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# **Framing and Foreign Policy—Israel’s Response to the Arab Uprisings**

**Amnon Aran and Leonie Fleischmann**

## **Introduction**

The Arab uprisings engulfing the Middle East since December 2010 have attracted a great deal of scholarly writing (Dalacoura 2012; Noueihed and Warren 2012; Peters 2012; Haas and Lesch 2013; Hochman-Rand 2013; Monier 2014, 2015; Khalil 2015; Yossef and Cerami 2015; Nabavi 2017). However, and somewhat surprisingly, the foreign policy of Israel, a key power in the region, has received less attention. The handful of articles on Israel (Byman 2011; Inbar 2012; Bereshith 2012; Jones and Milton-Edwards 2013; Magen 2015) converge around the claim that, amid the Arab uprisings, Israel has adopted a defensive realist foreign policy posture in which ideals did not play a part (Magen 2015, 114, 128-29; Jones and Milton-Edwards 2013, 405, 411).

Whilst useful in some respects, the current debate on Israel and the Arab uprisings has significant shortcomings. The notion of defensive realism is not theoretically grounded by its proponents. For instance, Magen (2015, 128) refers simply to the origins of realism, but offers no detail on its defensive realist strand, while Jones and Milton-Edwards (2013) ignore the International Relations (IR) literature from which defensive realism derives. As a result, these authors too easily overlook the fact that, in important respects, defensive realism is inadequate as a label to describe and explain the foreign policy posture adopted by Israel amid the Arab uprisings.

For example, defensive realism is a theory dealing primarily with relations between states. Thus, it does not seem helpful to describe and explain relations between Israel and non-state actors, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which are an important facet of Israeli foreign policy, in the context of the Arab uprisings. Even if this deficiency could be reconciled, other problems arise. As will be shown below, Israel’s foreign policy behavior since the Arab uprisings does not conform to some of the basic requirements of a defensive realist posture. Defensive realism cuts across realist and neorealist strands of IR and seeks to explain state expansion under conditions of anarchy. It contends that, in the context of a security dilemma, the stronger states in the international system can use offensive means, but that the best route to security would be to pursue moderate strategies that communicate restraint. Therefore,

states are expected to send mixed signals that can lead to either cooperation or competition (Jervis 1978; Posen 1984; Walt 1987; Christensen and Snyder 1990; Van Evera 1998, 1999; Legro and Moravcsik 1999; Taliaferro 2000; Narizny 2017, 159). However, since the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, Israel has rejected opportunities to signal cooperation and often has failed to signal the restraint that a defensive realist position requires. This was reflected most strongly—but not exclusively—during the 2014 war with Hamas and by the rejection of the Kerry peace initiative in 2016. We discuss these in more detail below.

Thus, the rendition of Israeli foreign policy as “defensive realism” does not bear close scrutiny. Nor, as we demonstrate below, is the claim that ideals played no part in determining Israel’s foreign policy in the wake of the Arab uprisings. We acknowledge that Israel’s skepticism towards the belief that the Arab uprisings could democratize the Middle East was due to a lack of the liberal-idealism that marked the early foreign policy responses of the United States and the European Union. However, Magen’s (2015, 129) claim that Israel’s foreign policy towards the Arab uprisings lacks idealism is unsustainable. In one fundamental respect—its stance towards the Palestinians—Israeli foreign policy since the start of the Arab uprisings has been driven strongly by certain ideals such as the Revisionist-Zionist ideals propagated by Netanyahu and his Likud party.

In addition, current research on Israel and the Arab uprisings overlooks the role of agency, the *raison d’être* of Foreign Policy Analysis (Hudson 2005; Kaarbo 2015; Hill 2016). Instead, accounts hinge on the assumption that the regional flux, somehow, inevitably led Israel to adopt a foreign policy stance of defensive realism. Why this rather than some other position was adopted is not explained, which is problematic. After all, in previous instances of regional “flux,” which also involved the rise of “Islamists,” Israel adopted radically different foreign policy stances. For instance, in the wake of the end of the Cold War, and the war in Iraq in 1991, which was accompanied by the rise of Islamists throughout the region, Israel responded by seeking to expand its political engagement with the Arab world. Unprompted by the United States, Israel initiated the Oslo peace process and concluded the 1994 peace accord with Jordan. Therefore, it is clear that regional flux, in and of itself, can lead to different foreign policy responses. Indeed, the task for scholars is to explain why, amid a number of possible alternatives, one option rather than another was adopted, which is something that the current literature on Israel and the Arab uprisings fails to do.

Finally, accounts such as Jones and Milton-Edwards (2013), argue that a monolithic and pessimistic view of the threats posed by the rise of Islamists drove Israeli foreign policy-makers to adopt a defensive realist foreign policy posture. However, this explanation was proposed when Islamists appeared to be making significant gains across the region. Most crucial, from a contemporary Israeli perspective, was the election of Egypt's President Muhamad Morsi, a candidate fielded by the Muslim Brotherhood. However, since then, circumstances have changed significantly. President Morsi was ousted by a military coup (Monier and Ranko 2013), and an offensive led by the Russian and Syrian armies, Iran, Hezbollah, and a United States-led coalition of sixty-five states, hindered the advance of ISIS in Iraq and Syria (Reuters 2015). In addition, Hamas (Karmon 2013) was weakened by its conflict with Israel while Hezbollah's (Bahout 2014) intervention in the Syrian civil war had a similar enfeebling effect. Any military experience gained by Hezbollah from its involvement in Syria, has been offset by the depletion of its human and material resources caused by its intervention. In addition, Hezbollah's political standing in Lebanon was dented as a result of the anti-Syrian March 14 Alliance, which accused Hezbollah of behaving like the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) by invading and occupying land and encroaching on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. Meanwhile, Hezbollah activists clashed with Lebanese Sunni Islamists and Jihadi Salafists, such as the followers of Shaykh Ahmad al-Assir of Sidon and Sheikh Salem al-Rafi'i of Tripoli, who were sending fighters to Syria to oppose the Assad regime. In this context, Hezbollah was perceived as fueling Sunni-Shia discord, which weakened its pan-regional credentials developed following the 2006 war with Israel (Alagha 2014, 198, 201). The weakening of Hezbollah and Hamas and the ousting of Morsi shows that Jones and Edwards used particular stages in the Arab uprisings to draw general conclusions, which now are outdated.

In an attempt to address these shortcomings, we draw on the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) literature on framing. Several studies utilize framing to explain decision-making (Tversky and Kahneman 1981), foreign policy negotiations and bargaining (Levy 1996), military intervention (Vertzberger 1998), foreign policy change (Barnett 1999) and how advisory groups operate (Garrison 2001). Some authors employ a particular aspect of framing, "analogical reasoning," to identify mistakes in foreign policy decision-making (Khong 1992; Siniver and Collins 2013). Others argue that framing a dilemma in a particular way can be a foreign-policy making manipulation technique (Maoz 1990; Hoyt and Garrison 1997).

If decision-makers employ binary language consistently, as in the case examined here, framing can be constitutive. Framing is a discursive strategy that sets the contours that define which foreign policy options can be considered plausible/implausible, responsible/irresponsible, moral/immoral among potential foreign policy alternatives. Indeed, the aforementioned studies show that, rather than being epiphenomenal, framing is constitutive of the foreign policy process; it reduces the range of available/acceptable foreign policy alternatives and demarcates the boundaries to what is and is not to be said and thought.

Thus, we are interested in demonstrating how framing shapes foreign policy—"the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually but not exclusively a state) in international relations" (Hill 2016, 4). Therefore, our research hinges on locating agency. We argue that the dominant Israeli decision-maker since 2009, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, imposed specific diagnostic and prognostic frames in the wake of the Arab uprisings, which he saw as inextricably linked to the rise of Iran and Islamists. Hence, we examine these processes—the Arab uprisings, and the rise of Iran and Islamists—in tandem. As Snow and Benford (1988) explain, "diagnostic framing" refers to the identification of a problem and its causes, and the attribution of blame in a particular direction. "Prognostic framing" consists of providing solutions to the problems identified and the strategies needed to achieve them. Through the use of framing, Netanyahu managed to define the "problems" caused by the Arab uprisings, the potential "solutions," and what was possible/impossible to achieve. Crucially, and contrary to the claim in Magen (2015, 117), we find Prime Minister Netanyahu's statements to be consistent. Irrespective of the type of audience and whether it was domestic or international, our analysis shows that Binyamin Netanyahu employed the same frames. Through this discursive strategy, he committed himself—personally and politically—to the problems he identified in the context of the Arab uprisings, and the solutions he proposed.

