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Exploiting Cognition: The Blame Game and Cognitive Biases in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been perpetuated, in some form or another, since around the time of the end of the first World War. During this time, the British gained control of portions of the former Ottoman Empire, including the strip of land that is now known as Israel and Palestine. This strip of land was contested by both Jews and local Arabs, and eventually the British pulled out of the region. The newly formed at the time United Nations offered a partition plan between the two groups. This UN resolution ultimately failed, leading into the Israeli war of independence, or 'al-Nakba', The Catastrophe as it is known by Palestinians. During this war, Israel was attacked by the surrounding Arab states, and ended the war with more land than it was offered in the partition plan. Since this event, Israel has had many wars over the last century with surrounding Arab states and Palestinian terror groups creating an ongoing conflict.[1]

One of the more recent wars between Israel and Palestinian terror groups was the 2014 Gaza War. On May 14, 2014, in the West Bank Town of Beitunia outside of Ramallah, two Palestinian teenagers, Nadeem Nawara and Mohammed Abu Daher, were killed and another, Muhammed Azzah, was wounded.[2] These murders being perpetrated by Israeli forces was denied, but evidence of what became known as the Beitunia killings surfaced which found that Israeli border police were responsible.[3] On June 11, it became public knowledge that Israeli forces were responsible for the deaths of the Palestinian teenagers. One day later, on June 12, three Israeli teenagers, Naftali Frenkel, Gilad Shaer, and Eyal Yifrah, were abducted at a bus

[1] For more information on the military history of Israel, Daniel Byman's *A High Price* explores this topic with a focus on counterterrorism.

[2] Weizman, Eyal. "The Killing Of Nadeem Nawara And Mohammed Abu Daher." Forensic Architecture, November 20, 2014. https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-killing-of-nadeem-nawara-and-mohammed-abu-daher.

[3] Ibid.

stop in the Israeli West Bank settlement of Alon Shvut.[4] These kidnappings were blamed on Hamas and lead to hundreds of Palestinian arrests in the West Bank, many of whom were Hamas activists.[5] On June 30, the bodies of the three Israeli teenagers were found outside of Halhul, a West Bank town near Hebron.[6] These events started the rising tensions that soon became known as the 2014 Gaza War during which Israel launched a ground invasion into the Gaza Strip. The 2014 Gaza War and Operation Protective Edge is one of the most recent of many wars and violent conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians. Each conflict comes with each side competing for the role of the victim of their adversaries. My research question is: *What rhetoric strategies do state leaders use to influence public opinion during interstate conflict?*

In the case of the 2014 Gaza War, Israeli Prime Minister at the time Netanyahu claimed victimhood at the hands of Hamas by using the deaths of the three Israeli teenagers that were killed.[7] Meanwhile, Palestinians claimed victimhood at the hands of the Israeli forces for the deaths of their own Palestinian teenagers and the heavy-handed response from Israeli forces to Palestinian protests. This strategy of claiming victimhood[8] at the hands of the other is used in attempt to shift public opinion towards a favored political narrative by portraying themselves as either the victim of the other or as a justified aggressor. As a result of their competition for victimhood, Israeli and Palestinian leaders engage in a 'blame game' in order to avoid responsibility for rising tensions and violent conflicts. The difference between leaders merely

[4] Erdman, Shelby Lin. "Israeli Authorities Identify the Suspects in Teens' Kidnapping." CNN, June 26, 2014. https://www.cnn.com/2014/06/26/world/meast/israel-kidnapped-teenagers-hamas/index.html.
[5] Ibid.
[6] BBC News. "Abducted Israeli Teens Found Dead near Hebron." BBC News, n.d. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28097164.
[7] Ellis, Ralph, and Michael Schwartz. "Netanyahu Says Hamas Abducted 3 Israeli Teenagers." CNN World, June 15, 2014. https://www.cnn.com/2014/06/15/world/meast/west-bank-jewish-teens-missing.
[8] The current literature regarding victimhood narratives in inter-state and ethnic conflict will be covered more in depth in the following section.

stating facts to support their claims and leaders engaging in the blame game is that they use selective portions of factual information that support their narratives while leaving other portions of the events that support the other side out of their narratives.

The present research's main contribution to this topic is discussing the ways in which the blame game is the primary strategy in which Israeli and Palestinian leaders attempt to influence the domestic public, and that they incorporate the use of cognitive biases into their blame game narratives. Victimhood narratives, as will be discussed in the following section, are fairly prevalent in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the current literature on this topic is primarily concerned with the effects of such narratives on public opinion, not how these narratives are created and perpetuated by leaders. The present research has an emphasis not on the public, but on the leaders that influence the public.

The present paper begins in the following section with a literature review covering relevant articles on public opinion, conflict narratives, and cognitive biases. The literature review concludes with a brief overview of my primary arguments throughout the paper. Following is a section discussing the methods and sample of data for the present research, as well as the reasons behind some of the decisions made during the design and data collection phases. The next section is an analysis of the collected data. This section gives a more detailed explanation of the data collection phase and fleshes out the arguments introduced in the arguments section. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the present research, as well as potential directions for future research to expand on this research.

Literature Review

The present research is focused on the strategies that Israeli and Palestinian leaders use in order to change public opinion to fit their favored narratives. There are three bodies of literature of particular interest to this research. The first topic of interest is public opinion. It is important to understand public opinion and various relevant ways in which it changes because the goal of different narratives is to change public opinion to match the desired narrative. There is also a growing body of research on conflict narratives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with a focus on the commonly used competing victimhood narratives employed by Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Lastly, there is a large collection of literature in psychology focused on cognitive biases. The cognitive biases are an important component because the present research argues that leaders take advantage of the cognitive biases of their audience in order to employ their victimhood blame game narratives. These three pieces come together to form the background knowledge of the strategies that Israeli and Palestinian leaders use in order to push their narratives. While these three bodies of literature are important for the present research, they are incapable of answering my research question because of one major shortcoming. They do not explore the strategies used by political elites, and instead focus on the effects of these ideas on the public.

Public Opinion

Perhaps the most important literature on public opinion is that from political psychology that shows the weight of the opinions of political elites. Cohen's series of experiments in 2003

show that people are more likely to adopt the opinions of political elites in their desired party than their own previously held opinions.[9] This was done in an experimental setting in which participants, who identified with a particular American political party with predictable positions, would be presented with faux news articles stating that political elites in their preferred political party favored political positions that were unrepresentative of the typical position of said party. The result was that the participants would change their own position to match the position presented in the faux news article.[10] Furthermore, Kaufmann's work demonstrates using a case study how political elites were successful in altering public opinion to their advantage during the second Gulf War.[11] This research emphasizes the importance of political narratives and the words of political leaders for public opinion.

A related topic on public opinion to the present research is the ways in which public opinion is shifted. There are several ways that public opinion is changed, both artificially and through natural ways. Both means, however, are psychological in nature. One of the ways in which public opinion is shifted artificially is propaganda. Vysotskyi, Pavlov, and Ishchenko describe the types of propaganda that leaders engage in when using victimhood conflict narratives as psychological in nature.[12] A significant amount of research on the topic of changing public opinion is focused specifically on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Propaganda, including propaganda in the form of Israeli and Palestinian conflict narratives, has a primary purpose of

[9] Cohen, Geoffrey L. "Party Over Policy: The Dominating Impact of Group Influence on Political Beliefs." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 85, no. 5 (November 2003): 808–22. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.5.808.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Kaufmann, Chaim. "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War." International Security 29, no. 1 (2004): 5–48.

[12] Vysotskyi, Oleksandr, Dmytro Pavlov, and Igor Ishchenko. "Propaganda Technologies as Tools of Legitimation of Political Power." Tecnologías de Propaganda Como Instrumentos de Legitimación Del Poder Político. 7 (December 2, 2019): 1–17.

increasing the legitimacy of a political actor in the eyes of the public and other international actors.[13] Another artificial way in which public opinion is shifted is through effects such as the framing effect, which Shamir and Shikaki demonstrate during a game theory analysis of public opinion in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[14] [15] Two of the natural ways in which public opinion changes in Israel and Palestine is through a sympathy effect and the public's perception of the economic costs of conflict.[16] There is also evidence that political violence has both short-term and long-lasting impacts on Palestinian public opinion through testing political preferences offered in public opinion polls during the second intifada.[17] The impact of violence on public opinion is demonstrated to be similar for Israelis by Berrebi and Klor's analysis of vote share change over time as a result of local deaths due to terrorism.[18] They found "that the occurrence of a terror fatality within three months of the elections is associated with a .45 percentage point increase in the locality's relative electoral support for the right bloc of political parties."[19] This collection of research demonstrates the importance of various variables on public opinion in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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[13] Vysotskyi, Oleksandr, Dmytro Pavlov, and Igor Ishchenko. "Propaganda Technologies as Tools of Legitimation of Political Power." Tecnologías de Propaganda Como Instrumentos de Legitimación Del Poder Político. 7 (December 2, 2019): 1–17

[14] Jacob Shamir, and Khalil Shikaki. "Public Opinion in the Israeli-Palestinian Two-Level Game." Journal of Peace Research 42, no. 3 (2005): 311. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343305052014.

