeo-Christian foundations of civilisation; we are familiar with their society by virtue of travel and economic exchange;

we cherish the same belief in values like democracy, human rights, belief in our enlightenment and progress; they even look like us and speak our language. (Moffett, 2019, p. 21)

All of this while the Palestinian has never been and will never be more than the agent of the ever-standing threat to us, to our style of life, to our values and to our existence. After all, weren't they the Persians led by Emperor Xerxes who stood at the gates of Sparta with his hordes of monster armies intent on burning Sparta? Weren't they the Moors from the Southwest and the Ottomans from the Southeast who sat siege respectively to Poitiers in the South of France and Vienna, the capital of Austria? Weren't the Al-Qaeda terrorists who destroyed the Twin Towers in New York bringing Apocalypse to our midst?

### 3.2 Constructing Israeli Legitimacy versus Palestinian “Terror.”

Arthur Balfour, the British MP, once stated in the British Parliament that Egypt, an exemplary Oriental country, had witnessed conqueror after conqueror consolidating only despotic rule, and that self-government was the Western standard, which stood for a country's deserving of independence. By the same token, a Palestinian today, incapable as he is of self-rule, is an outlaw and a terrorist. Israel, on the other hand, as we have seen in the laudatory appellations the British and American press use to describe and reinforce the state's legitimacy over the land it is stealing, is a liberal democracy as the British know and are familiar with. Other forms of rule are often seen as alien and unwanted. An annual report by the Sun uses the following title for its article reporting on the ongoing Israeli war on Palestine: “Year of Hell: Hamas's Horror October 7 massacre plot sparked a Year of bloodshed.” Israel defends a democratic state, while Hamas “plots a Horror October 7 massacre”. To plot, according to the Oxford Dictionary, means to “plan something secretly, often something harmful.” The event from the Sun's perspective needs no context. It is simple: “Hamas, an outlaw group of terrorists plots horror massacre attack against innocent Israelis and most importantly against a democracy; that is, against civilization, stability, progress and security. (Said, 1978, pp. 32–33)

The introductory paragraph of the article starts thus: “It [October 7 attacks] was the catalyst that plunged four nations –Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Iran – into War.” Hamas's October 7 attack is responsible for “plunging” four countries into war, not decades-long siege to Gaza, not the many massacres of genocide that Israel is carrying, not the ever-expanding settlements in the West Bank and certainly not the bleak prospects for a nation for Palestinians in this situation. Everything began on October 7.

As if summoning the help of experts, the author of the article continues in a desperate plea for credibility: “Experts have branded the spiraling situation in the Middle East as “one of the biggest human rights crises in the Middle East right now.” Afraid again that the blame will fall back on Israel, he continues “triggered by October 7 atrocity”. One wonders who this expert is that the Sun is counseling on the issue. He is “Bruce Reidel, who spent 30 years in the CIA, including a stint in Israel at the Tel Aviv embassy”. What did this expert have to say on the issue at hand: “Israel is fighting a war on multiple fronts.” Again, no mention of why this is happening?

The article continues: “Since October 7, Israel's archenemy Iran has used its terror proxies to do its dirty work.” Whether it's Rome's barbarians, Christendom's followers of the imposter anti-Christ, or modern Israel/ the West's thugs and terrorists, it is always a civilizational centre versus a lawless, terrorist hinterland of the empire threatening the imperial centre. The “frontline state of the West is fighting a war on all fronts,” while its enemies are mere terror proxies who do Iran's, another terror regime's “dirty work”, mind you, a regime not a state.

In its canonical definition of “terrorism,” Encyclopedia Britannica states that terrorism is “the systematic use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby to bring about a particular political objective.” It is an act of violence that an outlaw group plots to achieve a political objective in spite of a centre's majoritarian authority. The definition applies, in part, to Palestinian resistance: it uses systematic violence for political objectives. But haven't the Palestinians exhausted the political means to achieve statehood? Yes. What choice do they have? To accept Israel's ongoing takeover of their country piece by piece and not resist.

The “terrorist proxies doing Iran’s dirty work” are “Hezbollah firing rockets from Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen “terrorizing the Red Sea.” To recapitulate, notice the semantic nuances: “ Hamas unlawfully plotted the horror massacre, was aided by Iran terrorist proxies against poor innocent Israel “fighting a war on all fronts”, while the situation “is spiraling...[and we are witnessing] the biggest human rights crisis in the world”. Somehow, Hamas and the other terrorists caused the war, and somehow the area is “plunging...spiraling into chaos.” No Israeli hand in what is happening.

Israel is only, and here a new instrumental language enters the scene, exorcising Israel of any responsibility while dehumanizing its enemies: “Israel is still razing much of Gaza as its troops look to wipe out Hamas and rescue hostages held by Hamas thugs.” Here is a professional army of a legitimate state doing “the razing and wiping” of something resembling humans called Palestinians. Semantically, wiping and razing are verbs that describe human or machine action brushing aside plants or trees.