Thus, his discursive strategy significantly limited certain foreign policy options whilst enabling others. Rather than defensive realism, as current debate on Israel and the Arab uprisings claims, we demonstrate that, amid the Arab uprisings, Israel's foreign policy was one of entrenchment, which was consistent with the foreign policy frames employed by Prime Minister Netanyahu. This position was predicated on peace for peace, not territory, reinforcing Israel's military capabilities and granting limited autonomy to the Palestinians under Israeli occupation. Therefore, this article offers some insights into the foreign policy outlook of the dominant foreign policy-maker in Israel since the emergence of the uprisings.

It also reveals the counter-frames deployed in opposition to the Prime Minister—especially by prominent members of the Israeli security network—and explains why these counter frames and the foreign policy response they might have facilitated, were suppressed.

The questions arising from this article about framing and foreign policy in the case of Israel speak to broader debates within the discipline of IR. The literature on framing and its application to specific case studies complements the literature on neurological (Stein 2012), cognitive and psychological (Sprout and Sprout 1962, 122-35; Jervis 1976; Vertzberger 1990; Hill 2016, 69-78) foreign policy determinants. The scholars using these multifaceted cognitive approaches, which reveal how images, ideas, worldviews, perceptions and misperceptions affect foreign policy decisions, have paid less attention to how they are translated into foreign policy behavior. Given that foreign policy outcomes are often so different from the original intentions, this gap seems significant. In this context, this article uses the literature on foreign policy framing and its application to a current case study, Israel, to provide clues to how images, ideas, worldviews, perceptions and misperceptions are linked—via framing—to foreign policy behavior. It demonstrates that when images, worldviews, ideas, perceptions and misperceptions are expressed via strategically deployed diagnostic and prognostic frames, they establish contours that limit which foreign policy decisions *and* actions are possible and impossible to pursue.

### **Framing and Foreign Policy: Analytical Groundings and Methodology**

The notion of framing is employed across the social sciences (e.g., Entman 1993; Schön and Rein 1994; Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998; Scheufele 1999; Benford and Snow 2000; Kitzinger 2007; Verloo 2007; Tarrow 2011) and by parts of the FPA literature. Framing is a discursive strategy used to construct meaning in relation to events occurring in the world around us (Gamson et al. 1982; Snow and Benford 1988). Its adoption allows experiences and perceptions to be organized in a particular manner (Snow et al. 1986, 464). Entman (1993, 52), a pioneer of framing theory, explains that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” Framing involves emphasizing some aspects of reality whilst omitting others, with the strategic aim of making certain information

more meaningful and, therefore, rendering it more memorable to its audiences (Entman 1993); framing renders decision-makers' perceptions intelligible and meaningful to others.

However, framing is not merely the articulation of the problems and solutions perceived by an individual or group, which assigns meaning to certain occurrences in the world. As a discursive strategy, it also defines the contours of what is possible/impossible, plausible/implausible in the context of foreign policy behavior. In this respect, frames are "action-orientated sets of beliefs and meaning that inspire and legitimate activities" (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Thus, in uncovering how leaders interpret the world around them, we can develop an understanding of the limits they self-impose on foreign policy, and the strategies adopted to solve the problems they perceive.

As already mentioned, Snow and Benford (1988) identify two key framing types. "Diagnostic framing" refers to the identification of a problem and its causes, and the attribution of blame in a particular direction. "Prognostic framing" consists of providing solutions to the problems identified and the strategies needed to achieve them. Diagnostic and prognostic frames help to create a direct connection between a leader's worldview and his/her foreign policy actions. As "problems" and "solutions" are identified, certain foreign policy courses are rendered plausible and responsible, and certain others are deemed inappropriate to address the particular foreign policy challenge. Yet not all frames constitute foreign policy. As Benford and Snow (2000, 620) argue, they need to meet certain criteria: "frame consistency," meaning there are no contradictions between frame and the frame-maker's behavior; "empirical credibility," meaning there is congruence between the proposed frame and the world realities; and "credibility of frame articulator," based on the status and knowledge of the frame-maker. Therefore, if a political leader breaches his or her own frame, this jeopardizes their status as a credible and consistent framer, which is an important political attribute. Moreover, it risks their being positioned outside of the normative context in which their frames originally were deployed. Consequently, over time, political leaders can become increasingly constrained by the frames to which they have expressed political and personal commitment.

Our use of framing to explain foreign policy responses draws on the insightful work of Michael Barnett (1999) on the relationship between IR institutionalist and constructivist theories. Institutionalism, according to Barnett (1999), fails to consider the important contributions of constructivism, especially its attention to the normative structure, which is understood as the "long-standing patterns of norms and expectations of behavior within a

society” (Elwell 2010, 25) in which the actors are embedded. The normative structure, which comprises national identity and historical narratives, renders certain practices both possible and legitimate—for example, by mimicry, social conformity and rhetorical coercion—and others not. Barnett argues that whilst institutionalists do not ignore the role of ideas in strategic calculations, they fail to appreciate that it is the normative structure of a society that shapes and guides action.

In contrast, constructivism tends to exaggerate the nature of the normative structure, which makes it almost impossible to locate where individual agency resides (Barnett 1999, 7). Furthermore, constructivism fails to acknowledge that actors are situated within an institutional setting that also shapes their actions. Framing resolves these issues in the sense that what is articulated is not merely a reflection of the normative structure but is also a manifestation of purposeful strategic-driven action within a defined institutional setting. Hence, while frames are strategically purposeful, they are simultaneously bounded by the normative structure in which they are embedded. Barnett (1999, 10) demonstrates that the normative structure, which comprises national identity and historical narratives, will legitimate and make intelligible certain frames and actions rather than others.

To enable the linking between framing and foreign policy we situate Barnett’s understanding of normative structure within what Tilly (1978) describes as the “political opportunity structure”—that is, factors in the external environment that facilitate or constrain political action. We extend Barnett’s normative structure by adding two institutional elements, which we will show have a bearing on the relationship between framing and foreign policy. The first is the decision-making structure, which determines the relative autonomy of policy-makers to use frames to shape foreign policy decision-making and implementation (Rosati 1981; Mintz 2004). A personalized, non-institutionalized and ad-hoc decision-making structure will increase the relative autonomy of decision-makers to frame, and vice versa. The second element is the configuration of state institutions, which can vary considerably (Skocpol 1979; Giddens 1985; Halliday 1987). Michael Mann (1993, 75) famously described states as polymorphous, meaning that the expression of their ideological, economic, political and military features differs.

### *Methodology*



Before examining these elements within an Israeli foreign policy context, a note on methodology is needed. The diagnostic and prognostic frames identified in this study are extracted from sixty-seven speeches delivered by Netanyahu since the 2010 Arab uprisings. The speeches are drawn from the official website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Israeli Prime Minister's Office.<sup>1</sup> We selected speeches delivered to a range of domestic and international audiences, between February 2, 2011 and September 22, 2016, in order to determine the consistency of the frames deployed by the Prime Minister.<sup>2</sup> Here, speeches refer to formal, pre-written addresses delivered by Netanyahu, which were scripted and carefully prepared discursive acts. They provided the deliverer significant opportunity to frame his perceptions of the world, the problems it faces, and his perceived solutions. We searched for the terms "foreign policy/Arab Uprisings" and "foreign policy/Arab Spring" to identify relevant speeches. From the seventy-one speeches by the Prime Minister that our search identified, sixty-seven items were deemed relevant for the analysis and were retained as our sample. In line with the study's research aims, the coding scheme adopted examined how frames enable certain foreign policy options and suppress alternatives. Following Saldana (2015), we employed manual qualitative coding, useful for analyzing the representative amount of data contained within the speeches to extract frames, and adopted Saldana's (2015) collaborative coding approach. Accordingly, each of the authors read the speeches independently before conferring over the frames, which are the focus of our analysis. To identify prognostic and diagnostic frames, we conducted a process of "pre-coding" (Layder 1998) to highlight the parts of those speeches referring to foreign policy and/or the Arab Uprisings/Arab Spring. This first coding round involved assigning descriptive codes to identify the main topics in the highlighted sections. In the second coding round, we extracted the frames used by Netanyahu according to the previously assigned codes, distinguishing between diagnostic and prognostic frames. Our analysis is limited to examining the frames that emerged from the speeches; it does not include audience research, which is consistent with the methodology applied in framing studies (Creed et al. 2002; Tarrow 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://mfa.gov.il/mfa/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> The collection of speeches was drawn from those delivered during this period to Congress, the Knesset, the United Nations General Assembly, Foreign Press Corps, AIPAC – American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Conference of Presidents and the Institute for National Security Studies, and key speeches related directly to the Arab uprisings.