[15] For another source on public opinion in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a game theory perspective, Jacob Shamir's 2007 article "Public Opinion in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" is a good source.

[16] David Fielding, and Madeline Penny. "What Causes Changes in Opinion about the Israeli: Palestinian Peace Process?" Journal of Peace Research 46, no. 1 (2009): 99. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343308098406.

[17] Jaeger, David A., Esteban F. Klor, Sami H. Miaari, and M. Daniele Paserman. "The Struggle for Palestinian Hearts and Minds: Violence and Public Opinion in the Second Intifada." Journal of Public Economics 96, no. 3–4 (April 1, 2012): 354–68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2011.12.001.

[18] Berrebi, Claude, and Esteban F. Klor. "Are Voters Sensitive to Terrorism? Direct Evidence from the Israeli Electorate." *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 3 (August 2008): 279–301. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055408080246.

[19] Ibid.

Conflict Narratives and Competitive Victimhood

Many conflict narratives focus on victimhood. There is a substantial pool of literature about victimhood narratives in intergroup relations, particularly in social psychology, which will be explored later in this section.[20] Most of the research on victimhood narratives in international relations and political science has been focused on the impacts of these narratives on conflict. While there is not full consensus on what these impacts are, it is largely agreed, with some exception, that victimhood narratives have negative impacts on conflict resolution. Specifically, the competition for which side is the victim is an important battleground for propaganda in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.[21] This was determined when Ulug et al found that the terrorism narratives, which are narratives that view the other side as terrorists, and the presence of competitive victimhood correlate negatively with support for non-violent conflict resolutions.[22] The main argument of the Ulug et al article is that, in addition to a primary or dominant conflict narrative, each side also has an alternative narrative that is endorsed by minority groups and members of majority groups that are considered extreme. They argue that dominant conflict narratives are typically dismissive of the other side, while alternative conflict narratives are more constructive.[23] This means that the Ulug et al article suggests that dominant narratives will be more likely to be the detrimental terrorism narratives while alternative narratives will likely be

[20] For a well written review of competitive victimhood in social psychology, see Noor, Vollhardt, Mari, and Nadler's 2017 article "The Social Psychology of Collective Victimhood."

[21] Ulug, Ozden Melis, Brian Lickel, Bernhard Leidner, and Gilad Hirschberger. "How Do Conflict Narratives Shape Conflict- and Peace-Related Outcomes among Majority Group Members? The Role of Competitive Victimhood in Intractable Conflicts." GROUP PROCESSES & INTERGROUP RELATIONS, May 2020. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430220915771.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

independence narratives that acknowledge the other side's ideas. Other studies support these and similar findings that indicate that competitive victimhood is a predictor for groups to be less forgiving of each other,[24] as well as contributing to conflict escalation.[25] For research that runs alternative to many of the other articles on this topic, Vollhardt examines victimhood beliefs in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and argues that a perception of victimhood "may give rise to empathy and prosocial behavior toward outgroups, even toward the other party in the conflict."[26]

Cognitive Biases

The third important body of literature for the present research is that of cognitive biases. This section is important because, unlike current literature on the topic of victimhood narratives that neglect the impact of cognitive biases, I argue that cognitive biases play a major role in the creation and perpetuation of competitive victimhood narratives. Specifically, two cognitive biases are important for this research: the framing effect and confirmation bias. The framing effect, as illustrated by Tversky and Kahneman, is the effect that takes place when information in presented in different ways, causing the information to be perceived in a different manner than it

[24] Noor, M., R. Brown, R. Gonzalez, J. Manzi, C. Lewis. "On positive psychological outcomes; what helps groups with a history of conflict to forgive and reconcile with each other?" Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 34, no. 6 (June 2008): 819 - 832.

[25] Noor, Masi, Nurit Shnabel, Samer Halabi, and Arie Nadler. "When Suffering Begets Suffering: The Psychology of Competitive Victimhood Between Adversarial Groups in Violent Conflicts." Personality and Social Psychology Review 16, no. 4 (November 1, 2012): 351–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868312440048.

[26] Vollhardt, Johanna R. "The Role of Victim Beliefs in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Risk or Potential for Peace?" Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology 15, no. 2 (2009): 135. https://doi.org/10.1080/10781910802544373.

otherwise would be.[27] This effect, often either intentionally on the part of the person transmitting the information or not, changes the preferences of the people who are receiving the information.[28] In the case of Israeli and Palestinian leaders, I will showcase how they present their messages in a way that frames the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as lacking a middle ground. This changes the preferences of the audience of this messaging to either side with or against the speaker.

Confirmation bias, on the other hand, was first explored in 1960 by Wason. It is the tendency to seek out information that confirms one's current beliefs and disregard information that is contradictory with one's current beliefs.[29] An important distinction here is between being prone to falling for the confirmation bias and taking advantage of the confirmation bias in others. The present research does not claim that Israeli and Palestinian leaders are being affected by their confirmation bias, but that they are taking advantage of their audience's confirmation bias in order to make their own narratives seem more likely and easier to subscribe to. The confirmation bias employed by Israeli and Palestinian leaders also offers justification for the narratives given to the audience that fits within the bounds of confirmation bias. This allows the narratives to be stronger because the audience has reasons for why the beliefs are valid and justifiable.

Cognitive biases were first studied thoroughly by psychologists in 1974 by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman. They identified the three main heuristics: availability, representativeness, and anchoring.[30] The two heuristics that are relevant to the present research

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[27] Tversky, Amos, and Daniel Kahneman. "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice." Science 211 (January 30, 2981): 453=457.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Wason, P. C. "On the Failure to Eliminate Hypotheses in a Conceptual Task." Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology 12, no. 3 (July 1960): 129–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/17470216008416717.

[30] Tversky, Amos, and Daniel Kahneman. "Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases." Science 185, no. 4157 (September 27, 1974): 1124–31.

are availability and representativeness, which both serve as additional consequences to the form of the cognitive biases that are manipulated by Israeli and Palestinian leaders. The availability heuristic is defined as a bias towards the probability of an event due to the imaginability and familiarity of the event happening.[31] For example, people may be more likely to overestimate the probability of a shark attack due to their recollection of the movie *Jaws*. This heuristic is capable of working with both the framing effect and confirmation bias in order to perpetuate the narratives created by political elites. Palestinians may overestimate the likelihood of the IDF invading their private space to arrest them due to Palestinian leaders providing multiple examples of similar situations while Israeli Jews may overestimate the likelihood of being victim to a Palestinian terror attack due to Israeli leaders also providing many examples of similar events happening.

The representativeness heuristic works in a similar way to the availability heuristic. The representativeness heuristic is defined as a bias towards the probability of a person belonging to a particular group due to how well that person fits into the typical description of that group and how many of the defining characteristics of members of the group that the person has.[32] The relevancy of this heuristic lies in how the audience of leaders' speeches perceive the other side. If Palestinian leaders portray Israelis as oppressive and self-centered, Palestinians will be more likely to automatically assume Israelis are that way because that is the Israeli schema that is created. The same applies to Israelis; if Israeli leaders portray Palestinians as self-centered terrorists, their audience is more likely to apply this schema to Palestinians in their everyday life judgements.

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

The Present Research and its Arguments

The primary question driving the present research is: What rhetoric strategies do state leaders use to influence public opinion during interstate conflict?

The current literature on this topic is not able to answer this question because there is little focus on how political elites influence the conflict narratives that have profound effects on the public. The present research aims to amend this gap by bringing the role of political elites and leaders in creating and perpetuating these ideas to the forefront. In order to do this, the emphasis that current literature has placed on the opinions of the public will be replaced with an emphasis on the opinions of leaders. Whether or not the narratives employed by political elites and leaders are effective at changing public opinion or raising their perceived legitimacy is studied extensively in other works, as demonstrated earlier in this section, but I focus on how these narratives are represented by leaders.

My argument in response to my research is that the primary rhetoric used by Israeli and Palestinian state leaders is engaged in the blame game and is driven by cognitive biases. I define the blame game as the competition for the public perception of who is morally righteous and who is morally evil.