Israel’s attack on Lebanon, a sovereign state, is portrayed thus in the next paragraph: “Another front has opened in Lebanon after Israeli troops *poured over the border in a mission* to wipe out Hezbollah’s war machine.” Hamas thugs, Hezbollah and Houthis, Iran’s terror proxies, are attacking Israel, while the Israeli army “pours over” the Lebanese border. As if pouring over absolves Israel of the unlawful assault on Lebanon, a sovereign country.

“Last week,” the article goes on, “ Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu vowed Tehran will pay.” We, as readers, are put back in the picture only to discover that Israel has a PM, a political position we know and recognize in “the only democracy in the Middle East,” other states, governments in the area, despite the fact that they were elected in free elections like Hamas in Palestine in 2007 and the Houthis in Yemen and Iran as a state, often referred to as a regime, are thugs and terrorist doing the dirty work of the tyrannical regime of Iran. Again, the contrast is clear.

More on the language used here to describe Israeli state work: “the Israeli PM met with his war cabinet in a secret bunker to map out the blueprints of a devastating revenge attack on Iran.” So, Israel is a state that has a Prime Minister and a war cabinet, nothing about its enemies. Not only this, but the targets in the war between the “terrorists” and a legitimate state are clear: “Netanyahu’s response to Iran blitz could target oil production facilities or even nuclear bases in a final blow to the tyrannical regime.” Here, the Prime Minister of a legitimate state vows to target oil production facilities and nuclear bases, while these tyrannical terrorists are responsible for “horror massacres and bloodbaths”.

The article states further other sources and experts, including Krystian Benedict, crisis response manager for Amnesty International, senior Israeli officials, current serving Israeli officials, previous officials, intelligence officials, IDF special reservist, all lamenting the security error and crying over the hostages not returning. No pro-Palestinian expert is counselled here. The rest of the article, as if to save face for this one-sided narrative, proceeds to mention the Palestinian:

*On October 7, 2023, some 1175 civilians, soldiers, and foreign nationals inside Israel were savagely murdered in a hideous early-morning assault.*

*Hamas terrorists stormed into Israel from Gaza, firing thousands of rockets, flying over in paragliders and bulldozing through in trucks in over 100 different places across the border.*

*Just weeks ago, an IDF report found that 6,000 fighters from Gaza managed to get into Israel that day – including 3,800 from the Hamas terror group’s elite Nukhba forces.*

*Horrifying reports that followed October 7 revealed children were killed; women were raped, and around 250 had been kidnapped and taken back to Gaza.*

And here again, the Gazan resistance appears as a statistical figure threatening Israeli peaceful pastoralist Kibbutz surrounding Gaza with decimation (killing of children), rape, and kidnapping, despite the fact that allegations of rape were found to be not true by Israeli fact-checkers. The long-awaited context to the “horror massacre” that Hamas plotted and executed arrives in the form of numbers of terroristic hordes, with no mention of leadership, a lawful claim to the land, or any form of a counter-authority that is claiming the right to life and self-determination.

Finally, one thinks, a sane person’s opinion, President Biden, among many, described the event as “the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust.” To recapitulate again: in a swift move of hand, the Israelis are the peaceful Jews making of Israel a heaven and living in it. They belong to a internationally-legitimate state with a power structure that we know and recognize; a Prime Minister with a war cabinet, ministers and ministries, is a place where there are foreign embassies brimming with experts, while the Palestinian appear as the thug, the terrorist, insinuator of a war for which his people will be “razed and wiped” with his “terror proxies” doing the “dirty work of tyrannical regime of Iran”, for which this Iran will be dealt a final blow like an ailing monster begging to be relieved of the misery of existence.

The simple historical truth here, that Palestine is a land that belongs to Palestinians and that they have the right to self-determination, is forcefully effaced. The report here is reminiscent of a Greek myth with which I want to end this essay; the myth of Procrustes:

*“And sixth he slew Damastes, whom some call Polypemon, and who was surnamed Procrustes. He had a bed on which he compelled those who passed by to lie down, and if any were shorter than the bed, he stretched them, but if any were longer, he cut off the excess.” (Apollodorus, 1921)*

Like Procrustes, this simple but disturbing historical and political truth is subjected here to Procrustes’s bed, where it is stretched here and cut there to suit a whim, a Zionist dream that the right to conquer and live on a land lived on and owned by others, as Conrad (2006) would have it, is possible.

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude this article, we have used the methods of critical discourse analysis in order to demonstrate how the Sun, a British mouthpiece of conservative Britain, constructs “terrorists” out of Hamas resistance. We noted that the way in which Israel is referred to in its annual report often invokes a sense of a state known among British newspapers readers as “the oasis of democracy in the Middle East in a sea of despotisms”; a state which has the usual power structure of a Western democracy with a prime minister and a war cabinet, embassies, and media experts, while Hamas is portrayed as a violent indistinguishable mass of thugs and outlaw terrorists, fighting a war with its terror-proxies of the terroristic and tyrannical regime of Iran; a war for which Gaza, with no mention of inhabitants, no schools or institutions of any kind, will be “razed and wiped” in a swift move by the professional army of the state of Israel. We noticed that Hamas is portrayed as this terrifying, mysterious force of darkness haunting, with its terror-proxies, “the only oasis of democracy in the Middle East”, that is Israel.

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