## **The Political Opportunity Structure**

### *The Decision-Making Structure and the Prime Minister's Relative Autonomy*

This section contextualizes the analysis by identifying the political opportunity structure surrounding the framing process. The institutional determinants of framing in the case of Israel are linked closely to the decision-making structure, which is conditioned strongly by Israel's proportional representation electoral system. Parties need to pass an electoral threshold defined by the minimum number of votes needed to win a seat in the Knesset, Israel's Parliament, which comprises 120 members. This electoral threshold of 3.25 percent of the votes, is low (The Electoral System 2014) and has resulted in Israeli governments consisting of coalitions of several parties that govern according to a coalition-cabinet system (Freilich 2006, 649).

The Prime Minister has no institutionalized or formal sources of control over his ministers—especially those from rival parties. This severely constrains the Prime Minister's political authority over his cabinet members, who are political figures in their own right, with their own political agendas. Consequently, the task of maintaining the coalition becomes all-consuming and affects the decision-making process; even the most junior coalition partners can topple government based on a narrow parliamentary majority. Israeli cabinets also are prone to leaks and political discord (Freilich 2006, 645).

Nevertheless, in contrast to what some studies (Ben-Meir 1995; Freilich 2006; Dror 2011) imply, Israeli prime ministers tend not to be buffeted by the political forces of the government. Rather, this decision-making structure affords the prime minister a high level of relative autonomy, which is enhanced by the political and symbolic resources accompanying that office, and exclusive access to United States decision-makers and officials. The foremost officials are the United States President, the Secretary of State, and the National Security Advisor. United States "peace envoys," such as Ambassador Dennis Ross, also become the prime minister's key contact.

In addition, the government enjoys an almost automatic parliamentary majority, which means that the Knesset cannot exercise significant oversight over Israeli foreign policy. The Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, responsible mainly for statutory oversight to manage government foreign policy, has historically been under resourced and thus weak. Consequently, key decisions shaping Israeli foreign policy and its framing during the last twenty-five years have been made by the various prime ministers with no consultation with government, and presented to the cabinet as *faits accomplis*. These decisions include recognizing and negotiating with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (Beilin 1999, 123-26) withdrawing unilaterally from Lebanon (Peri 2006, 94-96) and the Gaza Strip (Yaalon 2008, 168-72).

The relative autonomy of Binyamin Netanyahu, who returned to power in 2009 after a previous term (1996-1999), derives from a number of sources. Netanyahu's party, Likud, the current ruling party in Israel, has been the leading coalition partner in all governments since the beginning of the Arab uprisings. Consequently, Binyamin Netanyahu is set to become the longest serving prime minister since the State of Israel was established. This has allowed him the time denied to all other decision-makers and Israeli state officials to influence Israeli foreign policy in response to the Arab uprisings.

Furthermore, during this period, Netanyahu has developed important attributes required for a prime minister to influence decision-making. Prime Minister Netanyahu has prestige, political skills and informal links within Israel, which, since his return to power in 2009, have been manifested strongly in his ability to lead his Likud party to consecutive election victories. Moreover, Binyamin Netanyahu's premiership is the main element of consistency in an otherwise rather malleable decision-making forum, which changed after each of the two national elections held since the outbreak of the Arab uprisings. Thus, Netanyahu has had more opportunity than any other Israeli policy-maker to frame his country's foreign policy according to his personal beliefs, which are articulated in what is considered a blueprint, *A Place Among the Nations: Israel and the World* (Netanyahu 1993a; Peleg 1995).

The personality of his hardline revisionist and historian father, Ben-Zion Netanyahu, significantly influenced the son's ideological development. Binyamin Netanyahu, consistent with revisionist Zionist leaders and his father's views, which were expounded upon during a long interview to Ari Shavit (2012), is a strong advocate of Israel's maximal territorial expansion. More specifically, Binyamin Netanyahu (1993a, 343) has stated explicitly that

“one simply cannot talk about peace and security for Israel and in the same breath expect Israel to significantly alter its existing defense boundaries.” Also, within the Greater Israel of the future, he sees only Jews as having real political power, with Palestinians remaining subservient. The prospect of a demographic imbalance favoring Arabs over Jews is not perceived by Netanyahu as a factor that need impede Israel’s territorial expansion.

Netanyahu maintains that Greater Israel and its prospects for survival hinge on possession of overwhelming military strength, deterrence and the position of a regional superpower (Netanyahu 1993a, 250, 253). Accordingly, peace is not a function of mutual recognition and acceptance. Rather, as Chapters Seven and Ten in *A Place Among the Nations* —entitled respectively “The Question of Jewish Power” and “The Wall”—explicitly reveal, Netanyahu perceives peace as resulting from military strength, deterrence or, in short, the “Iron Wall” of Jewish military force. Thus, his approach to peace is militaristic to its core. There is not one reference in *A Place Among the Nations* to how to improve relations between Jews and Arabs. This is unsurprising given Netanyahu’s conception of the unremitting hostility of pan-Arabists and Islamic fundamentalists towards the West and Israel as the source of conflict in the Middle East. The threats posed to Israel by what Netanyahu perceives to be a historical permanence, are often compared to the threats presented by Nazi Germany. For example, Netanyahu equates the Oslo agreements with Chamberlain’s appeasement of Nazi Germany (Netanyahu 1993a, 157; Netanyahu 1993b).

As ample scholarship demonstrates, Netanyahu’s personal beliefs and ideological dispositions, and their public representation by him, have been consistent during all his years in power (Lochery 1999; Kimhi 2001; Shindler 2001a; Aronoff 2014). Consequently, the duration of Netanyahu’s rule has conferred credibility on his frames based on the criteria of “frame consistency,” “empirical credibility” and “credibility of the frame articulator.” Frame credibility has proven crucial for providing the Prime Minister with the opportunity to frame the Arab uprisings in a particular way, thereby setting clear contours for Israeli foreign policy in this period.

### *The Tilt of the State towards Security*

However, it would be a mistake to assume that Prime Minister Netanyahu enjoys complete independence in decision-making, which is why we prefer the term “relative autonomy” to

describe his ability to frame and formulate foreign policy. There are other factors in the political opportunity structure that play a significant role in defining where frames can be used. One is the institutional configuration of the Israeli state, which exhibits a serious tilt towards the defense establishment. Sheffer and Barak (2013) argue that Israeli foreign policy is influenced significantly by a highly informal, but very potent “security network.” This includes serving and retired IDF generals, members of Israel’s broader defense establishment, politicians, bureaucrats and private entrepreneurs. Their tight-knit structure around the defense establishment socializes them and instils shared values, perceptions and material interests, pursued via their influential civil roles, to determine key foreign policy issues.

The influence of the security network on Israeli foreign policy is compounded by institutionalized and formalized inroads into foreign policy-making made by the IDF over time (Peri 2006, 50-76). Of crucial importance in this context is the Military Intelligence Directorate—Israel’s main military intelligence-collecting agency and analyst of regional and international strategic developments. It produces the annual National Intelligence Estimate, which is the main strategic assessment made available to Israeli foreign policy-makers on issues such as war and peace, and regional and global processes. The IDF’s Planning and Policy Directorate, which, since the early 1970s, has been the main unit in the military providing strategic and political assessments, represents the military’s second institutional inroad into foreign policy-making.

At the same time, the influence of the security network is tempered by a number of factors. The legal framework, in the form of the Military Basic Law (enacted in 1976) and later amendments to it, defines the relationship between the military and the government. The influence of the defense establishment is tempered also by its reliance for its daily functioning on resources generated by the civil sphere. For instance, the IDF is dependent on a constant civilian presence in its large reserve core, which for many years epitomized the notion of the IDF as a “people’s army.” Thus, the IDF is not a closed corporate entity insulated, as are professional militaries, from the civil sphere (Horowitz 1982; Peri 2006, 19, 23; Sheffer and Barak 2013, 2). Consequently, extra-parliamentary movements and the media have developed mechanisms for calling the IDF to account (Ben-Meir 1995, 43-50; Cohen 2006, 775; Levy 2008, 52). On balance, therefore, the tilt of the state towards security is significant in shaping though not outright determining the boundaries to framing.

### *The Normative Structure*

We next contextualize the third element of our political opportunity structure, the normative structure, which comprises national identity and historical narratives. Identities are fundamentally social and relational rather than personal and psychological, because they are shaped by the communities into which one is born or chooses to belong. As Macmillan (2010, 53) argues, various elements—for example, gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion, history—define identity. Benedict Anderson (1983) coined the term “imagined community” to capture the collective identity of large groups, such as nations, which are so vast that no one member can ever know all the other members, but which still draws out loyalties.