The first part of my argument is that the primary rhetoric strategies used by state leaders are engaged in the blame game. This would suggest that in order for a narrative to be perceived as morally righteous it also needs to claim victimhood specifically at the hand of the opposing force. This will lead to the two primary narratives of a conflict being ‘mirrored’ in a sense that

both sides are simultaneously claiming that they are the victim of the other. This means that both narratives will be seen as morally right by their ingroup but morally wrong by their outgroup.

The second part of my argument focuses on the cognitive biases that were brought up at the end of the previous section. This argument is that cognitive biases are the mechanism through which the victimhood narratives are created and maintained in the face of contradictory victimhood claims. The two cognitive biases I will focus on are the framing effect and confirmation bias. I argue that the framing effect is used in order to limit middle-ground perspectives, allowing for 'us vs. them' victimhood narratives. The same controversial event would be framed to restrict 'legitimate' public perceptions to two options: that one side is the victim of the other and vice-versa. Specifically, while framing the conflict as one side being the victim, leaders attempt to convince their audience that it is only logical for their side to be the victim. Confirmation bias is used during information distribution in order to emphasize the validity and importance of events that offer evidence for the supported victimhood narrative while dismissing the events that may offer evidence against the supported narrative or in favor of the opposing narrative. This takes the two victimhood narratives created by the framing effect and influences the audience to believe one victimhood narrative over the other. The purpose of this is to raise the moral fortitude of the victimhood claim and in turn, the moral righteousness claim.

The combination of the blame game and cognitive biases raises the question of who the audience of the narratives is. My third argument is that leadership alters the framing of the narrative depending on the audience of the particular information. For both forces, there are two audiences: the domestic public and the international public. So far, I have discussed how the narratives are framed to the domestic public, but the framing effect can also be used to extend the

reach of a narrative into an international audience. While there may be deviations, I argue that the audience will not have an impact on the presentation of messaging. Leaders use the same types of messaging in the same way for an international audience as they would for a domestic audience. In other words, the framing effect and confirmation bias are largely used in the same way for an international audience that it is used for a domestic audience. The method of the present research includes audience (specifically domestic or international) as a factor, but this is to showcase primarily the similarities and slight differences instead of demonstrating fundamental changes in messaging.

Methods and Design

My qualitative method involves gathering a collection of interviews and speeches from leadership that were given during three events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All interviews and speeches are of contemporary leaders (i.e. Israeli prime minister or president of the Palestinian Authority, Fatah, or the PLO) except for one. That exception is an interview with Yitzhak Rabin, who later became the prime minister of Israel, while he was serving as the defense minister of Israel. These three events from which the collection of interviews and speeches are taken from are the First Intifada, Second Intifada, and 2014 Gaza War. This offers a variation in leadership from both sides, in location of conflict, and in the domestic and international political landscape. These events were also chosen because they are among the most important events in the last several decades of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, each of them significantly altering the political landscape of the conflict. This allowed for an easier collection of data for statements given by leaders during this time without requiring archival research.

Although choosing three fairly recent events made data collection easier, there was still limited choice in particular speeches and interviews. This is partially the reason for inclusion of interviews along with speeches. The specific[33] speeches and interviews were chosen primarily on if they fit the criteria of taking place during one of the three chosen events and were delivered by a major Israeli or Palestinian leader. Secondarily, speeches and interviews were chosen based on subject of speeches and how well they demonstrated my arguments. Speeches and interviews with a subject focus being unrelated to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were not included in the collection.

I coded this collection in order to first determine if their narrative is focused (consciously or otherwise) around victimhood. I was then able to look at whether these different means of diffusion of information are tapping into confirmation bias in order to strengthen their narrative to a domestic audience and the framing effect in order to make themselves seem more reasonable to people who subscribe to the opposing narrative. Lastly, I looked to see if speeches directed at an international audience follow the same victimhood narrative that is used domestically. The analysis determining any differences between the international and domestic audience is secondary to the analysis of the types of messaging used throughout their speeches and interviews.

In order to substantiate my arguments, I coded one speech or interview from each intersection of variation. In order words, for each of the three conflicts, I took one Israeli speech and one Palestinian speech for an international audience and a domestic audience. The domestic

[33] The specific speeches, interviews, and statements are mentioned throughout the 'analysis' section later on, but not all of them will be mentioned directly. For more information on the specific speeches and interviews, I can be contacted at mb2020@uchicago.edu

audience, for the purposes of this method, is considered an audience that is almost exclusively made up of the domestic government (i.e. The Knesset for Israelis) and/or the domestic public. The international audience, conversely, is considered any audience outside of the domestic sphere. This collection primarily includes United Nations General Assembly speeches for the international audience, but also includes interviews for an American audience and a wider Middle East audience. This totaled to twelve speeches or interviews. These speeches and interviews are all publicly available in English in text format, and many of them are also available in video format in English or Arabic. The English text format was used to code all speeches and interviews in order to keep the method uniform.

The speeches and interviews were coded for six ideas. Half of these codes are for the invoking of cognitive biases while the other half are for the presence of the blame game. The first two codes are concerned with the basics of invoking exploiting confirmation bias. Code One, dismissive messaging, marks ideas that are meant to dismiss the validity of the opposing side's messaging. Code Two, self-trusting messaging, marks ideas that are meant to place an emphasis on the validity of the messaging from the speaker's own side. Code Three, signaling singularity, marks the explicit exploitation of the framing effect to frame the conflict as having no viable middle ground. These first three codes will be referred to collectively as the cognitive bias codes. This group of ideas serves as the basic framework through which the political messaging is meant to be evaluated by the audience. The next group of ideas is the different forms that the competing victimhood narratives take when used in different political environments and for different audiences.

The second half of codes are centered around the blame game and will be referred to collectively as the blame game codes. These codes stem from the premise of Code Three, and act as attempts to guide the audience towards the desired side of the 'us versus them' paradigm created by Code Three. Code Four, victimhood messaging, marks ideas that label the opposing force as the aggressor, and therefore labels the speaker's side as the victim of that aggressor when used with Code Three. Code Five, signaling of justice, marks ideas that signal an asymmetry of extremism. Code Five ideas typically show the speaker's side as being reasonable or justified while the opposing side is behaving in an extreme or unreasonable manner. In the same vein as Codes Four and Five, Code Six or security messaging, marks ideas signaling that the speaker's side is focused on defense. This code usually takes the form of claiming that the actions of the speaker's side were in the name of anti-terrorism or border security.

Similar to my present research, there is a small body of literature about the narratives that are pushed by Hamas. Two studies analyzed the themes of Hamas's Twitter account. One studied the visual propaganda[34] while the other studied Hamas's English language Twitter account which mostly looked at text-based propaganda.[35] Both were looking to discover common threads over the tweets to determine what narratives were being pushed. Unsurprisingly, neither of these studies found Hamas as representing itself as an aggressor. There is also some research on how support for certain narratives can be predictors for backing certain solutions to the conflict.[36] In

[34] Seo, Hyunjin. "Visual Propaganda in the Age of Social Media: An Empirical Analysis of Twitter Images During the 2012 Israeli–Hamas Conflict." Visual Communication Quarterly 21, no. 3 (September 2014): 150–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2014.955501.

[35] Margolin, Devorah. "#Hamas: A Thematic Exploration of Hamas's English-Language Twitter." Terrorism and Political Violence (June 2020): 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2020.1761343.

[36] Ben Hagai, Ella, and Eileen L. Zurbriggen. "Bridging Narratives: Predictors of Jewish American and Arab American Support for a Two-State Solution to the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict." Analyses of Social Issues & Public Policy 19, no. 1 (December 2019): 177–203. https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12181.

this research, Ben Hagai and Zurbriggen found that "a monolithic narrative on the conflict explains rejection of a peaceful compromise to the conflict among both Arab Americans and Jewish Americans," which suggests that many of the narratives explored in the present research result in less support for peaceful solutions to the conflict.[37] Their research also found evidence for victimhood narratives resulting in a lower chance of supporting granting concessions to the opposing side.[38]

Alternative Explanations

There is one main argument that would deny the significance of my research: that individuals, and the psychology of leaders by extension, do not matter in international relations. This is important because my argument does not state necessarily that leaders are not influenced by their own psychological biases; my argument is only that leaders do invoke cognitive biases during their public statements. It may very well be that cognitive biases are important aspects as conflict narratives because leaders themselves are being influenced by their own cognitive biases. The individual psychology also extends to that of individual members of the public. Even though my argument does not state that the public is necessarily influenced by the cognitive biases exploited by leaders, my argument does state that individuals of the public are capable of being influenced by such narratives. This argument that individual psychology is irrelevant is often seen used in the realm of theory with realism and liberal institutionalism.

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

The argument that individuals do not matter in international relations is not an uncommon one. Byman and Pollack offer a compelling explanation[39] for why arguments like Waltz's in *Man, the State, and War*[40] do not hold up. Byman and Pollack have three rebuttals to these arguments. First, they argue against the notion that human nature is a constant, which means that it is incapable of explaining why international politics change. They argue that human nature in fact does vary between individuals, and that some leaders may possess more or less propensity for traits like risk-taking.[41] The next objection is against the idea that because including human nature would be unnecessarily complex it would be less useful, which is rebutted by the idea that including human nature would make predicting state behavior more precise and therefore more useful.[42] Byman and Pollack's final point revolves around how state intentions may be more complex than the mere security-seeking behavior highlighted by Waltz.[43] They point towards recent ideas that different types of states may seek different primary goals than security, which makes the intentions of individuals much more important.[44] These rebuttals of Waltz's arguments show how individual psychology does play an important role in international relations.

[39] Byman, Daniel L., and Kenneth M. Pollack. "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In." *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 107–46.
[40] Waltz, Kenneth. *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis; Revised Edition*. Columbia University Press, 2001.
[41] Byman, Daniel L., and Kenneth M. Pollack. "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In." *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 107–46.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Waltz, Kenneth. *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis; Revised Edition*. Columbia University Press, 2001
[44] Byman, Daniel L., and Kenneth M. Pollack. "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In." *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 107–46.

A Brief Timeline of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

As briefly mentioned previously the wider Arab-Israeli conflict has spanned a time frame of around a century at this point. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians began around 1964 with the creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Shortly after, in 1967, Israel entered into a war with the nearby Arab states of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The war lasted six days, with Israel finishing on top. At the end of the war, Israel had taken chunks of land from each of its three primary opposing states; the Golan Heights from Syria, Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the West Bank from Jordan. The Sinai Peninsula was eventually given back to Egypt as part of a peace deal, but Israel retained the other territories. Many Palestinian residents of the West Bank fled to Jordan during the war, and the majority of those who remained did not become Israeli citizens.

The two intifadas, from which a portion of the speeches and interviews for the present research is taken, were conflicts that primarily took place in and around the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The first intifada took place between December 1987 and September 1993. It consisted of a series of violent protests primarily against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank after the 1967 war. The second intifada, taking place from September 2000 to February 2005, was another series of violent riots following the failure of the Camp David Summit in July of 2000 that was meant to conclude with a working peace plan. The 2014 Gaza War, its beginnings outlined previously, was an Israeli ground invasion into the Gaza Strip following rising tensions and more violent riots. This war ultimately ended in Israel pulling its settlements and authority out of the interior of the Gaza Strip.

Analysis

Table 1: Prevalence of Messaging Tactics by Conflict

	Code One: ***Dismissive***	*Code Two:* ***Trustworthy***	*Code Three:* ***Singularity***	*Code Four:* ***Victimhood***	*Code Five:* ***Justice***	*Code Six:* ***Security***	***Total***
Israeli	**7.4%**	**20.4%**	**0.8%**	**16.1%**	**21.6%**	**18.6%**	**84.9%**
First Intifada	1.5%	0%	1.1%	38.2%	24.2%	5.4%	**70.1%**
Second Intifada	0.6%	29.4%	0.9%	17.9%	25.6%	10.5%	**84.8%**
2014 Gaza War	13.5%	18%	0.6%	10.5%	18.3%	27%	**87.9%**
Palestinian	**3.2%**	**14.2%**	**4.2%**	**22%**	**24.6%**	**1.6%**	**69.7%**
First Intifada	2.7%	16.2%	4.2%	17.5%	30.3%	1.7%	**72.4%**
Second Intifada	4.7%	13.7%	0%	19%	17.2%	2.2%	**56.8%**
2014 Gaza War	1.8%	10.1%	11.2%	37.8%	22.9%	0.7%	**84.6%**
Total	**5%**	**16.8%**	**2.8%**	**19.5%**	**23.3%**	**8.7%**	**76%**

Findings

The above table[45] shows the findings of the qualitative coding methodology outlined in the previous Methods and Design section. The total word count[46] for each speech and interview[47] was taken, as well as the total word count of the sections of speeches and interviews that rely on

[45] There exists, in the document created by me which mentioned in another footnote later on, a version of this table that shows the numbers in terms of total word count numbers instead of percentages.
[46] The total word count for all speeches and interviews combined (not including words spoken by interviews during interviews) is 60,108.
[47] Any words spoken by interviewers were not included in the total word count for interviews. This effectively makes the word count for interviews consist only of words spoken by the leader of interest.

one of the six ideas that were coded for.[48] The percentages shown in the table above are the percentage of the word count that each code takes up for each type of speech. For instance, the first number in the top left corner, 7.4%, is the percentage of the total word count for all combined Israeli speeches and interviews that is reliant on Code 1 messaging. The number under that, 1.5%, is the percentage of the total word count for all Israeli speeches taking place during the first intifada combined that relied on Code 1 messaging. The first column on the right, the 'total' column, demonstrates the percentage of the speeches that are comprised of messaging that was coded for. For the number in the top right corner of the table, 84.9%, this means that 84.9% of the word count of all the collected Israeli speeches and interviews combined is reliant on at least one of the six messaging types that have been identified in the present research. The bottom row, the 'total' row, combines all of the speeches and interviews in the entire collection. This row shows the percentage of total word count for the entire collection that is reliant on each of the coded messaging types.

Keywords of Each Message Type

Each of the six types of messaging comes with a set of keywords or recurring ideas that are often invoked as part of the messaging. The first two codes, associated with confirmation bias, are less associated with keywords and more associated with recurring concepts. The Code One strategy is focused on diminishing the validity of the opposing narratives while the Code

[48] For any interested parties, all of the speeches, interviews, and statements used for data collection of this research were carefully recreated in text version in a document of my own making. Each of the codes were highlighted a different color so that they could be easily differentiated from each other. Each speech or interview is accompanied by a small table similar to the one shown above that contains the word count total for each of the codes in that specific speech or interview. For more information on this document, email mb2020@uchicago.edu

Two strategy is focused on emphasizing the validity of their own narratives. The Code One strategy has one central idea on both sides: that the opposing side is dishonest. During Arafat's 2002 speech at the Palestine Legislative Council, he portrayed Israeli elites as dishonest when he responded to claims that Palestinian leadership encouraged terrorist attacks by saying "we reject the operations that target the Israeli civilians."[49] Similarly, there is one recurring Code Two idea about how their own side's messaging is trustworthy. This can be seen again with Arafat, in his 1992 speech for Fatah's anniversary:

> "The Palestinian people remain the secure fence for the unity of the revolution and the unity of the PLO, and for preserving its national program and its future decisions with patience, wisdom, and persistence, and on the basis of democratic principles and democratic dialogue, common denominators, political and organizational programs approved by our national councils, in order to consolidate this national unity."[50]

The ideas here are that because the PLO is founded on democratic ideas, its messaging is trustworthy. They portray themselves as patient and wise while highlighting that they represent the Palestinian people by invoking the idea of democracy. This idea of democracy occurs 17 times throughout the speeches and interviews in this collection, primarily from the Palestinian leaders. However, it is not always used as part of Code Two messaging.

As will be discussed in the next section, Code Three messaging is likely to be implicit in the following three messaging types, so Code Three itself comes in different forms depending on which blame game messaging is being used alongside it. On its own, Code Three messaging was primarily used by Palestinian leaders during the first intifada and the 2014 Gaza War (see Table

[49] IMRA. "Full Text of Arafat Speech - What the White House Didn't Read." IMRA: Independent Media Review Analysis, May 16, 2002. https://www.imra.org.il/story.php?id=12024.

[50] Laqueur, Walter, and Barry Rubin, eds. "PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat: Speech for Fatah's Anniversary (December 31, 1992)." In The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict, Seventh., 407–11. London: Penguin Books, 2008. https://philosproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Arafat-Speech-for-Fatah%E2%80%99s-Anniversary.pdf.