In thinking about the link between identity and foreign policy, four strands of Israeli identity stand out in terms of setting the contours for framing. The first is *religion*; Israel is, after all, a Jewish state. Although the specific meanings and practices of what being a Jewish state entails are disputed, there is a virtual consensus amongst the Jewish majority in Israel that religion must play some part in defining the state and everyday life (Ben-Porat 2013). The second is *nationalism*, which is in the form of Zionism and includes different ideological persuasions. However, all of them converge around the core idea that rather than being only a religious community the Jews are a nation, with the right to self-determination in the Land of Israel or parts of it. This view of Zionism is adopted by the majority of Israelis (bar some ultra-orthodox Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel) as an integral part of their national identity (Avineri 1983; Arian 1995; Shafir and Peled 2002).

The third strand is *the Holocaust*, which is deeply embedded in Israeli identity via a national Commemoration Day, legislation and museums, such as Yad Va-Shem, and which frequently is exhibited in moments of crisis and conflict. Accordingly, political leaders have branded Israel’s foes—from the PLO to Iran—as Nazi incarnations, which amplifies the already high perception of Israeli foreign policy-makers of the threats under which they operate (Zertel 2011). The fourth aspect is *Israel as a democracy*—it has a free press, free and fair elections, a competitive party system, etc. However, Israeli democracy is seriously impaired by the prolonged and deepening occupation of the West Bank where Palestinians are not granted Israeli citizenship, cannot vote for the Israeli Parliament and are subject to severe limitations on their personal movement and their movement of goods (Shafir and Peled 2002; Ram 2006; Gordon 2008).

These four strands of Israeli identity set the boundaries to the frames that shape and are shaped by political discourse. Israeli political parties—by dint of their central role in mobilizing group action, defining policy options and articulating alternative future paths—play a critical role in shaping the frames extracted from the repository provided by national identity. In this context the narrative supported by Binyamin Netanyahu’s party, Likud, is based on a saga of unceasing persecution of the Jews, the redemption and protection provided by Jewish military power, and the right to settle the whole of Israel and the occupied territories. Likud’s historical and main political rival, the Labor party, is hazier on these issues. It articulates a narrative that Israel is sustainable without the territories, which offers a more hopeful appraisal of progress and peaceful coexistence (Ezrahi 1997, 12, 14; Shindler 2001a).

### **Diagnostic Frames, Prognostic Frames, Foreign Policy Behavior**

Based on sixty-seven speeches delivered by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to a range of domestic and international audiences, we identified the main diagnostic and prognostic frames he has used and which have endured since the Arab uprisings erupted in 2010.

#### *Diagnostic Frame 1: An Unprecedented, Epic Struggle between Good and Evil*

Recurrently, the Prime Minister has framed the Arab uprisings as a historic “earthquake of seismic proportions” (Statement following Events in Cairo 2011), which unleashed an epic struggle between “good” and “evil.” This good/evil binary frame appears in 48 percent of the sample of speeches. Echoing the democratic element in the normative structure, but overlooking completely the imperfections of Israeli democracy, the Prime Minister contrasts Israel to its foes. Israel is portrayed as epitomizing good; as a beacon of enlightenment, humanity, light, hope and stability. The embodiments of “evil” are Iran and the “Islamists”—the label he employs to cluster different groups such as ISIS, Hamas, Hezbollah and the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. *A Place Among the Nations* reveals that this rendition is consistent with the ideas Netanyahu began propagating in the early 1990s.

Irrespective of the distinct agendas of Iran and Islamists on various issues—from their relationship with the West, their attitude to existing Arab regimes and, even, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—they are lumped together. “They,” Netanyahu told one audience, are leading the Middle East region into “medieval barbarism” and turning it into “a dark, savage,

and desperate Middle East” (Speech to AIPAC Policy Conference 2015). In the midst of this savagery, he told the United Nations that “Israel stands out as a towering beacon of enlightenment and tolerance” (Address to UN General Assembly 2015).

Framing the uprisings as an unprecedented epic struggle between good and evil suppresses two counter frames, especially in relation to Iran. For example, the conflict with Iran was framed by former Israeli President Shimon Peres, while in office, as a “policy problem,” rather than a struggle between good and inherent evil. Accordingly, Peres stated that he “would meet Rouhani,” the recently elected President of Iran (Berman 2013). Concurrently, the IDF’s Chief of Staff (2011-1015), Benny Ganz, framed Iran as a “rational player” and described its leadership as “full of rational individuals” (Harel 2012). The framing of Iran as a policy problem/rational actor by Peres and Ganz, counters the Iran-as-evil frame deployed by Netanyahu by providing a different explanation for Iranian foreign policy behavior. Correspondingly, it permits engagement with Iran, which is precluded by the Iran-as-evil frame deployed by Netanyahu on practical and ethical grounds.

### *Diagnostic Frame 2: Regional Flux as Inherently Threatening*

The current regional flux is framed repeatedly as inherently threatening, which is the second frame we explore. A total of sixty-three speeches, representing 94 percent of the entire sample, employ the threat frame. Within those speeches, four key themes can be identified: 75 percent use the threat frame, mentioning Iran’s quest to develop military nuclear capability; 41 percent express concern over physical attacks on Israel’s borders from the Sinai and Gaza; 41 percent refer to the prospect of terrorist groups obtaining weapons from the collapsing Syrian regime; and 14 percent frame the on-going entry of illegal immigrants from the African continent as posing a threat to the Jewish nature of Israel. Although these threats may have potentially different causes, *all* are framed as emanating from the rise of “Islamists” and the growing influence of Iran, in the context of the Arab uprisings. Notably, the frames used by Netanyahu persisted unchanged following the setbacks suffered by the “Islamists.” These include, the Egyptian army’s coup which brought down President Morsi, the ensuing campaign by the Egyptian military against radical Islamist groups, and the price exacted from Hezbollah by its mobilization in support of the Assad regime.



Moreover, all the speeches in the sample exhibit an alarmist, fear-mongering tone, which chimes well with the emphasis Likud imposed on the normative structure of Israel as a Jewish state under constant threat. Resonating with the deep-seated perception of threat among Israeli society, which is illuminatingly documented by Bar-Tal (1992, 2017) amongst others, the Prime Minister frames the Middle East as “the most dangerous region in the world” (Speech at AIPAC Policy Conference 2014; Speech at UN General Assembly 2014) and as posing an existential threat of Holocaustian proportions. This corresponds to Netanyahu’s references to the Holocaust since the publication of *A Place Among the Nations*, to explain contemporary events, and is reflected in 14 percent of the speeches employing the threat frame. This particular framing also reflects Likud’s narrative emphasizing the Jewish people as facing perpetual persecution, which occurs in 21 percent of the speeches containing the threat frame. Similarly, Netanyahu evokes the history of the Jewish people, telling different audiences, “if our people’s history has shown us anything and has taught us anything, it is not to dismiss the threats we face” (Speech to Conference of Presidents of Major North American Jewish Organizations 2011) and “we must take calls for our destruction seriously” (Speech to Joint Meeting of US Congress 2011). In this context, in 34 percent of the speeches Netanyahu frames his government’s foreign policy as “preventative” (Remarks to Foreign Press 2014; Statement at Opening of Winter Knesset Session 2013).

However, conspicuous by its absence is mention of the potential threat to the democratic and Jewish nature of the State of Israel posed by the prolonged occupation of Palestinian territories, which reflects the salience of ideology in shaping the choice of frames available in the repository provided by the normative structure. The revisionist-Zionist ideological strand espoused by Likud and salient to Netanyahu’s own thinking since the early 1990s, is enshrined in the integrity of the Land of Israel and Jewish settlements. In this respect, the contours of Israeli foreign policy in response to the uprisings clearly have been shaped by a revisionist ideology, which refutes Magen’s (2015) claim that Israel’s response was “non-idealist.” Illustratively, Netanyahu’s delineation suppresses the counter-frames constructed by policy-makers, corresponding to the narrative articulated by Labor. Thus, Yuval Diskin, Head of the Israeli Shin-Bet from 2005 to May 2011, frames the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as “existential,” stating that the danger of failed peace talks “dwarfs” the Iranian threat (Ho 2013). Yet, this frame was not reflected in Israeli foreign policy and Diskin left public service in 2011.

### *Diagnostic Frame 3: A Brand New Day?*

The prospect of the uprisings generating a “new day” in the Middle East marked by reform, democratic institutions, liberty and peace, is the third frame considered. Certain Western groups, such as the European Union, initially described the uprisings as a potential “window of opportunity for democratic transition” (Dandashly 2015, 39). President Obama (2011) referred to them as a “historic opportunity.” Moreover, prominent policy-makers within Israel expressed similar views. Upon the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, former President Shimon Peres stated that Israel “welcomes the wind of change, and sees a window of opportunity” (Peres 2011). Similarly, former Deputy Prime Minister, Nathan Sharansky, called upon Israel “to bet on freedom in Egypt” (Sharansky 2011).