1). When used alone, similar to the first two messaging types, the Code Three strategy does not have any keywords; it primarily has a key idea in that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is 'us versus them' and that those taking middle ground stances are not truly loyal Palestinians or loyal Israelis. This is evident in Arafat's same speech for Fatah's anniversary:

> "More steadfastness, more all-out confrontations in the sixth year of our blessed intifada in the towns, villages, camps, streets, fields, and mountains. The battle for national deliverance has begun with these solid Palestinian human blocs, who fill our lands and defy the bullets of the Israeli occupation and ferocity with their strong and profound faith and deep-rooted will and great sacrifices, and with national unity our staunch shield in the melting pot of the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of our people and revolution."[51]

This segment of Arafat's speech implies, with the phrase "sole legitimate representative of our people"[52] that individuals of the public are either on the side of the PLO or on the side of Israel. The three cognitive bias codes work together to portray the opposition as wrong and untrustworthy while portraying themselves as correct and trustworthy,

For the blame game strategies, there are more concrete keywords and ideas, which can sometimes vary depending on which side the leader is on. The biggest difference between the keywords of Palestinian and Israeli leaders is that Palestinian leaders use the word 'occupation' much more often to refer to Israel than Israeli leaders do to refer to Palestine or to themselves. This keyword is also mostly associated with Code Four messaging. The word 'occupation' was mentioned 56 times, all but 12 of which were as part of Palestinian Code Four messaging. For Israeli leaders, Code Four messaging has a keyword of 'terror,' as well as a recurring theme of Palestinian violence. Peres's United Nations speech in 1988 demonstrates this idea: "Sadly, the

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

absence of progress was accompanied by an outbreak of violence. Wrongly, the Palestinians chose to knock on the door of the future with stones in their hands."[53]

Similarly, Code Five messaging often focuses on how their own side is justified or that the opposing side is unjustified. There is only one main difference between the justice-focused Code Five and the victimhood-focused Code Four. This is that the emphasis of each code is on different ideas, even though they may be using similar evidence. Code Four's emphasis is on themselves as the victim of the out-group while Code Five's emphasis is on themselves as justified. One does not necessarily need to be the victim to be justified. For example, Israel's ground invasion of the Gaza Strip during the 2014 Gaza War was an aggressive act, but it was considered justified. Netanyahu's 2014 United Nations speech demonstrates this idea: "Israel justly defended itself against both rocket attacks and terror tunnels."[54] The idea is that violence Israeli action is justified if Palestinian actors engaged in unjust violent activities first. Another recurring idea with the idea that leaders portray their own side as peaceful while the opposing side is violent. This is evident in a portion of Arafat's 1988 United Nations speech:

> "Our people refuse to feel superior to, and refuse to be less than, any other people. Our people want equality with all other peoples to have the same rights and the same obligations. I call upon all the peoples of the world, especially those who experienced Nazi occupation and considered it their duty to put paid to the practice of oppression and injustice by one people against another and help all those who fall victim to terrorism, fascism and Nazism. I call upon all those peoples to face up today to the responsibilities put upon them by history towards our long-suffering people, who only want a place for their children under the sun, in their homeland – a place where they can live as free people in a free land, like all other children in the world."[55]

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[53] United Nations. "Forty-Third General Assembly." United Nations, September 28, 1988. http://undocs.org/en/A/43/PV.9.

[54] C-SPAN. "Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu U.N. Assembly Address." C-SPAN, September 29, 2014. https://www.c-span.org/video/?321761-2/israeli-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-addresses-un-general-assembly.

[55] United Nations. "Forty-Third General Assembly." United Nations, September 28, 1988. http://undocs.org/en/A/43/PV.9.

As indicated by Table 1, the security-focused Code Six messaging is primarily used by Israeli leaders. It also has several clear keywords that is associated with it. The first of these keywords is security. As demonstrated by Sharon in his 2003 Mideast Summit speech, they claim that "[their] paramount responsibility is the security of the people of Israel and of the state of Israel."[56] Security, in this context, is used 60 times throughout the collection of speeches and interviews. The other keyword, which was previously mentioned as a keyword for Israeli leadership when using Code Four messaging, is terror. Terrorism is mentioned 92 times throughout the collection primarily between Code Four and Code Six messaging. The difference between the Code Four usage of terrorism and the Code Six usage of terrorism is that when Israeli leaders mention terrorism for Code Four messaging it is showcasing that Israel is the victim of terrorism, focusing on an emotional appeal. Whereas in Code Six messaging, terrorism is used to show that Israel is merely defending itself again Palestinian threats, focusing on an ethical appeal. To exemplify this difference, look at the emotional excerpt from Netanyahu's 2014 Knesset speech:

> "The cruel terror that struck at a three-month-old baby for whom her parents had waited for so long, a baby in her stroller on the way back from the Western Wall with her parents who wanted to pray and thank God that she was born."[57]

This excerpt is a clear example of the Code Four's invoking of terrorism because the focus is on victimhood as opposed to defensive state action. This can be compared to a Code Six invoking of terrorism from the same speech:

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[56] CNN. "CNN.Com - Transcript of Speech by Sharon - Jun. 4, 2003." CNN, June 4, 2003. https://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/06/04/summit.sharon/index.html.

[57] Israel MFA. "PM Netanyahu at the Opening of the Knesset Winter Session." Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 27, 2014. https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2014/Pages/PM-Netanyahu%27s-remarks-at-the-opening-of-the-Knesset-winter-session-27-October-2014.aspx.

> "The last time I stood here was before Operation Protective Edge. During that operation to defend against criminal terrorist attacks, the State of Israel showed the entire world what decisiveness, force and unity are."[58]

This except of Netanyahu's same 2014 Knesset speech invokes terrorism in a way that emphasizes defensive state action, as expected of Code Six messaging.

The Blame Game and the Framing Effect

On first glance, it may appear that Code Three, representing the framing effect being used to portray the conflict as black or white, is used the least. This is indicative of the framing effect being used in this specific way primarily alongside the blame game. In other words, it is not used consistently by either Israelis or Palestinians outside of the blame game. This also means that while the second half of codes are all related to Code Three, the majority of them appeared without the context of Code Three on its own. Whether this is because the blame game is used in order to increase sentiments that there is no viable middle ground or because of the reverse, it is impossible to tell given the present data. There is room for more research on this topic, but this phenomenon likely occurs due to the framing effect, as used to portray the conflict as 'us versus them,' being implicit in the blame game arguments. In support of this claim, the blame game arguments require an 'us versus them' paradigm in order to make sense.

Code Four messaging, arguments that focus on self-identified victimhood and aggression from the opposing side, implicitly include Code Three messaging through conveying that their citizens are victims of specifically the government of the opposing side and its allies. While the

[58] Ibid.

content of the messaging may change depending on whether the speaker is Israeli or Palestinian, the goal of the messaging remains the same. To illustrate this point, compare a Palestinian Code Four message with an Israeli one, both from the second intifada. In 2002, Yasser Arafat said at the Palestine Legislative Counsel:

> "Our masses and our Palestine National Authority have suffered huge sacrifices over the last two years, so much so that no city or a refugee camp or a village or a house or a hut was spared. None was not an Israeli military target, of their tanks and air planes [sic], or a target of their strangulating siege imposed on our towns and villages."[59]

In this quote, Arafat is claiming Palestinian victimhood of Israeli aggression at the same time as portraying the events as Palestinians being completely innocent at the hands of a hyper aggressive Israeli military. Ariel Sharon can be found using the same tactic in the opening of his speech to the Knesset in April of the same year:

> "They have one mission: to chase us out of here, from everywhere — from our home in Elon Moreh and from the supermarket in Jerusalem, from the cafe in Tel Aviv and from the restaurant in Haifa, from the synagogue in Netzarim — where the murderers slaughtered two over 70 worshippers, walking in their prayer shawls to morning prayers — and from the Seder table in Netanya."[60]

Sharon is portraying Israel as completely innocent in the face of Palestinian terrorism. The difference between these two excerpts is minimal. Arafat claimed that Palestinians were victims of Israeli aggression while Sharon claimed Israelis as the victims of Palestinian terror. These are examples of mirrored victimhood narratives, where both sides portray themselves as the primary victim of the conflict in similar ways. Objectively, only one side could truly be the

[59] IMRA. "Full Text of Arafat Speech - What the White House Didn't Read." IMRA: Independent Media Review Analysis, May 16, 2002. https://www.imra.org.il/story.php?id=12024.

[60] The New York Times. "Text of Speech by Sharon to Israeli Parliament." The New York Times, April 8, 2002. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/08/international/middleeast/text-of-speech-by-sharon-to-israeli-parliament.html.

primary victim (even though in reality, they are likely both equally victims), but Arafat and Sharon are shown competing for that same role.

Code Three messaging of framing the conflict as 'us versus them' is also implicit in the other two blame game codes. For Code Five messaging, or claims of being reasonable while the opposing side is unreasonable, implies the Code Three mentality through the implication of Code Five messaging being that the conflict is caused by one side wanting to make steps towards peace while the other just wants to gather as much power as possible. It portrays the conflict as 'us versus them' with a spin of 'justified versus unjustified.' Take, for example, an excerpt of Netanyahu's speech at the opening of the Knesset in October of 2014:

> "They demand a withdrawal to the '67 borders, the entry of refugees and the division of Jerusalem. And after all these unrealistic demands, they are not ready to agree to the fundamental condition for peace between our two peoples - mutual recognition. While they expect us to recognize their nation-state, they refuse to recognize our nation-state."[61]

In this excerpt, Netanyahu explicitly calls Palestinian request for Israeli withdrawal towards the 1967 borders unrealistic while characterizing it as a demand. Following this up with the claim that the Palestinian leadership refuses to recognize Israel as a nation-state takes something that could seem reasonable from a Palestinian perspective and uses a new phrasing to make it seem completely unreasonable while portraying Israel as just trying to move towards peace.

The same tactics are, again, seen with Palestinian leadership as well. During Mahmoud Abbas's speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014, he said the following:

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[61] Israel MFA. "PM Netanyahu at the Opening of the Knesset Winter Session." Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 27, 2014. https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2014/Pages/PM-Netanyahu%27s-remarks-at-the-opening-of-the-Knesset-winter-session-27-October-2014.aspx.

> "Even as we watched the ongoing and escalating Israeli violations, we exercised unimaginable self-restraint, silencing our cries and tending to our own wounds in order to give the American efforts the best possible chance for success. However, and as usual, the Israeli government did not miss the opportunity to undermine the chance for peace."[62]

Abbas, like Netanyahu, implicitly frames the conflict as reasonable Palestinians against unreasonable Israelis. He portrays these events as Palestinian leadership working towards peace with an Israel that is indifferent towards the idea of peace.

Code Six messaging is the least reliant of the three blame game codes on Code Three messaging. Code Six is an emphasis on national security and combines the other two types of blame game messaging to create a new one. Code Six takes the victim/aggressor paradigm of Code Four and the justified/unjustified paradigm of Code Five to portray themselves as merely seeking to protect their citizens from an opposing force. Because Code Six messaging combines the other two types of blame game messaging it does rely on Code Three messaging, just less directly. Both Code Four and Code Five require an implicit Code Three to make sense, and Code Six does as well. An excerpt of Ariel Sharon's speech at the Mideast Summit in June of 2003 demonstrates this concept well:

> **"**As the prime minister of Israel, the land which is the cradle of the Jewish people, my paramount responsibility is the security of the people of Israel and of the state of Israel. There can be no compromise with terror, and Israel, together with all free nations, will continue fighting terrorism until its final defeat. Ultimately, permanent security requires peace. And permanent peace can only be obtained through security."[63]

Sharon's invoking of anti-terrorism campaigns highlights both Israeli victimhood and contrasts justified Israeli military action with the extremist Palestinian terrorist activity.

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[62] Times of Israel. "Full Text of Mahmoud Abbas's Speech to the UN." Times of Israel, September 29, 2014. http://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-abbas-speech-to-un/.

[63] CNN. "CNN.Com - Transcript of Speech by Sharon - Jun. 4, 2003." CNN, June 4, 2003. https://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/06/04/summit.sharon/index.html.

As indicated on Table 1, this messaging type was used significantly more by Israeli leaders than by Palestinian leaders, but the Palestinian use of Code Six, when it appears, is the same as the Israeli use of it. This can be seen in Arafat's 2002 speech to the Palestine Legislative Council:

> "It is the people who are recording this heroic epic waged by the heroic Palestinian people and all their militant forces, in order to gain their freedom and independence, and so that our children and generations can live in security and peace in a free and independent homeland, far away from occupation, settlement, oppression, assassination and detention, that take place in an unprecedented manner in contemporary international community, where our people are the only people the world over who are still living under occupation."[64]

As exemplified by this excerpt, state security is often explicitly referenced as a major concern when using Code Six messaging for both Israelis and Palestinians. This keyword embodies both Code Four and Code Five through invoking a sense of victimhood and justification.

The Israeli and Palestinian leaders rarely use the blame game in relation to entities other than each other. The most common entities outside of Israel and Palestine that were mentioned were the United Nations[65] by Palestinian leaders and Iran by Israeli leaders.[66] This acts as evidence of the blame game being used by both Israel and Palestine primarily in order to gain appeal in specifically the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Because this conflict is highly salient in the everyday, the blame game and victimhood narratives may be perceived as more effective on the general population than on political entities. The lack of mentions of other states or political

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[64] IMRA. "Full Text of Arafat Speech - What the White House Didn't Read." IMRA: Independent Media Review Analysis, May 16, 2002. https://www.imra.org.il/story.php?id=12024.

[65] The United Nations was mentioned by Palestinian leaders 37 times. 31 of these times were in a positive light and 6 of these times were in a neutral light. The United Nations was never referred to with a negative connotation by Palestinian leaders. By Israel, the United Nations was mentioned 11 times, only 4 of these times had a positive connotation, 3 had a neutral connotation, and 4 had a negative connotation.

[66] Iran was mentioned 31 times throughout the speeches and interviews. All of these mentions were done by either Sharon or Netanyahu. This is likely more indicative of Iran's perceived rising nuclear threat to Israel in the 21st century than of a diminishing focus on the conflict with the Palestinians.

entities may, however, be due to the time frames of the chosen speeches and interviews. Due to the speeches and interviews being chosen specifically from the times during the first and second intifadas as well as the 2014 Gaza War, it could certainly be that at the time Israel and the Palestinian Authority were primarily concerned with the conflict at hand. Future research may find an interest in if Israeli and Palestinian leaders are less likely to focus public speeches on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during less violent time periods of the conflict.

The United Nations as a Palestinian Platform?

As previously mentioned, the United Nations was the most referenced non-Israeli or Palestinian political entity throughout this collection. It was mentioned 48 times throughout the speeches, primarily by the Palestinian leaders. Remarkably, not a single reference to the United Nations by Palestinian leadership had a negative connotation. Meanwhile, Israeli leadership only referred positively to the United Nations four times, less than half of their mentions of the United Nations. Palestinian leadership regarded the United Nations as a close ally while Israeli leadership regarded the United Nations as a third party aligned unilaterally with Palestinians. Many times throughout the speeches and interviews, both Israeli leaders and Palestinian leaders treated the United Nations when involved with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a favorable involved party for Palestinians and an unfavorable party for Israelis.

The most common manifestation of these relationships is the willingness of Palestinian leadership to operate under the parameters of the United Nations. The vast majority of Palestinian references to the United Nations fall under Palestinian signaling about how they are

careful to conform to UN resolutions. This signaling is typically used as a crucial part of Code Five arguments, demonstrating themselves to reasonable in contrast with an extreme Israel. For example, during Arafat's speech at the United Nations in 1988, in response to his own interpretation of Israel portraying the Palestinian goal of achieving "a democratic State of Palestine wherein Moslems, Christians and Jews would live as equals who enjoy the same rights and have the same obligations in a unified integrated community" to be "an evil design to destroy and obliterate their identity," he said the following: "did we not endorse the Fez Arab peace plan in 1982 and later the call for an international peace conference under the auspices of the United Nations in conformity with its resolutions?"[67] This type of signaling conformity with UN resolutions was only present in the Israeli messaging during one speech. This speech was that of Ariel Sharon at the Knesset in 2002, when he stated that "the war [with Egypt] ended with an agreed cease-fire, in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolutions 338 and 339"[68] as a way of showing that a gradual approach to peacebuilding between Israel and the Arab states is advantageous.

Israeli messaging regarded the United Nations as if the entity is explicitly in support of Palestine over Israel. While Palestinian leadership primarily referenced their relationship with the United Nations for Code Five messaging, Israeli leadership primarily referenced their relationship with the United Nations for Code Four messaging. They used their relationship with

[67] United Nations. "Palestine Question/Arafat Statement - GA Debate (Geneva) - Verbatim Record (Excerpts)." United Nations, December 13, 1988. https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-181060/.

[68] The New York Times. "Text of Speech by Sharon to Israeli Parliament." The New York Times, April 8, 2002. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/08/international/middleeast/text-of-speech-by-sharon-to-israeli-parliament.html.

the United Nations to demonstrate how Israel is the victim in the conflict. For example, at the 2014 United Nations General Assembly, Netanyahu claimed the following:

> "By investigating Israel rather than Hamas for war crimes, the United Nations Human Rights Council has betrayed its noble mission to protect the innocent. In fact, what it is doing is to turn the laws of war upside down. Israel, which took unprecedented steps to minimize civilian casualties, is condemned; Hamas, which both targeted and hid behind civilians — that is a double war crime — is given a pass."[69]

While this is only one example, it is indicative of how Israeli leadership portrays the United Nations as biased against Israel. It may be that it is more beneficial for Palestinian leadership to have good relations with the United Nations than it is for Israeli leadership, but regardless the leaders of both sides seem to behave as if the United Nations acts as an extension for Palestinian leadership when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Messaging for Different Audiences

As previously suggested, this collection of speeches and interviews consists of messaging from Israeli and Palestinian leadership directed at three distinct audiences. These three audiences are the Israeli domestic public, Palestinian domestic public, and the international audience. This particular set of speeches and interviews only includes messaging from each side, Israel and Palestine, directed towards two audiences. The Israeli set of speeches and interviews includes messaging for both the Israeli domestic public and the international audience. The Palestinian set includes messaging for both the Palestinian domestic public and the international audience.