In an attempt to suppress these intimations from fellow policy-makers in Israel and abroad, Netanyahu responded through an act of counter-framing, which refers to attempts to rebut, undermine or neutralize a person’s or a group’s myths, versions of reality or interpretive framework. He reframed references to the Arab uprising as leading to reform, democratic institutions, liberty and peace, by depictions of the event as naïve and wishful thinking (19 percent of the sample of speeches). “We are in a turbulent region,” Netanyahu told the Knesset as demonstrations against former Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, began:

In such situations, we must look around with our eyes wide open. We must identify things as they are, not as we’d like them to be. We must not try to force reality into a preconceived pattern. We must accept that a huge change is taking place, and while it is happening keep a watchful eye (Address to Knesset 2011).

A few months later, he told parliament that “Despite all our hopes, the chances are the Islamist wave will wash over the Arab countries, an anti-West, anti-Liberal, and ultimately an anti-democratic wave” (40 Signatures Speech 2011a). The correlation to Netanyahu’s conviction, since the 1990s, that Arab animus against the West was the source of conflict in the Middle East, is patent.

Unfolding events in Libya, Egypt, Syria and Iraq in the wake of the uprisings, vindicated the Prime Minister's framing of the uprisings as producing a change marked by ongoing oppression and violence, which created some threats to Israel, for example, via Iran’s growing presence and power in Syria. This amplifies his “frame consistency.” Nonetheless, it is striking that the use of this diagnostic frame by Netanyahu denies any reading of the Arab

uprisings as presenting an opportunity for Israel. The strategic manner in which the discourse is employed—emphasizing threat whilst omitting any reference to opportunity—is obvious when one considers how, in some respects, the strategic position of Israel has improved since 2010. Within five years, Iraq and Syria have all but imploded. Consequently, the possibility of an Arab invasion from the East, which had preoccupied Israeli strategists since the establishment of their state, has effectively been nullified. This view was expressed to the Prime Minister directly in his own cabinet meetings (Former Senior Member of Netanyahu’s Government Briefing at the Chatham House Think Tank, London 2016). Thus, one can conclude only that Netanyahu deliberately omitted from his speeches this aspect of the Arab uprisings, thereby reframing the regional flux in a manner that resonates with the historical narrative of eternal Jewish persecution and danger instilled by Likud in the normative structure.

The three diagnostic frames discussed above—the Arab uprisings as a struggle between good and evil, and as an existential threat, and reframing any optimistic counter-narrative as naïve—are mutually reinforcing and complementary. The contours they impose preclude adoption of a foreign policy stance based on engagement and its corresponding foreign policy tools such as diplomacy, negotiation and dialogue. In contrast, these foreign policy tools are accommodated by the diagnostic counter-frames produced by politicians and the top echelon of the Israeli security network. However, as we have demonstrated, these counter diagnostic frames along with the foreign policy they accommodate, are suppressed and delegitimized by the diagnostic frames deployed by Netanyahu. Having delved into the “problems” generated by the Arab uprisings for Israeli foreign policy, as expressed via the diagnostic frames deployed by Netanyahu in his speeches, the next section examines the “solutions” he proposes.

### *Prognostic Frame 1: The Land for Peace Formula as Perilous*

The Prime Minister devotes significant attention in his speeches - mentioning it in 79 percent of the entire sample –to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is integral to his prognostic frames. In 75 percent of the speeches referring to the conflict, the Prime Minister expresses support for resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of the conditions first outlined in a speech he delivered at Bar-Ilan University. In this speech, the Prime Minister endorsed the two-state solution under certain conditions. “The Palestinians,” he stated “must

clearly and unambiguously recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish People [and t]he territory under Palestinian control must be demilitarized with ironclad security provisions for Israel” (Netanyahu 2009). While expressing support for the Bar-Ilan framework in 75 percent of the speeches referring to the conflict, there is another noticeable trend in the Prime Minister’s speeches following the Arab uprisings. The land for peace formula, a prerequisite for realizing the Bar-Ilan framework, is framed as a threat in 89 percent of the speeches that discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“No one can foresee who would control the territory that would be transferred,” the Prime Minister told one audience:

We left Lebanon, every inch of it, and Iran walked in. We left every inch of Gaza and Iran walked in. The state of Israel cannot afford to step out without making security arrangements, without suitable barrier from Judea and Samaria because we cannot have this happen a third time (40 Signatures Speech 2011a).

Thus, it is clear that the Prime Minister—rhetorically at least—never renounced his support for a two-state solution in line with the Bar-Ilan conditions. However, the consistent prognostic framing of the land-for-peace diplomatic formula as perilous imposes rhetorical contours that significantly restrict the foreign policy space for realizing the Bar-Ilan framework as long as the risks the Prime Minister perceives in the regional environment prevail.

The persistent prognostic framing of the land-for-peace formula as perilous, also suppresses alternative counter prognostic frames. Politicians, such as President Shimon Peres, consistently countered Netanyahu’s framing by rendering the land-for-peace formula as a “solution” rather than a threat, and describing the Palestinian President, Abu-Mazen, as Israel’s best-ever partner for peace (Bergman 2013). Former Defense Minister Barak and other members of the security network also countered Netanyahu.<sup>3</sup> They framed *not* resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a “disaster” on two critical counts: it directly threatened the Jewish and democratic nature of the Israeli state, and it undermined support for Israel from its Western allies (Bergman 2013; Diskin 2013; Tait 2013; Ravid 2013; Ho 2013; Winer 2014; Weitz 2015; Barnea and Sheffer 2015; Lis and Kubovich 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., former Head of Mossad under Netanyahu, Meir Dagan; Former Head of Military intelligence, Uri Sagi; and Yuval Diskin.

The counter frames generated by key members of the security network challenge the consensus in current debate on Israeli foreign policy amid the Arab uprisings—that the security network’s pessimistic and monolithic view was a key determinant of Israel’s subsequent foreign policy behavior (Byman 2011; Inbar 2012; Jones and Milton-Edwards 2013; Magen 2015) . We concede that certain segments of the security network, personified by the Prime Minister’s Military Secretary and close advisor, Ya’akov Amidror, held views in line with the frames employed by the Prime Minister (Magen 2015, 115, 122, 129). However, the counter frames propagated by key security chiefs demonstrate that portraying—as the current literature does—the security network as unified in the wake of the Arab uprisings, is completely inaccurate. It fails to reveal the significant differences within the security network, which were underscored by the counter frames promulgated by its chiefs. Given these divisions, the security network could not have swayed Israeli foreign policy-making and implementation in either direction.

### *Prognostic Frame 2: Military Might as the only Responsible Response*

Framing the land-for-peace formula as a “threat” effectively precludes the establishment of negotiation, diplomacy and dialogue as the basis for Arab-Israeli peace. Therefore, in line with the views and policies he had advocated since the early 1990s, the Prime Minister framed reinforcing the might of the State of Israel as the only responsible way to preserve and extend peace. This frame appears in 36 percent of the sample of speeches. Netanyahu stated that “the security philosophy cannot rely on defense alone. It must also include offensive capability, which is the very foundation of deterrence” (Speech at Opening of Knesset’s Winter Session 2011; Speech in Knesset 40 Signatures Special Session 2012; Speech at Institute of Security Studies Conference on Security Challenges 2012).

Furthermore, in 38 percent of the speeches employing the military might frame, Netanyahu claims it to be the basis for forging alliances. “In every part of the world,” the Prime Minister told an enthusiastic AIPAC conference, “no one makes alliances with the weak. You seek out those who have strength, those who have resolve, those who have the determination to fight for themselves. That’s how alliances are formed” (Speech at the AIPAC Policy Conference 2015). This prognostic frame reflects a central plank of the normative structure outlined above, and Netanyahu’s unchanged world view of redemption and protection provided by Jewish military power. It resonates also with the historical narrative of eternal Jewish

persecution and danger instilled by Likud into the normative structure. In Netanyahu's words, "the Jewish people know the cost of being defenseless against those who would exterminate us. We will never let that happen again" (Address to AIPAC 2013; Speech at Opening of Knesset's Winter Session 2011).

### *Prognostic Frame 3: The Arab-Israeli Axis*

The third prognostic frame depends on the assumption that the Arab uprisings posed a threat to other pro-Western Arab states; it appears in 30 percent of the sample of speeches. These states included the rich Gulf States post-Morsi Egypt, and Jordan. Despite the rather pessimistic portrayal of the uprisings, identified in the third diagnostic frame, the rise of Iran and Islamists in this context is framed as a unique opportunity for Israel and pro-Western Arab regimes to cooperate in the face of the two common dangers: a nuclear armed Iran and militant Islamist movements gaining ground in the Sunni world. Implicit in this framing is the unproven assumption that this common threat could overcome the obstacle posed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to Israeli-Arab rapprochement. Thus, on October 1, 2013, Netanyahu told the United Nations General Assembly that:

The dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran and the emergence of other threats in our region have led many of our Arab neighbors to finally recognize that Israel is not their enemy. This affords us the opportunity to overcome historic animosities and build new relationships, new friendships, and new hopes. Israel welcomes engagement with the wider Arab world. We hope that our common interests and common challenges will help us forge a more peaceful future (Speech at UN General Assembly 2013).