[69] C-SPAN. "Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu U.N. Assembly Address." C-SPAN, September 29, 2014. https://www.c-span.org/video/?321761-2/israeli-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-addresses-un-general-assembly.

This collection does not include speeches or interviews directed at each other's domestic public. This is primarily due to sample issues. Public speeches, interviews, and even statements targeting each other's domestic population with either a full video/audio recording or a full written transcript are exceedingly difficult to find. Finding speeches of this nature within a certain period of time, as was included in the goals of this collection, even further limits the data pool. Another difficulty with this issue is the language barrier. Neither Yasser Arafat nor Mahmoud Abbas have spoken in Hebrew, and many of their speeches to Israelis were in Arabic without an official translation or full written transcript to be translated. Because of this gap, there is room for future research on whether the messaging of Israeli and Palestinian leaders towards the opposing domestic audience is different from their messaging directed towards either their own domestic public or an international audience.

This collection of speeches and interviews demonstrates the consistency of Israeli and Palestinian leaders' usage of the same messaging tactics, which exploit the cognitive biases of the audience in order to gain support. The messaging is not only mirrored in their usage of exploiting cognitive biases, but also is largely mirrored in the ways in which cognitive biases are invoked. However, Israeli messaging and Palestinian messaging are not static. As previously demonstrated in the section about keywords, Israeli and Palestinian messaging have slight differences tailored to their unique situations and their unique populations. The same is true of the audience of these speeches and interviews. The messaging remains the same but is tailored to match the new population that the audience represents. Although, while there are slight differences between the messaging used in speeches for an international audience and the messaging used in speeches for a domestic audience, which will be explored in this section, the messaging used is largely consistent across these two different audience types.

Because of the nature of this collection including an extraordinarily small sample size for examining variation, it is important to note that claims on the consistency of messaging types across different variable is not generalizable to leaders worldwide or even to Israeli and Palestinian leaders outside of the studied parameters. These speeches were given during times of violent conflict between Israel and Palestinians specifically in the West Bank and Gaza strip. That being said, the types of messages in speeches remain largely the same between domestic and international audiences. While some messaging types are less common for ether Israelis or Palestinians, both Israeli leaders and Palestinian leaders exhibit all six of the highlighted messaging types throughout speeches and interviews for both a domestic and an international audience. The major keywords, phrases, and ideas for each type of messaging are present in both domestic and international speeches and interviews.

The primary difference between speeches directed towards international and domestic audiences, for both Israeli and Palestinian leaders, was that international speeches were much more likely to invoke global politics and the repercussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the rest of the world. By invoking global politics, what I mean is that Israeli and Palestinian leaders are more likely to discuss how other international entities, like the United States or the United Nations, have roles to play in the solution to the conflict. This difference between domestic speeches and international speeches is most likely due to those international entities being more relevant on an international stage than they would be on the domestic stage. If the United States is listening, which they likely would be at an international event like the United Nations General Assembly, there is more utility in addressing them than there would be when the United States is not listening. It does not mean that these international entities are less important in reality than international speeches would make it seem, but that it is more worthwhile to

address international components of the conflict to an international audience than to a domestic audience.

Of course, this also means that leaders are more likely to portray issues as international threats as opposed to just threats to their own state. The clearest example of this is comparing the way Netanyahu talked about Iran in his September 2014 UN speech and his October 2014 Knesset speech. In his Knesset speech, he had the following segment about Iran:

> "Members of Knesset, there is no greater danger to the future of our region than Iran's attempt to become a nuclear threshold state. In the fight between radical Shi'ism and radical Sunnism, the greatest danger is that one of the sides will become armed with nuclear weapons. I reiterate: Beating ISIS and leaving Iran as a threshold state is winning the battle and losing the war. I hope that the international community will not make a historic mistake by easing the sanctions imposed on Iran and leaving it with the ability to enrich uranium for a nuclear bomb in a short period of time. Let me be clear: Israel, which Iran is threatening to destroy, will always maintain its right to defend itself."[70]

Notably, Netanyahu did mention Iran as a global threat in this segment, but he focused on a nuclear-armed Iran as a threat to Israel in particular. The only mention of the international community was about how they have the ability to slow Iran's nuclear progress. His UN speech is vastly different in how he portrays the threat Iran poses. The portion of his UN speech in which Netanyahu talks about Iran is much longer than its counterpart in the Knesset speech, but he often refers to Iran as a threat to the world, not just to Israel. One example of this can be found in the following sentence: "In the future, at the time of its choosing, Iran, the world's most dangerous regime, in the world's most dangerous region, would obtain the world's most dangerous weapons. Allowing that to happen would pose the gravest threat to us all."[71] He uses

[70] Israel MFA. "PM Netanyahu at the Opening of the Knesset Winter Session." Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 27, 2014. https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2014/Pages/PM-Netanyahu%27s-remarks-at-the-opening-of-the-Knesset-winter-session-27-October-2014.aspx.

[71] C-SPAN. "Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu U.N. Assembly Address." C-SPAN, September 29, 2014. https://www.c-span.org/video/?321761-2/israeli-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-addresses-un-general-assembly.

the phrase ‘us all’ to denote all of the allied states at the United Nations, not just to all Israelis. However, in this excerpt, Netanyahu is talking about the exact same threat that he is in his Knesset speech when he characterizes nuclear Iran as particularly threatening for Israel. This contrast can be seen again later in his UN speech:

> “Once Iran produces atomic bombs, all the charm and all the smiles will suddenly disappear — they will just vanish. It is then that the ayatollahs will show their true face and unleash their aggressive fanaticism on the entire world. There is only one responsible course of action to address this threat. Iran’s nuclear military capabilities must be fully dismantled.”[72]

This time, Netanyahu explicitly claims that nuclear Iran would be a threat to the entire world, again playing up the significance of Iran’s threat and pulling focus away from Israel’s particular concerns about its relationship with Iran.

This difference between domestic and international speeches is also present in those of Palestinian leaders. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this is the inflated relevance of the United Nations portrayed by Palestinian leaders when speaking for an international audience, which can be seen in Arafat’s 1988 speech at the United Nations:

> “On the basis of our belief in international legitimacy and the vital role of the United Nations, that actions be undertaken to place our occupied Palestinian land under temporary United Nations supervision, and that international forces be deployed there to protect our people and at the same time supervise the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from our country.”[73]

Of the 37 times the United Nations was referenced by the Palestinian leaders throughout this collection of speeches and interviews, 32 of those times were in those given for an international audience.

While, previously, it was discussed how the United Nations is seen by both sides as favoring Palestine. However, if the United Nations can be seen as an extension of the will of

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[72] Ibid.

[73] United Nations. “Forty-Third General Assembly.” United Nations, September 28, 1988. http://undocs.org/en/A/43/PV.9.

Palestinian leaders, the increased inclusion of the United Nations during speeches and interviews for an international audience would suggest that Palestinian leaders portray the United Nations with inflated relevance in order to demonstrate their willingness to work with the international community. This, again, is clear in Arafat's 1988 UN speech when he says:

> "I hope it is clear to everyone that our Palestinian people, determined as they are to gain their legitimate national rights to self-determination, return and the ending of the occupation of the Palestinian homeland, are equally determined to strive for those goals by peaceful means within the framework of the International Conference, under the sponsorship of the United Nations and in accordance with its Charter and resolutions."[74]

Not only is the United Nations mentioned more often by Palestinian leaders during international speeches and interviews, but it is also portrayed with increased importance. This can be exemplified by an interview with Arafat in 2002. In response to a question about his position on the Palestinian refugees, Arafat said: "I told [President Clinton], this had been accepted from the beginning by the Americans, by the whole world. It was the resolution of the United Nations, General Assembly 194."[75] The implication in this quote is that because it was a UN resolution then it must be that the whole world has accepted it. This can be seen again in Arafat's United Nations speech in 1988: "More than 40 years ago, the United Nations, in General Assembly resolution 181 (II), decided on the establishment of two States in Palestine, one Palestinian Arab and one Jewish."[76] This excerpt demonstrates the same type of messaging as the previous one. Arafat implies that because it was a UN resolution, then it must be legitimate. Whether or not this is valid logical reasoning, it is a clear example of how Palestinian

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[74] Ibid.
[75] PBS Frontline. "Shattered Dreams of Peace: Interviews Yasser Arafat." PBS Frontline, June 26, 2002. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/oslo/interviews/arafat.html.
[76] United Nations. "Forty-Third General Assembly." United Nations, September 28, 1988. http://undocs.org/en/A/43/PV.9.

leaders use an inflated portrayal of the United Nations as Code Two messaging for an international audience.