### *Linking Frames to Foreign Policy Behavior*

The prognostic frames outlined in Netanyahu's speeches have direct relations to the diagnostic frames presented above. The Prime Minister frames foreign policy solutions in binary terms - responsible/irresponsible, found in 30 percent of the sample of speeches. He told one audience that, "as Prime Minister of Israel I am entrusted with the awesome responsibility of ensuring the future of the Jewish people and the future of the Jewish state" (Address to the Institute for National Security Studies 2014). In this way, the Prime Minister self-imposed clear boundaries on what was possible and impossible in Israeli foreign policy

behavior. Breaching these boundaries is equated by Netanyahu to acting irresponsibly—personally and politically.

The advantage of his long service - longer than any other policy-maker - gave Netanyahu the time and institutional capacity to suppress the counter frames emanating from within the security network. Over time, policy-makers who challenged his frames either left government or were removed from their posts. None of the individuals who tried to counter the consistent frames employed by the Prime Minister currently remains in office. Thus, it is not the regional change entailed by the Arab uprisings that has defined the contours of Israeli foreign policy behavior; it is how Prime Minister Netanyahu chose to frame potential foreign policy responses in terms of responsibility/irresponsibility, possibility/impossibility that enabled certain foreign policy positions and suppressed others.

As we have seen, speeches on the Israeli Palestinian-conflict, delivered by Prime Minister Netanyahu following the Arab uprisings, show a clear trend. In 75 percent of the speeches referring to the Israeli Palestinian conflict, the Prime Minister expresses support for its resolution on the basis of the Bar-Ilan conditions. However, the diplomatic land-for-peace formula between Israel and the Palestinians—a prerequisite for realizing the Bar-Ilan framework—was discredited entirely and deemed “irresponsible” and inherently threatening in 89 percent of the speeches referring to the conflict. In this way, Prime Minister Netanyahu imposed rhetorical contours that significantly limited the foreign policy space to pursue the Bar-Ilan framework for as long as the regional risks he perceived prevailed. Furthermore, in framing the land-for-peace formula as inherently threatening and irresponsible, Netanyahu foregrounded the traditional Israeli right’s contention that the territory provided to Israel via its control of the West Bank is more significant than the potential threat to the Jewish and democratic nature of Israel posed by millions of Palestinians.

Accordingly, since the eruption of the Arab uprisings, the boundaries imposed by framing the land-for-peace as perilous and irresponsible, facilitated a total halt to the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. This can be seen in Prime Minister Netanyahu’s decision to reject the regional peace initiative presented to him by United States Secretary of State, John Kerry. A first draft of the initiative was seen by Prime Minister Netanyahu during a meeting with Kerry in Davos, Switzerland, on January 21, 2016. Another version was presented to him a month later, in Aqaba, Jordan, on February 21, 2016.

Crucially, the version he was given in Aqaba was commensurate with the Bar-Ilan conditions in three key respects: agreement would be based on recognizing Israel as a Jewish state; the Palestinian state would be demilitarized; and Israel would be provided with security assurances from the United States. Furthermore, Jordan's King Abdullah and President of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi supported this proposal. Likewise, the then head of the Israeli opposition, Yitzhak Hertzog, confirmed in private to Netanyahu that he would join his coalition if the Prime Minister embraced the Kerry initiative (Ravid 2017). In this context, Hertzog spoke publicly, on May 17, 2016, about "a unique opportunity that may never return" (Bendar 2016), which renders attempts to explain Netanyahu's rejection of Kerry's peace initiative in terms of domestic political constraints, unsustainable. However, accepting the initiative would have challenged the land-for-peace formula framing as perilous and irresponsible. Accordingly, two weeks after Hertzog's announcement, the Prime Minister sounded the death knell on the secret Kerry initiative. Rather than creating a national unity government with Labor, Netanyahu widened his coalition by including the ultra-nationalist party, "Israel is Our Home," and appointing Avigdor Lieberman, an ardent opponent of the land-for-peace formula, Minister of Defense.

Our aim is not to pass judgement on the foreign policy merit of the Prime Minister's decision to render the Kerry peace initiative stillborn by including Israel Our Home rather than the Labor party into his coalition government. Instead, we want to highlight two other issues. First, the appointment of Lieberman was utterly consistent with the Prime Minister's framing of the land-for-peace formula as a threat and as irresponsible, whereas forging a national unity government with Labor and pursuing the Kerry peace initiative would conflict with this prognostic frame. Second, in refusing even to explore the Kerry initiative publicly, the Prime Minister clearly rejected an opportunity to signal cooperation to the Palestinians. Given Israel's foreign policy measures indicating competition towards the Palestinians since the onset of the Arab uprisings, failure to seize this opportunity to signal cooperation seems inconsistent with a defensive realist foreign policy posture.

In this respect, rejection of the Kerry initiative cannot be considered an isolated incident. Indeed, the frames deployed by the Prime Minister restricted the scope for others types of modest steps to signal cooperation. Here, the speech delivered by former Secretary of State Kerry, in which he summarized United States policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is telling. He revealed that, throughout 2014-2015, Israel rejected requests from the United States and the Quartet—a diplomatic foursome of the United States, the European Union,



Russia and the United Nations—to collaborate with the Palestinians on a number of issues, such as granting more building permits, agriculture and natural resources. According to Kerry, these measures could have been taken “without negatively impacting Israel’s legitimate security concerns” (Kerry 2016; Ravid 2017), which is precisely what a defensive realist foreign policy would necessitate. However, despite arguments to the contrary, Israeli foreign policy did not meet this criterion.

Relatedly, the contours set by framing the Arab uprisings as wholly threatening, with the corollary of military might as the sole responsible response, enabled establishing the use of military force as a central plank of Israeli foreign policy. By the same token, these diagnostic and prognostic frames reduced the space for pursuing a foreign policy founded on diplomacy, negotiation and dialogue. This is reflected strongly in Israel’s defensive and offensive measures to reinforce its military might and deterrence. Defensively, Israel possesses a three-tier anti-missile defense structure. It consists of the Magic Wand Arrow and Iron Dome Systems, with the last becoming operational during the Arab uprisings. In addition, the government embarked on building a border barrier extending from the southern Israeli city of Eilat to the Golan Heights. The objective was to foil terrorist activities, but also to stop illegal immigration—especially from African countries—through the Sinai into Israel (Statement at Opening of Winter Knesset Session 2013; Remarks During PM’s Tour of Israeli Egyptian Border 2012).

Credible media outlets and the Prime Minister himself, confirmed the offensive measures taken by Israel, which include “numerous military attacks” to enforce its “red lines” in Syria and Lebanon. These strikes, which were designed to prevent the Assad regime from transferring “game changing” weapons to Hezbollah (Barnard et al. 2013; JPost 2013; Press Association 2013; Yosef 2016), are consistent with the offensive tactics allowed by a defensive realist posture. However, Israel’s conduct during the November 2012 confrontation with Hamas (Operation Pillar of Defense) and the fifty-six-day war during summer 2014 (Operation Protective Edge), paint a different picture. The IDF’s use of force on both occasions - examined judiciously in a recent study by Yagil Levy (2017) and the Israeli human rights Nongovernmental Organization, B’Tselem (2013, 2018) - is relevant to our discussion of the link between framing and foreign policy. Levy’s analysis delves into the figures provided by different agencies such as the IDF, B’Tselem, and Palestinian organizations. He demonstrates clearly that B’Tselem’s data are the most reliable because each Palestinian fatality in the 2014 war was investigated individually by the organization’s

researchers. Levy shows also that B'Tselem was subject to less institutional bias than the IDF and the Palestinian agencies, which were affiliated respectively to the Israeli government and Hamas.

Based on B'Tselem (2018) data, 1,390 Palestinian non-combatants and 765 Palestinian combatants were killed during the 2014 Israel-Hamas war.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the ratio of Gaza civilians killed by IDF fire to combatants killed is the highest among previous Israeli military offensives in Gaza (Levy 2017, 129). The main cause of Palestinian deaths was air-strikes and artillery bombardments providing cover fire for ground troops deployed to destroy the networks of offensive tunnels used by Hamas to penetrate Israeli territory. The use of massive air power and artillery reduced the risk for Israeli soldiers engaged in ground warfare, but increased the number of civilian Palestinian casualties and their proportions relative to Palestinian combatant fatalities (Levy 2017, 127). In this sense, Israel used a practice of “excessive lethality with relatively limited distinction between combatants and non-combatants” (Levy 2017, 118).

B'Tselem's (2013) estimate of the ratio of combatant to civilian fatalities during Operation Pillar of Defense shows a similar picture. This operation took place between November 14 and November 21, 2012 and was of shorter duration than the 2014 Israel-Hamas War. It also did not involve an IDF ground offensive. Notwithstanding, the ratio of civilian fatalities caused solely by Israeli aerial and artillery attacks during the operation, involved a high proportion of civilian Palestinian casualties. At least eighty-seven from a total 167 deaths were civilians (B'Tselem 2013, 9). Thus, Israel used the practice of excessive lethality—albeit on a smaller scale than in 2014.

Our aim is not to discuss the international humanitarian legal aspects of operations Protective Edge and Pillar of Defense. These aspects, as shown in a study by Pnina Sharvit-Baruch (2014), former head of the IDF's International Law Department, and a report by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA 2015), are fiercely contested. There is serious legal debate over whether Israel—given Hamas's constant rocket attacks— can claim that it acted in self-defense. Similarly, there are questions about whether the laws regulating the very use of force (*jus ad bellum*), which apply only at the start of an armed conflict, are relevant to the 2014 Gaza war, given the several preceding rounds of military hostilities between Israel and

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<sup>4</sup> The UN reports 1,523 civilians and 669 combatant deaths (Amnesty International, 2014) while Israeli MFA (2015) data report 936 combatant deaths and 761 civilian fatalities out of a total 2,125 casualties which includes 428 fatalities that the MFA claims cannot be definitively categorized.

Hamas. These questions, while extremely important, are beyond the scope of our investigation.

We are interested, instead, in the practice of excessive lethality to elucidate its link to the contours imposed by the prognostic frame deployed by Binyamin Netanyahu, whereby military force is the only responsible response to the threat posed by Islamist groups, such as Hamas, in the context of the Arab uprisings. In this perspective, it is important to note that operations Pillar of Defense and Protective Edge were not the first campaigns when the IDF used the practice of excessive lethality. Excessive lethality was also deployed in the 2008 war between Israel and Hamas (Operation Cast Lead), which was launched by Israel in December 2008 by the Kadima-led government of Ehud Olmert. According to B'Tselem, 352 out of the 1,398 Palestinian war casualties can be identified as being directly involved in the hostilities (B'Tselem 2009). Thus, while it cannot be argued that the frames deployed by the Prime Minister were the decisive factor in originating the practice of excessive lethality, we would assert that they were instrumental in solidifying its use as a key foreign policy tool to engage Hamas in the context of the Arab uprisings.

The practice of excessive lethality is pertinent to our discussion in another sense. Its deployment is inconsistent with the requirement of a defensive realist posture that, in a security dilemma, states can use offensive means, but ought to pursue moderate strategies as the route to security and to communicate restraint. Yet could Israel have pursued such a foreign policy route vis-à-vis Hamas, which refuses to recognize Israel, previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, and to renounce violence? In his carefully worded end of war statement, delivered on August 27, 2014, Netanyahu lists requests from Hamas that Israel rejected. These included demands to construct seaport and an airport in the Gaza Strip; release of Palestinian prisoners that Israel returned to jail during the war; and the rehabilitation of the institutions that Israel dissolved in the West Bank (Netanyahu, 2014). Our aim here is not to assess the foreign policy merit of the decision to reject the requests by Hamas. Rather, our intention is to show that Israel had an opportunity to take certain measures that would signal restraint and moderation—as required by a defensive realist posture—irrespective of the position of Hamas on recognizing Israel, its previous agreements with the Palestinians, and violence. In flatly rejecting the requests by Hamas, Israel diverged from these requirements of a defensive realist posture.

Furthermore, former United States Secretary of State Kerry revealed that Israel refused consistent calls during his term, which began in 2013, to ease “the movement and access restrictions to and from Gaza,” made “with due consideration for Israel’s need to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks” (Kerry 2016). These remarks are telling in that they represent yet another inconsistency between the foreign policy stance adopted by Israel following the Arab uprisings and its rendition by the current literature as defensive realism. In contrast, this aspect of Israel’s foreign policy behavior can be explained as being facilitated by the boundaries that were imposed by the diagnostic framing of military might as the only responsible response to the challenges posed to Israel by the Arab uprisings, which were framed by Netanyahu as inherently threatening. As the rigidity and embeddedness of these frames increased, the contours they imposed restricted the foreign policy space available to pursue other foreign policy options, which might have signaled moderation and restraint.

Israeli foreign policy behavior towards Jordan and Egypt (except during the Morsi period), corresponds to yet another prognostic frame, which presents the Arab uprisings as potentially giving rise to an Arab-Israeli axis. Thus, as forcefully shown in a recent study, the shift in Egyptian-Israeli relations from cold peace to strategic peace solidified, resulting in a significant level of cooperation between the intelligence and military sectors (Aran and Ginat 2014). Likewise, the Prime Minister and Abdullah II, the present King of Jordan, describe their relationship as “very strong” (Goldberg 2013) and Israeli Defense Minister until recently, Moshe Ya’alon, confirmed that secret channels of communication had opened between Israeli officials and their counterparts in the Gulf and North African States (Ravid 2016).

The strengthening of relations with countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia as a consequence of diplomacy and common strategic interests cannot be trivialized. They demonstrate that, alongside the strong emphasis on military force and deterrence, the Prime Minister’s frames also left room for engaging diplomatically with Arab states. However, in contrast to the approach taken by Israel prior to the Arab uprisings, which was based on the land-for-peace formula, Prime Minister Netanyahu’s approach is based on a peace-for-peace formula. The limits of Israeli-Arab foreign policy cooperation based solely on peace-for-peace were clearly delineated by the former head of Saudi Intelligence, Turki Al-Faisal. Challenging a key prognostic frame supported by Netanyahu, Al-Faisal reiterated his country’s traditional position towards Israel. While not denying the encounters mentioned by Ya’alon, Al-Faisal emphasized that “Sunni Arab countries are furious with Israel over the

occupation and its treatment of the Palestinians.” “Why,” he asked rhetorically, “should the Arabs feel friendship to you when you do that [to the Palestinians]?” (Ravid 2016).

The discursive strategy deployed by Netanyahu, via his diagnostic and prognostic frames, has imposed on Israeli foreign policy behavior clear contours, which have become deeply embedded in Israeli political and social discourse. Framing the land-for-peace formula as a threat, and Iran as “evil,” is stark illustration of the degree to which this process has advanced. During the last March 2015 national elections, Netanyahu engaged in a head to head battle with the Obama administration to stop negotiations with Iran over a nuclear deal, which culminated in a speech delivered to the US Congress critiquing the proposed deal (Speech to Congress 2015). The confrontation with the Obama administration was consistent with Netanyahu’s framing of Iran as evil, which imposes clear boundaries on the available foreign policy options towards Iran. Even indirect forms of engagement, such as via the “P5 + 1” negotiations that yielded the nuclear agreement with Iran, are rendered irresponsible and threatening. By contrast, the aforementioned counter frames used by former Israeli President, Shimon Peres and the IDF’s Chief of Staff, Benny Ganz, were able to accommodate indirect engagement. However, Netanyahu outlasted Ganz and Peres in office. Consequently, the foreign policy space created by their counter frames became limited by the Iran-as-evil frame used by Netanyahu.

During the same national election campaign, the Prime Minister stated explicitly that if he were elected there would be no Palestinian state (McLaughlin 2015). On the back of this claim, Netanyahu led Likud to success in the 2015 national elections, emerging as the largest political party in Israel. Moreover, even those political parties that traditionally had supported the two-state solution, such as the left-wing Meretz party and the Israeli-Palestinian United List party, mostly ignored this theme in their campaigns (Benn 2015).

In this section, we refuted the claim that Israel adopted a defensive realist stance in which ideals played no part. Instead, we have demonstrated that the foreign policy measures pursued comprise a coherent Israeli foreign policy stance of entrenchment in the wake of the Arab uprisings. Amid the threats the Prime Minister perceived in the regional environment, this foreign policy stance is predicated on peace for peace not territory, reinforcing Israeli military power and granting limited autonomy to the Palestinians under Israeli occupation. This foreign policy stance was determined strategically by the Prime Minister employing a

discourse producing diagnostic and prognostic frames, which impose contours that legitimize and justify this position. Foreign policy alternatives, such as the land-for-peace agreement with the Palestinians, negotiating with Iran or using foreign policy tools other than military force, are deemed by the Prime Minister's strategic discourse and frames, "irresponsible," "impossible" or outright "naïve."