Regardless of whether inflating the relevance of the United Nations in international speeches is effective, it is at least perceived by Palestinian leaders to be useful. The willingness of Palestinian leaders to work with the international community is likely perceived as useful for two reasons. First, it is favorable for Palestinian leaders to have a good relationship with status quo international powers like the United Nations. Second, it is favorable for Palestinian leaders to work through the United Nations instead of directly with Israeli leaders. This is in part because it increases their negotiating power to operate under the perceived favorable conditions of UN resolutions and UN involvement. This is evidenced by not only the prevalence of invoking the United Nations in international Palestinian speeches, but also by the prevalence of invoking UN resolutions in order to reinforce their narrative. Arafat demonstrates how leaders are able to strengthen their own messaging by invoking UN resolutions in the following excerpt from his UN speech in 1988:"Our Palestine National Council has reaffirmed its commitment to the United Nations resolutions that uphold the right of peoples to resist foreign occupation, colonialism and racial discrimination, and their right to struggle for independence."[77] This is one of the ways in which Code Two, invoking confirmation bias, is used by Palestinian leaders.

This form of invoking the United Nations as Code Two is not exclusive to Palestinian leaders, but it is primarily used by Palestinian leaders. It is, however, another difference between the domestic and international speeches given by Palestinian leaders. For domestic speeches, Palestinian leaders typically rely on invoking the values of the Palestinian Authority instead of

[77] Ibid.

invoking the values of the United Nations. This can be seen in Arafat's speech for the anniversary of Fatah in 1992:

> "The Palestinian people remain the secure fence for the unity of the revolution and the unity of the PLO, and for preserving its national program and its future decisions with patience, wisdom, and persistence, and on the basis of democratic principles and democratic dialogue, common denominators, political and organizational programs approved by our national councils, in order to consolidate this national unity. Those democratic principles have foiled crude intervention in our internal affairs of our Palestinian house."[78]

This is not, however, the case for Israeli leaders. As previously discussed, Israeli leaders invoke the United Nations much less frequently than Palestinian leaders and the same goes for the prevalence of Israeli leaders using the United Nations for Code Two messaging. Furthermore, unlike Palestinian leaders, Israeli leaders do not use the United Nations for Code Two messaging more often in international speeches and interviews. In fact, three of the four positive references to the United Nations by Israeli leadership throughout this collection were in domestic speeches and interviews. Two of these three mentions were in order to use Code Two messaging, and one was in order to use Code One messaging, Code Two's sister code. The usage for Code One was in an interview with Yitzhak Rabin when he was the minister of defense in 1988 on IDF radio: "Arafat tried to evade…[U.N. Security Council Resolutions] 242 and 338, which he mentioned, without linking them to the right to self-determination, within the context of willingness to attend an international conference as a state."[79] The other two positive mentions of the United Nations for a domestic Israeli audience were in Ariel Sharon's April 2002 speech to the Knesset, as was discussed in the previous section. In the previous section, a quote of

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[78] Laqueur, Walter, and Barry Rubin, eds. "PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat: Speech for Fatah's Anniversary (December 31, 1992)." In The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict, Seventh., 407–11. London: Penguin Books, 2008. https://philosproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Arafat-Speech-for-Fatah%E2%80%99s-Anniversary.pdf.

[79] Israel MFA. "418 Interview with Defense Minister Rabin on IDF Radio- 14 December 1988." Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 14, 1988. https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook7/Pages/418%20Interview%20with%20Defense%20Minister%20Rabin%20on%20IDF%20R.aspx.

Sharon positively invoking the United Nations in the way that is typical of Palestinian leaders was shown. The other time in the speech that Sharon used the United Nations for Code Two messaging in his Knesset speech was when he said that "U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 affirm Israel's right to exist in peace, and in secure and recognized borders, free from any military threat, like any other nation in the region."[80] It is clear that Israeli leaders do not highly value the involvement of the United Nations like Palestinian leaders do.

In order for leaders to reach different audiences, they adapt their messaging strategies to fit what leaders perceive to be ideal for those different audiences. However, while there are some differences between the ways Israeli and Palestinian leaders speak for and interact with different audiences, it is not the types of messaging that changes; instead, it is the ways in which the various messaging types are used that changes. The clearest example of how leaders alter the same messaging strategies for different audiences is with Code One and Code Two, messages that exploit the confirmation bias of the audience. Both sides put more weight on demonstrating the validity of their messages through international recognition. Both sides also generally put more emphasis on the role of the international community in finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when speaking for an international audience.

Discussion

While this research highlights strategies used by Israeli and Palestinian leaders in regard to conflict with each other and other involved parties internationally, there is plenty of research

[80] The New York Times. "Text of Speech by Sharon to Israeli Parliament." The New York Times, April 8, 2002. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/08/international/middleeast/text-of-speech-by-sharon-to-israeli-parliament.html.

that has yet to be conducted on the topic. This topic has been under-explored in the fields of political psychology and international relations. The greatest strength of the present research is the demonstration of potential directions for future research on the topic. There are many paths branching from the present research. However, the present research has space for improvement in many aspects.

The research question that I asked was: what rhetoric strategies do state leaders use to influence public opinion during interstate conflict? This research answers this question in two parts. First, Israeli and Palestinian leaders rely on the blame game in order to support their own narratives and counter the narratives of their opponents. I argue this through offering evidence of the large portions of leaders' speeches being dedicated to creating a dichotomy between justified and unjustified state behavior, and between victims and aggressors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Second, these blame game narratives are reliant on cognitive biases, whether leaders are knowingly exploiting the cognitive biases of the public or if leaders are suffering being affected by their own cognitive biases.

However, this research could improve in several ways. The current analysis would greatly benefit from a greater population of speeches, interviews, and statements from Israeli and Palestinian leaders in the highest held offices and other government positions. A larger and more diverse population of data may allow for some generalizability to be made on the messaging strategies of leaders. Including speeches in Hebrew and Arabic, as well as audio versions as well as text versions would further increase the research's external validity. Furthermore, having a consensus approach to the qualitative coding process would increase the internal validity of the

research by decreasing researcher bias and interpretation. Importantly, higher levels of statistical analysis would be able to be conducted with a higher and more varied population of data.

The present research demonstrates multiple ways in which knowledge on this topic can be expanded. The analysis of various speeches and interviews of Israeli and Palestinian leaders shows that leaders perceive these six types of messaging as effective in times of conflict, but further research on public opinion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may show whether these strategies are actually effective or not, and why these strategies work or do not work. There is also room for formal research on why the Israeli and Palestinian leaders perceive these strategies as ideal for conveying their messages, and if they use the same strategies during times that are less violent or even peaceful. It would also be interesting to compare the strategies of Israeli and Palestinian leaders with leaders in conflicts similar to that of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Furthermore, the role of the media in information distribution is a viable path for future research on how the messages of leaders influence public opinion. The work of Geoffrey Cohen shows not only the influence of political elites on public opinion, but also indirectly shows the role of the media in distributing the messaging of said political elites.[81] The premise of Cohen's 2003 set of experiments is that republicans and democrats will be prone to adopting the narratives of political elites who share a political identity group with them, even if people would typically hold opposite beliefs. For the experiment, Cohen presented participants with fake elite messaging in the form of news articles, suggesting that people may be likely to form political opinions through small excerpts of political elite messages.[82]

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[81] Cohen, Geoffrey L. "Party Over Policy: The Dominating Impact of Group Influence on Political Beliefs." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 85, no. 5 (November 2003): 808–22. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.5.808.

[82] Ibid.

Future research may also move in the direction of identifying more strategies that Israeli and Palestinian leaders use for building narratives. The six qualitative codes identified in the resent research may not encompass every strategy used. These six strategies may also be further broken down into component pieces, as Code Three was broken down in the blame game codes. Because the present research only incorporated speeches and interviews from periods of conflict between Israel and Palestine, there may be different strategies used during peaceful periods of time. Relevant to this research may also be a comparison of strategies used by leaders of states with varying degrees of international power and varying types of relationships with international entities. Related, the present research lays a path for continued research on how leaders may take advantage of cognitive biases in their messaging. Does the public truly respond to these messages in the same way that they would experiencing cognitive biases naturally? Do leaders exploit the cognitive biases of their audience knowingly? It may be the case that leaders are not exploiting cognitive biases, but are instead suffering from cognitive biases themselves. While it may be difficult to access the cognitive processes of leaders, they do still think and behave in the same ways as the rest of the population. Laboratory conditions may be able to replicate the conditions in which leaders answer interview questions and write speeches.

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