## **Conclusion**

Framing, a strategically deployed discourse, is employed in this article to demonstrate how, in the case of Israeli foreign policy during the Arab uprisings, the discourse employed by the key decision-maker, Binyamin Netanyahu, facilitated certain foreign policy options and suppressed others. By employing the notion of framing, we have tried to explain Israeli foreign policy towards the Arab uprisings and to refute the conventional wisdom that Israel responded to these uprisings by adopting a defensive realist stance in which ideals played no part. We have demonstrated, instead, that the foreign policy stance adopted by Israel consisted of entrenchment, shaped strongly by the ideology of Likud and based on the central plank of Israeli military might. Crucially, we provided several examples of Israeli foreign policy which was inconsistent with the stipulation of defensive realism that, in a security dilemma, states can employ offensive tactics, but should adopt moderate strategies and signal restraint. This inconsistency was demonstrated forcefully, but not exclusively, during the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas. Likewise, we cited a number of examples of Israeli foreign policy conflicting with the dictum of defensive realism that states should send signals that could lead to cooperation or competition. In this respect, Israel's rejection of the Kerry peace initiative in 2016, and his requests to ease the movement and access restrictions to and from Gaza, and expand collaboration with the Palestinians over agriculture and natural resources, demonstrates the absence of signals of cooperation.

We have shown that explanations offered in the literature as to why Israel adopted a particular foreign policy behavior in the wake of the Arab uprising, are mistaken. We have negated the claim that regional flux, however dramatic and unprecedented, could, on its own, have determined Israel's foreign policy. Similarly, by revealing the diverging views in the Israeli security network on what the Arab uprisings entailed, we can rebut the argument that this determined Israel's foreign policy. Nor, as we have shown, was the foreign policy space restricted a priori by domestic or regional constraints. Instead, we have demonstrated how

framing, a strategic discourse which Netanyahu employed consistently, irrespective of his audience, enabled a foreign policy stance of entrenchment while suppressing possible alternatives such as the Bar-Ilan framework or the “P5+1” indirect negotiations with Iran. Moreover, the Prime Minister’s framing foregrounded Likud’s traditional positions and Netanyahu’s own world views and personal beliefs from the early 1990s, regarding the threats to Israel in a challenging regional environment. Indeed, during the national elections held in a context of regional volatility, the frames invoked portrayed Netanyahu as a source of stability and responsibility.

We have shown that diagnostic and prognostic frames produced by this strategically deployed discourse from a single policy-maker with relative autonomy, able to tap into a normative structure, became constitutive. They imposed clear contours on what was possible/impossible, responsible/irresponsible in the state’s foreign policy. Moreover, the diagnostic and prognostic frames employed suppressed a number of counter frames and the foreign policy alternatives they accommodated, which, in the case of Israel, include diplomacy, negotiation and dialogue. Herein lie the sources of Israeli foreign policy agency in the wake of the Arab uprisings, which current debate on this subject unfortunately fails to identify.

Thus, whilst readily acknowledging Israel’s specificities, we would argue that framing is a portable concept that can be operationalized usefully to show that unequivocal and dramatic discourse does not merely reflect foreign policy, but is constitutive of it. Unlike the traditional IR and FPA literature on the role played by images, ideas, worldviews, perceptions and misperceptions in determining foreign policy, we not only focused on their influence on decisions. We have also shown how diagnostic and prognostic frames helped to create a direct connection between the images held by a leader, his worldview, ideas, perceptions and misperceptions, and foreign policy actions. As we have seen in the case before us, frames constituted action-oriented sets of beliefs and meaning that inspired and legitimated certain foreign policy options and instruments while restricting others.

As well as advancing debate in this vein, our article points to directions for further research into the intersection between foreign policy rhetoric and the institutional setting within which it takes place. Our article demonstrates that the ability of Binyamin Netanyahu to frame was interlinked inextricably to the democratic coalition-government political system in which he operated. As Juliet Kaarbo’s (2008) work in *International Studies Review* and elsewhere

(Kaarbo 2012) shows, coalition-governments, such as in Israel, which are common in parliamentary democracies around the world, provide for a different foreign policy decision-making structure than is produced by other political systems. These can include dictatorial, authoritarian and presidential political systems. In this context, further research on how the relationship between foreign policy framing, decisions, and behavior is influenced by the distinct institutional settings produced by different political systems, would be beneficial. Future research in this direction would allow us to reveal the underlying mechanisms linking institutional contexts, framing, policy-making and policy choices, which, the current debate, with its focus on individual and group settings, does not do. Thus, future research will help to ascertain under what conditions strategically deployed discourse and language may or may not influence foreign policy behavior. As rhetoric becomes more ubiquitous and instant in contemporary international politics, the ability of IR and FPA to separate the rhetorical wheat from the chaff seems ever more important.

### **Appendix 1: List of Speeches by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu**

Address to Knesset: The Situation in Egypt, February 2, 2011

Address to European Friends of Israel Conference, February 7, 2011

Speech at Conference of Presidents of Major North American Jewish Organizations, February 16, 2011

Remarks in Knesset, February 23, 2011

40 Signatures Speech, March 23, 2011a

Address to JNF Conference in Jerusalem, March 28, 2011

Speech to Joint Meeting of the US Congress, April 24, 2011

Address at Opening of Knesset Summer Session, May 16, 2011

Address at AIPAC Policy Conference, May 23, 2011

Speech to Joint Meeting of the U.S. Congress, May 24, 2011

Address to Jewish Agency Board of Governors-Excerpts, June 28, 2011

Statement following Events in Cairo, September 10, 2011



Address at 9.11 Ceremony, Jerusalem House of Quality, September 11, 2011

Remarks to UN General Assembly, September 23, 2011

Speech at Opening of Knesset's Winter Session, October 31, 2011

40 Signatures Speech, November 23, 2011b

Speech at Global Israel Business Conference, December 12, 2011

40 Signatures Speech, December 28, 2011c

Speech at Annual Conference for Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, February 19, 2012

Speech at AIPAC Policy Conference, March 5, 2012

Speech at 40 Signatures Special Session, March 14, 2012

Remarks during Tour of the Egyptian Border, March 27, .2012

Speech at Institute of Security Studies' Conference on Security Challenges, May 29, 2012

Remarks to President's Conference, June 21, 2012

Speech at UN General Assembly, September 27, 2012

Speech at Opening of the Winter Session of the Knesset, October 15, 2012

Statement to Foreign Press, November 15, 2012

Address at Swearing in Ceremony of the 19<sup>th</sup> Knesset, February 5, 2013

Speech at Conference of Presidents, February 11, 2013

Address to Jewish Agency Board of Governors, February 18, 2013

Address to AIPAC, March 4, 2013

Remarks at 40 Signatures Knesset Session, June 5, 2013

Address to Israeli Presidential Conference, June 20, 2013

Speech at UN General Assembly, October 1, 2013

Speech at Bar Ilan University, October 6, 2013

Statement at Opening of the Winter Knesset Session, October 14, 2013

Address to Jewish Federations of North America, November 10, 2013

Address to Saban Forum, December 8, 2013

Remarks to Foreign Press, January 16, 2014

Remarks at INSS Annual Conference, January 28, 2014

Address to Conference of Presidents, February 17, 2014

Speech at AIPAC Policy Conference, March 4, 2014

Address to Jewish Media Summit, June 22, 2014

Address at Institute for National Security Studies, June 29, 2014

PM Netanyahu at US Embassy July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration, July 3, 2014

PM Netanyahu Addresses International Conference on Counter-Terrorism, September 11, 2014

Address to International Cybersecurity Conference, September 14, 2014

Speech at UN General Assembly, September 29, 2014

Speech at Opening of Knesset Winter Session, October 27, 2014

Address to Annual Saban Forum, December 7, 2014

Address to Foreign Press Corps, December 17, 2014

Remarks before Conference of Presidents, February 16, 2015

Speech at AIPAC Policy Conference, March 2, 2015

Speech in Congress, March 3, 2015

Address to Herzilya Conference, June 9, 2015

Address at US Independence Day Celebrations, July 1, 2015

Address to Jewish Federations on Iran, August 4, 2015

Address to UN General Assembly, October 1, 2015

Speech at Opening of Knesset Winter Session, October 15, 2015

Address to Zionist Congress, October 20, 2015

Address to Jewish Federations of North America, November 10, 2015

Address to Saban Forum, December 6, .2015

Address to Foreign Press in Israel, January 14, 2016

Address to Cyber Tech Conference, January 26, 2016

Address to Conference of Presidents, February 14, 2016

Address to AIPAC Policy Conference, March 22, 2016

Address to UN General Assembly, September 22, 2016

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